How to Live Together:
a Dialogue Between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana

A dissertation submitted by

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Under supervision of
Dr Kodwo Eshun
Dr Jean-Paul Martinon
and
Dr Nicole Wolf
Declaration of Authorship

I, Christian Nyampeta hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Christian Nyampeta

Date: 30 September, 2019
Acknowledgements

It goes without saying that any thesis is a collective and perhaps even cooperative work. The entirety of the nearly one hundred thousand words that inhabit the following pages were there before me; I have merely rearranged them in titles, phrases, footnotes, paragraphs, sections and chapters. I have hopefully done so in a manner that makes enough sense to the reader. I have borrowed these words in order to make or test a hypothesis; in other words, I have used these words, and maybe misused them, as I have attempted to reflect on that said hypothesis, after learning of or about those words from someone or something that existed before me. Still, I say that a thesis is a collective work in a hesitant tone, because this dissertation is yet to be examined by the esteemed reader before it can be qualified as an actual doctoral thesis. Further, because I have no prior experience to speak from, I can only imagine that a doctoral thesis is a cooperative undertaking, and that this particularity is even more acute and necessary in navigating the fluidly unstable terrain of the Theory/Practice genre, as is the case with this current thesis.

What I do know is that this dissertation would not have been possible if it was not for the circle of friends and colleagues who, over the past eight years, have sustained conversations with me and provided me with contacts in fields that I would loosely describe as art, design and theory. This expanded circle includes friends and colleagues who have contributed to the questions, theses and subjects at the heart of this dissertation. The circle also includes those who have nurtured the research of the thesis and its practice component in a variety of ways, roles and forms, from across wide geographical contexts and temporal regions.

These collegial and colloquial contributions manifested variously in ways that are too numerous to recount. However, I would like to take up this challenge and explicitly express my gratitude to some of them. For a start, I would like to acknowledge the many invitations I have received to contribute as a lecturer, artist, theorist, filmmaker, designer, exhibition maker, editor, respondent, examiner and other such roles. The insights from these moments and
encounters proved to be invaluable ways of testing the solidifying ideas that are central to this thesis. In fact, I am still surprised when I receive an invitation because, to me, even this printed and bound copy before the reader remains in progress, and I worry that its provisional resolution in theme and in form, perhaps also in theory and in practice, might be unfit for public service, let alone examination.

While most of my colleagues were well aware of this concern, the searching, experimental and essayistic characters of my potential and actual contributions did not deter them from including or introducing in their programmes the vague forms or the nascent themes of what later became this thesis. As such, any invitation from colleagues has been viewed by me as an immeasurable way to show trust, to give support and perhaps also to co-author this thesis. I acknowledge that an invitation is a question, an opening and a risk, in the form of opportunity and occasion for experimentation and elaboration, on cherished platforms including prized manifestations at renowned museums, research networks, galleries, festivals and biennales.

For this alone, the depth of gratitude I have would demand a thesis of its own and, if I am not including everyone who rightfully belongs in the list of names below, it is not because I am ungrateful, but because of the sheer volume that would be required by the just inclusion of everyone involved. I would like to say that this inclusion would exceed the word count defined by the academic protocol and that this overflow would disqualify the thesis during its examination. However, I would be lying if I said so because, from my diligent supervisors Kodwo Eshun and Jean-Paul Martinon before him, I have understood that the word count only applies to the actual body of the main text and that this Acknowledgements section is merely a paratext. Nevertheless, a paratext is a pretext: the text that sets forth the actual text and, for this, the acknowledgement is what engenders the biography of the research.

Therefore, I would like to single out some individuals, institutions and contexts that have informed or contributed to this ongoing conversation. So far, the only occasions on which I have had to produce a formally-written acknowledgement has been in relation to the completion of a visual work. Specifically, I have made
these acknowledgements in the context of filmmaking. Hereby, as a film director, I list the actors, agents, producers, locations, funders, supporters, distributors and so on. The order of those acknowledgements follows the degree to which those listed are essential, referential or meaningful to the film, according to the roles they have performed in the film. This form of acknowledgement has a name: it is called credits in filmmaking jargon.

In the present context of this thesis, such directorial attitude that ascribes roles to my friends and colleagues would be unbecoming: clearly, I did not direct any of those whose generosity constitutes the substance of this thesis. Generosity is also quite hard to measure. Do I give the person who led me to a concept more words than the person who simply told me about a certain book? How to measure the word count with which to acknowledge the person who assisted me by facilitating the required accreditation for a temporary library access? Do I describe in more detail the actual roles played in public or domestic realms by each of my friends and colleagues?

In the interest of outplaying the hierarchy of the language in which such credits are written, I hope the reader accepts that I simply list the persons, institutions and contexts that have been instrumental to the making of this thesis. I also hope that the reader does not mind that I resort to the peculiarly random and yet also strict device: the alphabetical order. The result should not be received as a sterile list that recalls a commemorative monument! On the contrary, I am hoping that the following utterance attests my acknowledgement of the cohabitation of ideas, lives and futures, whose proximities, including my own, have created a plurality, or a montage, out of which this thesis has emerged.

I gratefully acknowledge the minor or major contributions from: Ima Abasi-Okon, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, Bisan Abu Eisheh, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Ma’an Abu Taleb, Larry Achiampong, Anna Adahl, Nana Adusei-Poku, Nick Aiken, Al Ma’amal Foundation Jerusalem, Mounira Al Solh, Shariffa Ali, Marie-Noelle Akingeneye Uwera, David Andrew, Noah Angell, Martina Angelotti, Africa Cluster of Another Roadmap School, Africa Studies Center at Columbia University in New York, African Studies Center at Leiden University, Another Roadmap for Arts Education, De Appel Arts Centre, Marwa Arsanios, Mirene

If the thesis is lacking in any aspect, it would not be for absence of time, resources or critical support. It would simply be because I am a student and that is my own responsibility. I acknowledge the visible and invisible labour at the hands of my life partner Mary Wang, as well as her lessons in how to live
together. I also acknowledge the years-long effort made by my supervisor Jean-Paul Martinon: how Martinon taught me to fear the terror of the deadline less and to see it as a mark rather than an end, and how his persistent question, “What can I do with this?”, was as sobering as it was mobilising. I also acknowledge the occasional calming interventions of Nicole Wolff during the crucial institutional negotiations of this thesis.

Finally, I acknowledge the patience, friendship, mentorship, tutorship, insight and liberating guidance of my supervisor Kodwo Eshun, whose infinite gentleness has guided the otherwise spiralling thoughts and idiosyncratic practices into this thesis that awaits the examination of the reader.
Synopsis

“How to Live Together” stages a speculative dialogue between French literary theorist Roland Barthes and contemporary Rwandan philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana, drawing from Comment vivre ensemble, Barthes’s lectures at Collège de France translated by Kate Briggs in 2013 as How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulation of Some Living Spaces.

The thesis focuses on rhythm, or rather idios-rhythm, derived from Barthes’s and Nzeyimana’s respective understanding of rest and movement or generosity. It expands on Nzeyimana’s insight that only those who have something in common can enter the conflict, particularly as such conflict is rendered through the global conditions that marked the last twenty-five years in the Great Lakes of East Africa. Paradoxically, even if this common bond can break, the same bond can also allow for a future dialogue to take place.

From here, the thesis formulates theories and fictions that may help to outdate the notion of the Other. This is done by looking at practical examples that move the understanding of community from an intersubjective condition to an intrasubjective relation, whereby conflict is constitutive of the very notion of community. This hypothesis is explored by focusing on the desedimentation of paleonyms in a process that gives way to new understandings of difference and heritage. Along the way, the thesis traces the evolution of the figures of the artist and the philosopher in Rwanda and beyond.

These formulations are nurtured by the sociography of the research, understood as a transcreative meandering through the fields of literature, history, theology and philosophy, supported by insights and encounters from Nyampeta’s own practice within contemporary art and design studies. Part of this practice is an artistic sequence in which artists, theorists, mythologists and translators in Rwanda and further afield—who would otherwise never meet—gather at the level of videographic montage and exhibitionary formats.
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Introduction

A Radiophonic Encounter with Roland Barthes

In the spring of 2011, I worked from home as a designer while I was living (at a discounted rate) in a semi-derelict flat on a council estate in East London that was about to be demolished. I had taken a liking to the online channel of WFMU, a radio station based in New York City. This independent, listener-supported radio described itself as “freeform”. Listening to its open format felt like floating on a flowing river: it was an uninterrupted stream of both obscure and popular consciousness in aural and visual cultures, without news segments or advertising. At that time, it was broadcasting audio content of the internet archive UbuWeb in a continuous, randomly-sequenced stream. The “freeform” suited my mood: it was over a year since I had graduated from the MA Industrial Design at Central Saint Martins in London. I had completed the programme right at the height of the global financial crisis and this historical moment had contributed to my already-growing sense of disorientation, resulting in my acute disinterest in working as an industrial designer. It had been twelve years since I had moved to the Netherlands from Rwanda as an unaccompanied minor, seven years since I had been naturalised in the Netherlands and four years since I had arrived in London for my graduate studies. I felt cast away, as is sometimes the case after relocation and graduation. I was commiserating with myself: “The job market crashed just as I was about to enter it!”

“Despite moving across continents”, I thought to myself, “I still have no sense of feeling at home in the world. Instead, despite all the effort I have made, I have only succeeded in amassing student debt!” Even though this effort had amounted to a prized qualification from a prestigious institution, I no longer cherished the accolade or the prospects I was supposed to have as a result of it. This self-pity, self-loathing and embarrassment turned me against London, a city I had just invested in through education. It was not only London that seemed inhospitable: in general, I was assailed by a deep sense of not knowing where, how or with whom to live and to work.
This moment of anguish was heightened by the ongoing difficulties being experienced at that time by Black youths in the UK. The police shooting of Mark Duggan sparked riots that summer; as Vancouver-based Brazilian philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva writes, “Fires broke out in north, east, and south London as well as other cities of England, from Leicester to Birmingham”.¹ Friends and neighbours living on the same council estate as myself were caught in the grip of the turmoil² which rapidly spread beyond this community and beyond London in fact; the riots were in effect “England Riots”, as described by the London-based publishing collective Endnotes.³ The collective’s analysis is such that the riots were a revolt of the youth—and its extended member groups—against dehumanising policing, which led to the formation of “the negative unity of a community self-organising against the [police]”. It was a “defence campaign’ oriented around retribution for the death in police custody of a community member”, coupled by “the indifference of state and media to one or another racist tragedy”. For Endnotes, this is an aspect that is “persistent, if often submerged, current in London life throughout the decades of capitalist restructuring—decades in which hundreds of deaths in police custody,

¹ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “To Be Announced: Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice”, in Social Text, vol. 31, no. 1 114, Spring 2013, pp. 43-62, p. 43. See also: “Duggan was shot dead by an armed officer known as V53 on 4 August 2011, sparking protests in Tottenham that spiralled into days of riots, arson and looting in London, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and other English cities. A three-month long inquest held in 2014 examined evidence from more than 93 witnesses to conclude that Duggan was lawfully killed”. Lizzie Dearden, “Mark Duggan’s family sue Metropolitan Police over 2011 shooting that sparked London riots”, in The Independent, 23 March 2019: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/mark-duggan-death-shooting-london-riots-met-police-case-a8836421.html


³ Ibid. “Camden, Lewisham, Catford, Croydon, Kilburn, Peckham, Battersea, Balham, Barnet, Clapham Junction, Ealing, Barking, Enfield, Bromley, Chingford Mount, East Ham, Birmingham, Liverpool, Bristol, Nottingham, Woolwich and Bromwich were all now experiencing riots or related disturbances: the rioting had clearly spread far, far beyond its original trigger point—far even beyond Greater London’s vast metropolitan sprawl; something missed in the frequent international naming of these as “London” or “Tottenham” riots”. 

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typically of blacks, have not resulted in a single convicted officer”. For the collective, this disregard for justice at the hands of all sectors of authority leads to “an extreme escalation of the social logic of abjection”. Returning to my decrepit flat, I was listening to this distant channel in a moment of crisis, of exhaustion and of questioning. My internal conflict in the search of where to live and what to do reverberated within the engulfing dejection that had beset the wider society at that time.

On the radio, between songs, performances and other aural flows, one distinct voice kept making an appearance: a stern, resolved timbre, enunciating terms I could not fully understand, yet using a French I could otherwise comprehend. The enunciation was punctuated by occasional laughter from the audience. I had the habit of playing the radio in the background in those days but, gradually, as the reoccurring voice started commanding more of my attention, I absentmindedly started to increase the volume. I noticed the voice’s discussions of “tiredness”, “exhaustion” and “fading”. These subjects captivated my mind and I soon came to learn that the speaker in question was the French literary critic Roland Barthes. I had been listening to the audio recordings of Comment vivre ensemble, his lectures at the Collège de France delivered in 1976-77.

It was possible to download the entire audio recordings of Barthes’s lectures at the Collège de France via UbuWeb: Comment vivre ensemble (1977-78), Le Neutre (1978-79) and La Préparation du roman (1980). I was particularly drawn to Comment vivre ensemble, so much so that, while I had obtained a copy of

4 Ibid. Such policing is symptomatic of the marginalisation in housing, and in the loss of social opportunity and cultural recognition, all of which “reinforce real long-term deprivation”. However, “the most salient dimension on which this exclusion occurs is a social logic of abjection experienced first and foremost in the encounter with the repressive arm of the state. Everything else follows: mediatised victimisation of residents, unending chain of aspirant cabinet members feigning deep concern, think-tank concept creation, crypto-racist scandals about a feckless, parasitic underclass”. As such, Endnotes writes, “it would be a bitter experience for those involved that the direct outcome of such riots—of their fleeting rebellions against a disrespecting Police—was an extreme escalation of the social logic of abjection”.

5 The reader will notice that in this thesis I introduce the references following the practices and localities affiliated to the names of those same references. This resolution does not aim at reducing the complexities of subjecthood and entanglement of production at the heart of each of these references. Rather, this is precisely for the purposes of minimising unanimity and generalisation. Instead, through this effort I wish to give accent to the movement, flesh and emotion mobilised in the contexts surrounding the utterances of such references.
the readily-available publication issued by Seuil/IMEC in Paris in 2007, I nevertheless proceeded to earnestly transcribe the audio recordings, translating them into English.

_Idiorrhythm_, which means “one’s own rhythm”, is the subject of these lectures. It is a notion of political theology, denoting ascetic formations of the Desert Fathers and Mothers that flourished in the fourth century in the Egyptian deserts, a practice that informed the development of Christian monasticism. Drawing from literature through what he calls a “novelistic simulation of some living spaces”, Barthes develops his ideas about a community in which every member has the right to live according to her or his own rhythm, without being expelled by the group. In his foreword to Barthes’s _How to Live Together_, French literary critic Claude Coste summarises the lectures as an “ethical enquiry (how to conceive of the relationship between the subject and the other)” and a moral study “on the condition that we invest the world with a concrete and practical dimension”.

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6 Claude Coste, “Preface”, in Barthes, _How to Live Together_, pg. xxi.
Other Concepts for the “Other”: Ubuvandimwe, Intense Proximity and Intramural

At the outset, I will hasten to remark that the obviousness of the notions of the “subject” and “the Other” are openly and implicitly questioned throughout this thesis, through encounters with concepts that carry more discursive tension. Specifically, the thesis explores *ubuvandimwe*, a notion of contemporary Rwandan philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana. Additionally, another notion that problematises “the subject” and “the Other” is that of “intense proximity”, proposed by late Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor. The “intramural” is yet another proposition formulated by African-American psychoanalyst and philosopher Hortense J. Spillers. Each of these formulations puts pressure on the self-evidence of a “subject” that is highly distinct and distant from “the Other”. Nzeyimana’s ubuvandimwe—literally: from the same womb—scales up into a rhythm that, as later chapters of this thesis explore, amounts to a dynamic in which it is only those who *already* have something in common that can enter the conflict. Enwezor’s “intense proximity” suggests an *a priori* adjacency resulting from a lingering contact that is the very source of an extreme antagonism, whilst Spillers’ “intramural” intimates a dissension among those already inhabiting an inside of some given “walls”. In this sense, Claude Coste’s summary of Roland Barthes’s lectures can be reformulated as an “ethical enquiry (how to conceive of the relationship of shared or opposing sensitivities)

These reflections result from the activities of transcribing and translating the recording of Barthes’s lectures. The act of transcription and transliteration was a distinctly trans-formative exercise. The transcription was a chorus, a pathway to choreograph my spiralling thoughts. African-American philosopher Saidiya

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Hartman describes a chorus as a dance in rotating movements within a confined space. Likewise, my transcription charted a path around which to revolve. For its part, the translation was a connective tissue, an *intertext*: a bridge between some elements of the sociography of my intellect, the Francophone intellect implanted through growing up in Rwanda and the English intellect inherited by subsisting outside Rwanda. The translation was also an embodied pragmatic solution: it was a method of constituting a community of practice, as it allowed me to discuss the lectures with my English-speaking friends and colleagues in London and further afield. In retrospect, the translation was also a mode of “thinking Africa” which, as I have come to learn, is “thinking across languages” such that to think is to translate. This is my own translation of the French words of Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, formulated during his address—also at the Collège de France in 2016, 40 years after Barthes—during the colloquium organised by Congolese novelist Alain Mabanckou “Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui”. Mabanckou convened this colloquium in his capacity as the Artistic Creation Chair at the Collège (2015-16).

My sociography already acknowledges the relevance and currency of thinking—that is, communicating, or rather living *with*—as translating. I grew up through the discourse of Kinyarwanda, French and Swahili. Subsequently, because of relocation and new geographical affiliations, I became versed and immersed in English, Dutch and German. On a much larger scale, the historical conditions of the material and immaterial heterogeneities presently assembled as “Africa” lead one to consider translation as relocation. When questioning “What is


11 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, “Le philosophe africain comme traducteur” at the colloquium “Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui”. In Rwanda, this thinking is further accentuated by the shift from the Francophone system to the Anglophone system, instituted by the Rwandan authorities since 2008. See Chris McGreal, “Rwanda to switch from French to English in schools”, in *The Guardian*, Monday 13 October 2008. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/14/rwanda-france

Africa?" following a remark by Beninese philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji on another occasion,\textsuperscript{13} Diagne reflected on how “[t]he creation of diasporic populations of African origins in the New World also means that Africa is not only in Africa”. Diasporic Africa belongs “to the five ‘regions’ of the continent which are understood to be on the path to becoming spaces integrated along cultural, social, economic and political lines”. This, Diagne points out, is affirmed by the African Union’s “symbolic decision of adding a sixth African region, that of the diaspora”.\textsuperscript{14}

Diagne proceeds to consider the historical conditions of “Africa” from a philosophical perspective. As I narrate in the Second Chapter of this thesis, there subsists a certain “Hegelian partition of Africa” in the disciplinary consequences of philosophical perspectives, impeding “the task of understanding the continent's intellectual history”. Such partition aims at separating “North Africa from sub-Saharan Africa” with the effect of making “the Sahara into a wall that it never has been, transforming this space into a border, or worse into an uncrossable barrier, when on the contrary it has always been open and traversed by various flows: human, commercial, intellectual”. In reality, “Africa”, within its incredible historical conditions, cultural diversities and geographic expanses, is constituted by elective and imposed routes and networks. Consequently, the present task of thinking “Africa” is addressed through the idiom of “indisciplinary”\textsuperscript{15} movements mobilised in the background of its enduring histories of commercial transactions, religious transmissions.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Souleymane Bachir Diagne, \textit{The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa} (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2016), p. 6.


philosophical transformations, literary transmutations and spiritual transliterations. For Diagne, “[t]he history of philosophical thought in Africa, yesterday as today, and as it is everywhere, is a history of encounters”. This is further formulated by French philosopher Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux: “African philosophies ceaselessly deterritorialize and reterritorialize philosophies and concepts that are foreign to them, and construct themselves as an encounter”.

If the history of philosophical modernities is marked by the partitioning of the geographies of reason, then the importance of the encounter remains current. Kodjo-Grandvaux explains how, according to the influential German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Africa must be divided into three parts”, chiefly to isolate the region situated south of the Sahara desert, which Hegel calls “Africa proper”, as a reality distinct from the Africa north of the desert, which Hegel calls “European Africa”. The third partition is supposedly the African region of the Nile River which Hegel unconvincingly connects with Asia. For Hegel,

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17 Ibid., p.7: “This is attested to by the important centres of teaching that developed, for example in West Africa (also called Bilâd as-Sudân, ‘the country of the Blacks’, or simply Sudân) under the Mali and Songhay empires. The legendary city of Timbuktu, commercial crossroads of trans-Saharan routes, is undoubtedly the paragon of these centres”. See Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne eds., 2008, The Meanings of Timbuktu, CODESRIA and HSRC. See also the work that John Hunwick has dedicated to African literature in Arabic script: Arabic Literature of Africa, Leiden: E.J. Brill (6 volumes published between 1994 and 2004).

18 Ibid. “Timbuktu today is a witness and a symbol that reminds us of an important fact too often ignored when it comes to the question of the intellectual history of Africa and, in particular, of African philosophy: it is simply not true that African cultures are in their essence oral cultures. Before reducing the question of philosophy in Africa into that of an African ‘oral reason’, it is necessary, first of all, to take full consideration of what was written and taught in the philosophical disciplines in Africa, for example in the field of logic in the Aristotelian tradition, long before the arrival of the school that would be qualified as ‘European’”. See Mamoussé Diagne, Critique de la raison orale (Paris: Karthala, 2005) and De la philosophie et des philosophes en Afrique noire (Paris: Karthala, 2006).

19 Ibid. Chapter One of this thesis explores the foundational importance of trans-Saharan movement to Christianity.

20 Ibid., p. 7.


22 The Nile River is an astonishingly long river which stretches from its putative sources in the regions of Rwanda and Uganda to the Mediterranean Sea.
Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection 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 self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night.23

To reflect on the histories and the present thinking of “Africa” through translating is perhaps also to intervene in the above dogmatic insistence of the categorical division of the life of billions, following a criterion of exterior accessibility imposed by an otherwise historically-specific disciplinary moment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this historical conjunction, philosophy “constituted itself through the gesture of excluding other ‘humanities’ from philosophical reflection”.24 However, this exclusionary constitution of philosophy is in effect a moment that is uncharacteristic of the development of thought, and it befalls upon the current thinkers to reject such prohibition of the movement of thought.25

In his introduction to Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe’s Critique of Black Reason (2017), translator Laurent Dubois reflects: “If a language is a kind of cartography, then to translate is to transform one map into another. It is a process of finding the right symbols, those that will allow new readers to navigate through a landscape”. For Dubois, Mbembe’s volume is “a map of a terrain sedimented by centuries of history” and, at the same time, “an invitation to find ourselves within this terrain so that we might choose a path through it—and perhaps even beyond it”.26


24 Ibid.


Translation and Transliteration as Transformation and Transcreation

This is why transcribing, translating and transliterating are all mobilised in this thesis. Textual and artistic translation is employed to find a path through the terrain sedimented by centuries of history. This motion is, according to French-Algerian Jewish philosopher Jacques Derrida, “a ‘strategic’ necessity that requires the occasional maintenance of an old name in order to launch a new concept”. Philology and etymology are two distinct fields of knowledge. Philology is the originary dissemination of a word. It traces the steps of a word in reverse and, in the process, scatters it across languages. Etymology, on the other hand, is the disarticulation of a word, but not necessarily in its originary mode. For the purposes of this research, the philological motion also works at the level of etymology. I move between a philological mobilisation and an etymological motion, following the guidance of Derrida, who distinguishes “between the name and the concept”: “a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates defining a concept, a conceptual structure centred on a given predicate”. This line of thought mobilises the philological motion to desediment, a field of knowledge made possible by “a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure (limited for motivations and relations of force to be analyzed), named X”.

The philological and the etymological mobilised as desedimentation allows to accede “to the delimitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name X being maintained as a kind of lever of intervention, in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organization, which is to be transformed effectively”. In this thesis, philology and etymology are approached as desedimentation, that is, a lever of intervention into the “discourse on the continent [that] passes from careless generalizations concerning an Africanity everywhere identical to the scrupulous juxtaposition, to

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28 Ibid. Emphasis original.
the point of absurdity, of territorial singularities impossible to subsume under one notion of Africa”. 29

In the words of American philosopher Nahum Dimitri Chandler—a careful reader of Derrida and of W.E.B. Du Bois—finding a path through the terrain sedimented by centuries of history is a “critical, or desedimentative practice” that “require[s] recognition of the necessity inscribed in antecedent practices of thought”.

It must (1) maintain a recognition of the necessity of this double gesture and (2) elaborate this necessity as both the possibility and condition of its own practice, in that it always emerges on the scene late and by way of its other, in all senses, and that it cannot accede to the fullness of its own voice, its own declared or willful position within knowledge and power. More sympathetically, we might index this redoubled enunciation as displaced in relation to both (a) its recollection of antecedent practices and (b) its possibility of setting loose a thought whose fullness is always yet to come. This “yet to come” is the spacing or timing of the operation of a nominal critical, or desedimentative, practice, of its possibility and its devolution. This is the order of a paleonymic problematic encoded in the task of theoretical labor in our time.30

For Chandler, this “strategic intervention enunciated in an idiom of thought” is situated “on the horizon of an ontological problematization of […] historical existence in general”. It is an intervention that “seek[s] to help expose or bring more into relief a path or better, paths, of interwoven tracks for retracing and reformulating the question through the operation of a kind of desedimentation and paleonymic practice in thought”.31

29 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Ink of the Scholar, pp. 4-5.


31 Ibid.
The method of this writing is an assembly, a montage of the encounters I describe here as a chorus, an old name I give to the narration of these episodes from the biography of the research. The chorus is my name for the dialogic. At the same time, the chorus describes the method of narrating and the method of assembly extended in practice across the timeline of this thesis. The mode of practice consists of arranging audio-visual colloquiums, in which philosophers engage with ideas that they would otherwise not necessarily encounter. The dialogic is therefore a disciplinary translation, an indiscipline of the artistic practice of the colloquium. Like in How to Live Together: Sequentia—an exhibition I staged at De Appel arts centre in Amsterdam in 2015—the practice component of this thesis is an artistic sequence in which philosophers who would otherwise never meet gather at the level of videographic montage.

In this sense, the practicum consists of artistically montaging the figure of the Rwandan philosopher, whose modes of address continue mostly in the forms of the text and the conference. Four generations after Abbé Alexis Kagame, renowned for his volume La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’Être (1956), the figure of the Rwandan philosopher remains a cultural type imbued with a certain form of political religiosity. However, the current generation is not so much in repetition of Kagame’s methods or thoughts. Instead, they complicate and at times qualify the position that Kagame formulated, the details of which I recount amply in later chapters. Therefore, the practice component of this thesis is to invite these figures into the realm of video, through artistic mode of installation and exhibition making. It is my aspiration that the process of staging these scenes will promote conditions that heighten the possibility for engendering a pluralism of speech in space and time. The artistic practice draws these figures into a dialogic mode, a dialogic mode sometimes with two or more screens, or sometimes in person. In this sense, the artistic work is also a reflection on how to live together. In that way, there is no difference between the theoretical reflection effected through this textual rendering and the reflection that takes the form of a video, a chair or an installation. Understandably, the video, the chair or

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the installation in this research are more formally elaborated, in a manner that demands more description or *exphrasis* included in this thesis as an Appendix.

The chorus is the rhythmic structure of encounter that makes the emergence of speech possible, expressed in a journey, a visit, a recording, a video or a song. This emergence of speech is also rendered in exhibitionary forms such as hosting structures and installations. In this thesis, the chorus is effected through the narration of these encounters, out of which theoretical reflections emerge. In its first name, its paleonym, a chorus is *χορώδια*: it is a movement. Saidiya Hartman's chorus is a circular movement that revolves around itself, in which "stories are told from inside a circle".33 Similarly, my notion of the chorus is designed to draw out aspects of self-emergence. I was, in fact, working with this idea before encountering Hartman's formulation in her recent volume *Wayward Life and Beautiful Experiments* (2019), but that helped me to further clarify my own understanding. I greatly admire Hartman's reading, to the extent that I visited Hartman at her office located at the Philosophy Department of Columbia University in New York, to stage a dialogue.34 Besides the two approaches outlined above, the chorus also functions in this thesis as a way of anticipating, making room for or speaking *before* the emergence of the question of *αναχόρηση, anachóρēsis*—understood as departure, taking leave or ascension.

A chorus then is an exercise towards *anachóρēsis* and, simultaneously, a method of visiting philosophers and staging dialogues with them. In consideration of the radiophonic appearance that filtered itself through the blockade imposed by my own crisis at the inception of this research, a meaningful artistic intervention is to multiply and to pluralise that single vocalisation: a chorus is precisely where multiples sing all at once, as opposed to a verse which would be given to a single actor/actress, character or persona: a chorus is plural exercises in speech.


34 The dialogue is due to be published in *Guernica Magazine*, New York, October 2019 Issue, in “Miscellaneous Files”, a monthly column conceived and edited by writer Mary Wang.
In such translative thinking of how to live together, “how” suggests a manner, a way of being, thinking and doing, a manual, a way of handling, a way of holding, of holding oneself or being held, or the flow of taking leave. “How” can be a rule, a law, a policy. It is a quest, a search, a questioning; it is a philosophising. The French term for “how” is *comment*. This meaning is sedimented in English: “to comment”, “commentary”, “to command” and “commando”. In Kinyarwanda, “how” is *uko*, the same term which gives meaning to *ubwoko*: race, ethnicity, type, character. It derives from *ubwo*, “truth” and *ko*, “that/which”.35 “To” indicates a movement: this can be a break, a waywardness, a destination, a transgression, a renunciation, a reduction, but also an excess. “To” is a vector and, even when it points to a stasis, it is an orientation: it points the way, purposefully or otherwise. “To” is a rhythm, a crossing. It can indicate a declension and an ascension, for instance *un*– of unlearning or *de*– of decolonial and perhaps also desedimentation. As outlined above, this philological motion invited me to revisit translation as a relocation: the removal of a saint’s body or relics to a new place.

This is a theological practice and because, as we shall see in Chapter Two, theology presupposes demons, there is a demonological imperative in this practice of thinking and inhabiting the rhythm of living together and its material, practical and theoretical synonyms. This task of studying these lectures through transcription and translation became so engrossing for me, to the extent that undertaking it seemed to require further structural guidance and supervision. It therefore happened that, despite my complete financial precarity at the time, I felt compelled to enrol on the PhD programme of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Just a few months into the study programme, it was announced that a translation of *Comment vivre ensemble* by American theorist Kate Briggs was

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forthcoming! *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces* would be published by Columbia University Press in 2013. In that moment I felt released from the outsized task and indomitable pressure to translate this complex French narration into an English text—both languages to which I am relatively foreign. Instead, I channelled the interest sparked by *Comment vivre ensemble* into “artistically” exploring the questions it raised.

In the years following my dejection in 2011, I came to realise that at the heart of the crisis I had experienced lay the loss of my ability to narrate, to articulate my own limits of living together. I learned that this limit had a rhythm which traversed immense temporal horizons and geographical expanses. On the world scale, my experience was dismissible, insignificant; at best, my desolation resembled that of any individual at a crossroad in life. It was a crisis of discourse: how to appear, where, with whom, what for, with what expression to bear witness, to transmit my joy and my sorrow, to whom?

As indulgent and confused as it was, my questioning was constant, so much so that it became a compass pointing me to the summit of the oppositional rhythm resulting from the sense of the loss of my place in the world. I came to learn that my immense exhaustion with life was akēdia, a sensation akin to “a burial without grave”, described as the “noonday demons” by ancient desert ascetics. My sense of being entombed above the ground was caused by my own inability, or unwillingness, to allow the contradictions of this oppositional rhythm to live together. I was letting go of it, while also refusing to ascribe to it its own resting ground. To the reader, this description might sound like symptoms of depression. Perhaps it was, in the sense of a “deflation” of the senses, perceived as anguish and despair. However, acedia suggests an emotionally-articulate range of feelings that helps to diagnose the sensation more carefully.36

On one side of this internal conflict was the societal rhythm, established by the confines of my psychobiological heritage and my disciplinary formations.

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Because this societal rhythm pulsates within the reality of “making a living”, it accounts for the manifest civic subjejecthood and occupation, and mobilises the necessary technologies to sustain this living. These technologies include the formation and governing of the subject, its memorisation, its historicisation and its spatialisation in society. However, on the other side was my exhausted rhythm, the chorus, repeated, revolving and revolting from within the depths of my person, hopelessly—and possibly inadequately—seeking an irruption, a break, a flight, a way out against the hold of the societal rhythm.

Theology, Philosophy and Visual Cultures

This thesis results from the artistic engagement with this question: how to live together and, from that, how to narrate its limits and how to engage with the crisis of its discourse. The thesis proceeds through an interpretive account of idiorrhythm. More particularly, it is structured around a dialogue between Roland Barthes’s and contemporary Rwandan philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana’s takes on the concept. If philosophy is first and foremost a narration of the world, then the philosophical idiom of Rwandan expression attempts nothing less than to rethink the propriety of life “after life”. In Rwanda, this ending of the world is characterised by the extreme limit of living together that culminated in the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi.

37 In this thesis I differentiate between “societal” and “social”. Societal is understood as a “social relation of production:” a system of authorities, whose agency is responsible for subject formation. These authorities include institutions of schooling, professionalism, civility, etc. that account for qualifications and license for “making a living”. In contrast, “social” addresses my subjective, fixed and mobile, but decidedly cumulative relationships with individuals and communities that surround me, whose conflux constitute the actual or imagined qualitative realm described as sociability. See: Jim Freedman, Nyabingi: The Social History of an African Divinity (Tervuren: Musée Royale de l’Afrique Centrale, nº 115, 1984), p. 23.

38 The official name of this event is the Genocide against the Tutsi. Throughout this thesis, whenever I write the Rwandan genocide or variations thereof, I mean the Genocide against the Tutsi. The different phrases used are not meant to confuse or make vague the precision of this denomination. Rather, it is simply for the purposes of the discursive clarity of the thesis.
cultural type is a useful interlocutor in the dialogue about thinking beyond the limits of living together, informed by theology.

This is because Roland Barthes draws his “novelistic simulation” of how to live together from idiorrhythmy, once again a theological phenomenon from the first instances of Christian asceticism. History records that, then and now, the philosopher in Rwanda receives their training and education largely within Catholic and Protestant monasteries, seminaries and convents, from “cenobitic” religious and missionary orders. “Cenobitism” is a monastic, uniformed rhythm, equally drawn from ancient Christianity, but developed in part in opposition to idiorrhythmy. In some way, the Rwandan philosopher is heir to, or progeny of “cenobitism”.

Barthes’s “novelistic simulation” performs “the prophetic function of writing”, whose object is “to Change Language”. This change would grant those who partake in language the ability to live freely, “according to the truth of desire”, because such truth would make a societal demand “to afford its citizen the luxury of as many languages as there are desires”. Indeed, “Barthes describes language as the very space of sociability in all of his work, whether it is a matter of exercising its power through words or freeing oneself from the code through literature”.39

Barthes’s negotiation for this freedom is sustained by the energy of a “fantasy”, a desire which Barthes expressed at the outset of his teaching during his Inaugural Lesson at the Collège de France in 1976, claiming “the right to a ‘fantasmic’ teaching, a research project that accepts that it will be compromised by the affect of the researcher but manages to avoid descending into confession or egotism nevertheless”.40

In contrast, my narration approaches biography as a mode of bibliography—not as an analogy, but in the methodological sense. The narration traverses fields of literature, history, philosophy, psychology, theology and visual culture.


40 Ibid.
Undertaking such traversal commands a disciplinary rigour and an expert dictation, but I am not a qualified historian, nor am I a philosopher, a theologian or a novelist. Strictly speaking, I barely even qualify as an artist, since my former studies are not in visual arts but rather in industrial design. Even if I was institutionalised in any of these fields, the transitional study pursued in this thesis would still court a horde of disciplinary and methodological limits. What is the authority on the matter in the field of memory and trauma? What are its histories and what are its key problems in education in post-conflict? What are the main challenges of writing economy in the aftermath of a genocide?

A priori, I flaunt my reality of an inadequate narrator, whose disciplinary voice breaks at every turn. It is a theoria: a recounting of a witnessed experience. This narration is a navigation, an orientation. In Dutch, experience is ervaren: er−, “by, there” and varen, “sailing”. However, a navigation presupposes a horizon, a passage, and my crossing does not guarantee to weave disciplinary authorities together into a theoretical tapestry, yet here we are embarking on a doctoral study! Is this not synonymous with seeking contextual coherence?

Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana: Two Differing Rhythms of Living

At the heart of this theoria is a dialogue between theorist Roland Barthes and philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana, narrated by myself, artist Christian Nyampeta. It is a dialogue about the propriety of life at the limits of living together. This dialogue about life stories is structured around an analysis of idiorrhythmy, approached as a double notion of idios and rhythm.

Idios translates as property, propriety, particular, private or one’s own. As such, idios relates to idiot and idiom, idiomatic, idiosyncrasy, idiosyncratic. The reader might have said or heard a sentence such as “s/he has got a really idiosyncratic way of talking”. This means s/he has a peculiar way of talking that nobody else has. This informal version of idios illustrates its relation to other concepts of
identity formation including idea.\textsuperscript{41} Rhythm, in turn, can be understood in two ways: as either liberating or as capturing, that is, as a disciplining instrument. Rhythm is the putting into practice of an idea of life, affirmatively or negatively. Rhythm is the regulation and determination in space and time of being in the world.

*Rhuthmos*, on the other hand, has a long and complex origin of meanings, centred on “distinctive form, disposition and proportion”, all of which allude to a way, or a manner of flowing, of doing or unfolding, of becoming. This meaning indicates the transitional disposition of something *animated*, such as the *form of a movement*, the *form of an attitude* and a *form of life*, but also someone’s character or nature.\textsuperscript{42} Rhythm is the inscription of the memory, hospitality and exchange. Rhythm traverses matters of the heart and the stone, between emotions and architecture, thought and action. It relates to the body and its governance. Its symbolism is the exhausted body.

Like the anecdote of my tiredness above, I retreat into a room, a symbolic but also actual repository of a concentric system that requires the expansion of gigantic infrastructures which, ultimately, give pulse to the maintenance of boundaries, borders and, by extension, ideologies. Rhythm is the inscription of this flow that compels us to ask: How to live? With whom to live? Will I survive? What will remain of my life? Rhythm is the act of giving accompaniment, purpose, structure and direction to this flowing of life.

The discussion of the propriety of how to structure this flow of life is what brings Barthes and Nzeyimana together in this thesis. Each embodies distinct schools of how to understand rhythm, and how to give its flow purpose, structure and direction. In other words, it is a question of how to live together. Once applied to the configuration of a community, and once scaled up to the level of a society,


Barthes’s and Nzeyimana’s differing rhythmic schools give rise to divergent ethical implications.

Ultimately, these ethical imperatives have bearing on memory, education and economy. For instance, in solving the problem raised by my proverbial exhaustion in my bedroom in London, Barthes’s understanding of rhythm would dispense me with unconditional rest, his idiorrhythm manifesting itself as an uninterrupted flow, as a repository from which I could think, feel and contemplate. Nzeyimana’s understanding of rhythm would greatly differ in this regard. For one, for Nzeyimana, rest does not really exist. Rest is the change of activity. In nature, absolute, uninterrupted rest is an aberration. It would be devastation if ever any of our organs rested! Even Planet Earth, our home and body, is hurtling at incredible speed through space in a double rotation, around itself and around the Sun. We can hardly call any of these instances rest. Movement, or transition, is what binds us to life. Nzeyimana defines rhythm as injyana, meaning “to go with”, “to move with”. Nzeyimana’s remedy for my exhaustion would be to change movement, trades, positions or directions.

For Barthes, to live is to live “with the without”, and for Nzeyimana it is to live “with”. It is a practice of posteriority that synthesises three planes of time and space: by way of engagement with what precedes one’s arrival, and by forging a relation with the posteriority, in the form of leaving something behind in the present. For Nzeyimana, in the instance of exhaustion or limit, the guiding question is: What will I leave behind for those after me? How will my life, my passage through existence, be remembered and recorded? This is “rhythmicisation” or flux: the organisation of the flow of life, at the limits of living together. For Barthes, rhythmicisation consists in the sustenance of the flux letting—being—letting. For Nzeyimana, rhythmicisation is giving—receiving—giving.
Theoretical Limits of Narrating Life in the Afterlife

The intellectual genesis of this narration of life in the afterlife is located in the anecdote of my radio contact with Roland Barthes, through his vocal apparition at the time of the loss of my own speech. Narrating the limits of living together is articulating living. It is co-joining and conjugating the rhythms of such limits. I must confess, however, that I might be unable to cross the horizon of such limits or overcome them: I am hardly qualified to author a work of political science, conflict resolution or genocide studies.

It would be a great achievement if my thesis contributes to these crucial fields, but it would be wrong to examine this work through these disciplinary logics. Rather, as a chorus, this is a narration, an artistic expression, pronounced as a lyrical irruption that may puncture my own limits of living together. My understanding of such lyrical irruption invokes the words of American philosopher Fred Moten: “a special site and resources for a task of articulation where immanence is structured by an irreducibly improvisatory exteriority that can occasion something very much like sadness and something very much like devilish enjoyment”.43 Even then, my irruption faces conceptual and ethical limits of expression. Indeed, there are at least three theoretical limits challenging this thesis.

The first limit is, how to remain sensitive despite the exposure to the limit of living together? How to navigate away from its imprint? How to become sensitive again? The second limit is: how to speak against violence from a “complicit” position of that same violence? The third limit is: what disciplinary strategies can address such “complicit” narration?

What is a Limit? Narration, Medium and Body, Anew

There is a relationship between violence and limit. According to the Concise English Dictionary of Etymology, the word violence originates from the Old French term *violacion*, from the Latin *violationem*: “an injury”. It is an irreverence, a profanation, as attested by the past participle stem of *violare* meaning “to treat with violence, outrage, dishonor”. *Violare* might be an irregular derivative of *vis*: strength, force, power, energy. My interpretive compression of the historical meaning of violence is “an injury to life”: a limit to life.

This reading is indebted to Nahum Dimitri Chandler’s rethinking of limit in terms of “re-narrativization” or orientation towards a future as a possibility. For Chandler, limit proposes a certain “hyperbolic re-narrativization” of the problem at hand, “not only as pasts, but as futures”. Limit then can be seen as a “necessity in the form of a certain finality, even as placed under the mark of death”, which “may well be understood to yet always remain distended in its own possibility”. In this sense, “[l]imit can only manifest through its other side: possibility. Limit, approached on the order of necessity itself, is still, always, thus already a thought of the future as possibility”. A limit thus seems to extend over two sides: negatively, as an end—and affirmatively, as a possibility; it is a horizon, not to say an overcoming. To put the question of limit in relation to the issue of heritage and to illustrate what is at stake in addressing both these issues in this thesis, I would like to refer to another chorus.

On 12 September 2019, although I was quite busy making the last revisions to this thesis, I found it important to stage a Skype meeting with anthropologist Natacha Nsabimana, and film directors Kivu Ruhorahoza and Amelia Umuhire. Ruhorahoza was born in Rwanda but grew up in exile in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He moved back to Rwanda after 1994 and

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44 Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *Toward an African Future—Of the Limit of World* (London: Living Commons, 2013), p. 13. The Living Commons Collective is an experimental publishing imprint by philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva and theorist Rashné Limki. It is “set amid and apart from neoliberal practices wherein sterilization of thought is lucrative business and from autonomist practices that have ceded themselves a peculiar racial valence” and its output is “a reflection of the inherent counter-disciplinarity of thinking, tracing the political as constituted across the various modes of the creative and the material, that is, the ideational, the emotional, and the spiritual”. p. vii.
is currently living in London. Nsabimana, who teaches at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, grew up in Belgium and Canada, and completed her doctoral studies at Columbia University under the supervision of African-American David Scott, a scholar of British-Jamaican Stuart Hall. Umuhire grew up in Germany and visited Rwanda for the first time in 2016 when she was 27 years old. She had left Rwanda at the age of three with her mother and younger sister, after her father was killed during the genocide.

In the months preceding that Skype conversation, I had initiated an idea of organising a screening of the works of these two filmmakers in New York and Chicago as I had done at other occasions, but this time in prospective collaboration with Nsabimana. Gradually, this effort intensified and it became a proposal for a much larger programme that will now involve a year-long academic fellowship at the University of Chicago’s Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry. The fellowship will include a semester of teaching what the four of us imagine as a collective audio-visual experimental course.

For the purposes of the formalities of and the preparations for this programme, the four of us had a Skype meeting with Seth Brodsky and Zachary Cahill, director and curator of the Gray Center respectively. Brodsky is also a scholar and Associate Professor in the Department of Music and in the Humanities. According to his academic page on the website of the University of Chicago, his scholarly work “concerns music of the 20th and 21st centuries”, with a particular interest in what a composition is and the figure of the “composer”, understood in cultural, discursive, technological and mythical terms. Cahill, on the other hand,

45 Through my project École du soir, I have staged public programmes and lyrical performances that involve the work of artists and theorists from Rwanda and beyond. Recent examples include A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow at Perdu in Amsterdam and Contour Biennale 9 in Mechelen. A Flower Garden at Contour in Mechelen was commissioned by Paris-based curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez. A Flower Garden included aural, visual and performative contributions from composer Aurélie Lierman Nyirabikali, film director Amelia Umuhire, visual artist Laura Nsengiyumva, and myself, artist Christian Nyampeta. A shorter version of the programme was recently also staged at the Museum of Contemporary art GfZK in Leipzig, at the occasion of my reception of The Future of Europe Art Prize, which I was awarded in 2019. At GfZK, further film contributions included Kivu Ruhorahoza’s film described below and another short film Kigali based director Clementine Dusabejambo. Finally, during the International Meeting of Another Roadmap School International that I convened in Huye in August In 2018, I then also organised a live music, performance and screening programmes which saw, among others, lyricist Sophie Nzayisenga perform during one of the evenings. More details are included in the Appendix section.
is also an artist, working on the long-term project the USSA, an exhibition-based fictional narrative relating to concepts of nation building. Cahill’s works include a novel, *The Black Flame of Paradise* (2019), described on the back cover as “a proposition for a new model of religious life grounded in the artistic and personal relations to the divine”.

During the meeting possible themes and concrete subjects for our future fellowship started to emerge. Ruhorahoza had just completed a film dealing with “haunting” driven by the central question: when an African dies in a foreign land, where does her or his spirit go? The film visits certain streets and areas where, while large numbers of people have been murdered, there is no visual or material trace or evidence of these events. Taking up the challenge posed by this gap or void, Ruhorahoza explained how his latest film *Anthropology and Tourism in the Wake of a Romantic Break-up* is informed by *Ghostly Matters* (1997), a volume by American scholar Avery F. Gordon. I mentioned to Ruhorahoza that Gordon was actually instrumental to this thesis, as she was my external examiner for the upgrade from the status of MPhil student to PhD candidate.

Umuhire had been working on a similar project: she is currently making a film based on the popular novel by French-Rwandan rapper and novelist Gaël Faye, *Petit pays [Small Country]* (2016), briefly mentioned in Chapter Four. Similar to her previous film and web series, Umuhire’s work studies the traces and legacies of trauma in a generation whose parents have had first-hand experience of the genocide. This concern aligns with Nsabimana’s PhD dissertation, concerned with “the everyday aftermath of violence in post-genocide Rwanda”, examining how “the violence of the genocide against the

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Tutsi occupies the spatial memory of Rwanda’s landscape and the kinds of individual and national narratives such memory allows and disavows”.

The aim of the Skype meeting was to formulate the project collectively in terms that the University of Chicago and the board members of the Gray Center would approve. Cahill and Brodsky suggested that we outline the individual and collective impasses or limits: What drives a scholar and visual artist, a pair of filmmakers and an anthropologist to want to work together and to compose a collective curriculum and a year-long public programme? What would these artists and theorists gain from the benefit of the support and free time occasioned by the fellowship at the Gray Center in Chicago? What of that which is bothering us can be solved by such mutual conversation with the centre but, first and foremost, by our group itself?

As the representative of the University of Chicago and the Gray Center, Brodsky formulated these questions in a way that compelled me to intervene by remarking how, as already noted by the novelists surveyed in Chapter Four, invoking a heritage from “Rwanda” can be a burden: if you are an artist, a filmmaker or an anthropologist of Rwandan descent, then you are institutionally expected not only to make work about Rwanda, but to focus specifically on the Rwandan genocide.

This conversation reminded me of a key moment recorded in my film *A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow* included in the Appendixes. During a visit Isaïe Nzeyimana and I made to the Major Seminary Philosophicum in Kabgayi (Rwanda), we staged a recorded conversation with philosopher, linguist, historian and priest Abbé Vedaste Kayisabe—the dean of the Grand Seminary—following the postcard method described in the Second Chapter of this thesis. There, Nzeyimana asked Kayisabe:

> How would you translate “memory” in Kinyarwanda? Because, at the moment, when we speak of memory as *kwibuka*, what immediately


51 See: “Abbé Vedaste Kayisabe” in “A Communion of Spirits” in the Appendix of this thesis.
comes to mind is the genocide. Is it not a reduction to believe that Rwanda has this only one memory?\textsuperscript{52}

Drawing from historical, cultural and political (dynastic) antecedents, Kayisabe affirmed that \textit{kwibuka}, memory, preceded the Rwandan genocide. This same reflection was made by theorist Olivier Nyirubugara in September 2015 during my visit to his office at Erasmus University in Rotterdam where he was teaching at the time, as recorded in my film \textit{Comment vivre ensemble} from that same year, also included in this thesis in the Appendixes section.

With these reflections in mind, I talked to the group about my own impasse attempts to surmount the limit brought into existence by the reduction of all memory and, therefore, all intellectual labour and, consequently, all future cultural directions to the question of the Rwandan genocide. On this point, if you are a German artist, novelist or philosopher, it is not culturally expected that you talk \textit{only} about the fall of the Wall, about the Holocaust, etc., at least not to the degree that is imposed on the Palestinian artist or the Rwandan artist. In the case of the German artist, although the events or atrocities in Germany happened over half a century ago, their effects remain current and actual in the present, so it is difficult to see or accept the distinction. I explained that my impasse was located at challenging the expected or the perceived circularity of the gift of heritage.

From this insight, Cahill and Brodsky noted the contours of a theme that could be provisionally structured in three components. That is the point of this long chorus. Its length is warranted, I believe, because it helps to clarify the technicalities and the efforts exerted in the following sections. Indeed, what is at stake here is, firstly, an attempt at displacing the limits of the unsayable through new forms of narration or story. Secondly, a thematic emerges that is engaged with the question of medium. The impasse herein has pushed this thesis towards an indisciplinary medium, as a means to engage in an expansion of the sayable, through what an artistic, filmic or writing medium can be. The third and final component of the thesis and future direction is concerned with the question of the body: the biological body, the cultural body or social body, expressed

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
already at the outset in the anecdote of exhaustion and anachoresis. It is the
disappearance of the body that, despite its absence, remains present.

As Nzeyimana insists throughout this thesis, the genocide is but a moment.
Although a painfully important one that marks a turning point from which crucial
lessons on how to live together can be learnt and implemented, I argue that this
moment is also an injunction to understand a measure of one’s own distance
from this same event.

In this thesis, the body has been explored through the works of ascetic figures
whose characters, as political philosopher and gender theorist Arlene
Saxonhouse analyses, exhort “men to imitate beasts, women to imitate men,
and men, in order to outwit Fortuna, to imitate fickle women”. The narrative
component of the thesis also draws from a paleonymic enunciation that are
“theoretic fiction”, as Marxist philosopher and Jesuit Michel de Certeau
suggests later on in this thesis. These are sketches of “enunciative models” that
“depict relations instead of statements (as would a logic) or facts (as in a
historiography)”.

Limit #1: Anaesthesia, Or Senseless Aesthetics

I have resided in New York City since 2017 and, in order to negotiate the time
difference with Europe and East Africa where most of my colleagues operate, I
developed the habit of waking up early to survey my emails, to allow enough
time to correspond with my transatlantic colleagues during their own working
hours. An interesting communication I received one such early morning was a
newsletter from the African Studies Centre at Leiden University. I had joined the
African Studies Centre as a library member in 2015 following the centre’s
contribution to this research with a selection of volumes from their catalogue,
which constituted an integral part of How to Live Together: Sequentia, my

53 Arlene W. Saxonhouse, “Democracy, Equality, and Eidê: A Radical View from Book 8 of
283, p. 281.

54 Michel de Certeau, The Mystic Fable, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1992), p. 44.
exhibition at De Appel arts centre in Amsterdam. The newsletter was drawing attention to a forthcoming seminar to be hosted at the centre by historians Filip Reyntjens and Bert Ingelaere of the University of Antwerp, in the context of the year 2019, which marks the 25th commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The newsletter read:

In less than a hundred days, more than 800,000 Rwandese people were murdered in a deliberate and well-organised act of genocide, orchestrated by then-members of the Rwandan government. The genocidal regime targeted the Tutsi population and moderate Hutu who opposed the killings. Many Hutu and Twa also lost their lives as the genocide unfolded in the context of a civil war between the Hutu-dominated government and a Tutsi-dominated rebel movement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). The killings started on the 6th of April, following a rocket attack that caused a plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi to crash. Despite the presence of a considerable UN peacekeeping force at the outbreak of the violence, the international community failed to intervene, pulling most of their forces out and ignoring any pleas for help. This failure to act allowed the killings to continue until the 4th of July, when Rwandan Patriotic Front forces, then led by the current president Paul Kagame, were able to take control of the country, ousting those responsible for the genocide from the country.

The circulation of this newsletter alone points at the global importance of the

55 The exhibition focused on the presentation of the then titled How to Live Together: Sequentia (now Comment vivre ensemble), a film of conversations and commentaries on the role of rhythm in the shaping of our subjects, our communities and our localities. The film brings together Rwandan philosophers that would otherwise never meet, because of exile, in the case of Nyirubugara, or because of differing religious or methodological sensibilities. The film and exhibition stages a dialogue between them at the level of montage with theorist Olivier Nyirubugara at his office at Erasmus University, Rotterdam; philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana at his home in Butare, Rwanda; philosopher Obed Quinet Niyikiza at his home in Butare, Rwanda; and philosopher Fabien Hagenimana at INES-Ruhengeri in Rwanda. The exhibition and the work are discussed in more detail in the Appendix section of this thesis.

event it refers to.\textsuperscript{57} This is supported by Cameroonian novelist Patrice Nganang in his \textit{Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine: Pour une écriture pré-émptive} (2007).\textsuperscript{58} British theorist Michael Syrotinski considers Nganang in “The Post-Genocidal African Subject: Patrice Nganang, Achille Mbembe and the Worldliness of Contemporary African Literature in French” (2012). For Syrotinski, Nganang’s “central thesis is that the Rwandan genocide has to be read as a metonymy for a wider \textit{self-destruction} in the context of the history of Francophone Africa”.\textsuperscript{59} Syrotinski observes that Nganang highlights Africa’s slow response to the genocide, referring to it as “a belated ritual that has its origins in the deep-seated guilt of African thinking, which fell asleep at the moment of the catastrophe”.\textsuperscript{60} Therefore, as well as the West’s complicity, Syrotinski highlights that Nganang also crucially points to the limit of “what had gone under the name of African philosophy until that point”.

Syrotinski refers to Nganang’s declaration: “A long tradition of African thinking died with the Rwandan genocide, and the only hope for its rebirth is literature, but literature as essentially, profoundly, necessarily dissident”.\textsuperscript{61} Syrotinski


\textsuperscript{61} Syrotinski, “The Post-Genocidal African Subject”, p. 274.
analyses that *Manifeste* thus sends out “a rallying cry” for “pre-emptive” writing. In other words, “African thinking and writing now have to define themselves as necessarily post-genocide”.  

Modern African literature, with one notable exception discussed below, has thus far done relatively little to truly address the Rwandan genocide and its immediate aftermath. A difficult starting point might be to confront how it actually compares to other genocides if Nganang’s view holds true that

> [t]he drama (and “truth”) of the genocide lies precisely in the fact that it was not exceptional: not only was it the logical culmination of a series of earlier ‘smaller’ episodes of genocidal violence that scarred the history of Rwanda, which was merely the latest in a long history of barbaric post-Independence political regimes in Africa—what he calls “the time of the exception which has become the rule”—but in global historical terms it could hardly compete with far larger-scale crimes against humanity (the

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systematic slaughter of American Indians, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and so on).


See my note later in this chapter on my obvious lack of knowledge of Genocide Studies, and what I am and am not trying to do with this thesis in full recognition of this limitation.
Thus it can indeed be said that the Rwandan genocide is of global significance but, rather than being because it separates or differentiates itself in some way on the world stage, it might be for another more nuanced reason:

Through a cruel irony, the Rwandan genocide, insofar as it becomes part of this broader history of world barbarism, marks the moment when Africa becomes, as Nganang puts it, “fully human.” The myth of Africa as different, extraordinary, other (whether positively or negatively conceived) no longer holds: instead the genocide is the moment of “the violent entry of (Africa) into simple, that is to say flawed, humanity”.

Syrotinski’s formulation of “and so on” is symbolic of Nganang’s Manifeste, whose “truth” could be described in Roland Barthes’s terms as a scandal: as a truth, one that is precious and inadmissible. The diagrammatic and banal specificity of this phrase is as sobering as it is provocative: in its chilling nonchalance, it lays bare the characteristic repetition and enduring currency of the phenomenon of the “genocide” in the history of the present. For instance, it is reported that, after the Rwandan genocide, there was a Congolese genocide, in which allegedly between three and six million people died between 44

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70 Barthes, “The Eiffel Tower”, in A Barthes Reader, ed. Sontag, p. 239.

1996 and 2003. The “intramural” banality—an amplification of Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil”—of the Rwandan genocide replaces, in Nganang’s view, “the Kantian or Hegelian subject around which most humanist discourses are constructed […] by the figure of the survivor”. This new subject marks the end of the Kantian and Hegelian subjectivity of the Other because the rationality that produces the Other is an “essentialist, ‘identitarian thinking’ that informed the racialism motivating the genocide”. With this prognosis,

Nganang’s thesis on ‘post-genocide writing’ [becomes] explicitly aligned with [Achille] Mbembe’s rejection of the two traditions which, since négritude, have dominated African thinking, that is Marxism in its various guises and Afrocentrist indigenism (two traditions Mbembe wryly refers to as ‘le rouge et le noir!’).

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74 Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 610: “The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied — as had been said at Nuremberg over and over again by the defendants and their counsels — that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact hostis generis humani, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong”.


In Nganang’s view, the Rwandan genocide is “the graveyard of Negritude, as well as of all of its conceptual corollaries”.\textsuperscript{78} In contrast, Syrotinski analyses how Nganang considers Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe to stand out from other African thinkers because, while other thinkers registered the genocide in terms of an “epiphenomenon” or as “an exceptional and uncharacteristic madness, [...] Mbembe reads the genocide as \textit{symptomatic} of ‘the time of misery’”. In Nganang’s words, this is “less a time of the ritual of mourning, than one of waking up after the genocide: of life after death”.\textsuperscript{79}

Nganang’s characterisation of the simplicity of humanity as genocidal humanism marks the history of the present as the epoch of the \textit{afterlife}. The inscription of the Rwandan genocide in this world history therefore compels, according to Nganang, “a morbid thinking” because “the never again” that follows its wake subsides into “an institutional takeover of the historical consciousness”.\textsuperscript{80} Isaïe Nzyeyimana would describe this mutation as a positivist ethos, whose declaration becomes in itself a statistical instrument to securitise and to militarise all aspects of life, in a manner that ends up denying the humanity and the intellectual relevance of witnesses whose survival testifies to the urgent experiences of genocidal criminalities. As German philosopher Theodor Adorno writes, “in a reality that stands under the constant threat of


\textsuperscript{79} Nganang, \textit{Manifeste}, p. 41, Loc. cit.

catastrophe”\(^{81}\) such criminality is either unfolding, or its aftermath is unacknowledged.\(^{82}\)

At this point I should say this would obviously be a different thesis if I was to pretend to have the slightest proficiency of or initiation into Genocide Studies. This is, of course, an enormous discipline with extensive fields that include International Relations, Sociology, Anthropology, Criminology, Political Science, International Law, Military History and evidently also Literature in a wider sense. By invoking this genealogy here I am simply tracing Nganang’s argument and attempting to mobilise the accusation—that Nganang launched from within comparative literature—in the domain of visual culture, by way of dialogues with philosophy practitioners, and between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzyeyimana on the theory side. My minor comment here would be to add that “pre-emptive” literature would have to include a translational dimension. This is not only for intellectual reasons, but also because, according to American historian of peace and conflict studies Susan Thomson:

The literature on Rwanda’s post-genocide reconstruction and reconciliation policies is more polarized, divided generally between those who praise the government for its economic growth and human development policies and those who criticize its human rights record. Much of the literature on the Rwandan genocide is published in English, which marks a break from the predominantly French-language scholarly literature on Rwanda before 1994. The lack of pre-genocide literature in

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English means that many well-intentioned and capable authors have sometimes failed to address the historically relevant details so essential to understanding Rwandan society.\(^\text{83}\)

Conceptually and in method I propose a mobilisation of this question at the level of the *ground*: not as an attempt at *grounding* and, in this way, qualifying Nganang’s position, but precisely to *desediment* its foundational, paleonymic implications. This thesis mobilises Nganang’s diagnosis and prognosis, not so much towards the cause, origins or sources of its emergence, but towards an interior reading, by drawing a close circle in which stories are told. This is something Saidiya Hartman might do. This circle of *one’s own* is diagrammed by the rhythms of *giving-receiving-giving* in Nzeyimana and by *letting-being-letting* in Barthes. Therefore, my only attempt with regard to Nganang’s *Manifeste* is to map out the paths or flows engendered by these two rhythms in the way of a relationship between generosity and genocide. Whenever I *foreground* Nganang’s question it is only for the purposes of the *desedimentation* of its limit.

This leads to, what exactly is the limit that Nganang’s question is *raising*? For Syrotinski, it is “taking the West out of the equation in the Rwandan genocide”. In doing so, Nganang bestows “Rwanda” and, by extension, “Africa” with a will of its own, an “autonomy that means taking responsibility for the genocide, insofar as this is how Africa has joined the universal barbarism of humanity”. Therefore, Nganang “makes this a story that has to do essentially with Africa’s self-destruction, the failure and collapse of African philosophy”.\(^\text{84}\) Reflecting on how Nganang proposes to move beyond this “time of misery”, Syrotinski poignantly asks: “is there not a very grave danger in exculpating the West in the desire to get away from a syndrome of victimization?”

As mentioned above, this idiorrhythmic—that is, interior—orientation can be described through what Nzeyimana calls *ubuvandimwe* (from the same womb), what Hortense J. Spillers terms an “intramural reading”, or through “intense


proximity”, the late Okwui Enwezor’s notion. This way, this thesis also reflects on another of Syrotinski’s questions he addresses to Nganang:

Why privilege literature as the site of a re-emergent philosophy and, specifically, a philosophy of subjectivity over other modes of cultural production (for example, music, art, photography, film)? Can these artistic forms not offer equivalent dissident practices?85

The nature and scale of these questions are such that they cannot be answered within the constrictions of a mere thesis. My narration offers a mere reflection, effected through charting a journey of my interventions undertaken in the background—that is, in the ground—of these questions.

If my anecdotal crisis marks the genesis of this thesis, the point made by American anthropologist David Graeber is useful to keep in mind: “[t]he word “crisis” literally refers to a crossroads: it is the point where things could go either of two different ways”.86 Barthes and Nzeyimana point to these two ways, in that Barthes’s rhythm points to an anachōrēsis, an ascension, while Nzeyimana’s rhythmicisation points to a praxis of posteriority, as a form of categorisation. Categorisation here should be understood in terms of κατηγορία, kategoria: derived from kategorein “to speak against; to accuse, assert, predicate”. The word is composed of the Greek κάτα, kata meaning “down(wards), against, along, through, over, across, concerning”87 and ἀγορεύειν, agoreuein, “to harangue, to declaim (in the assembly)”. Herein the reader might recognise ἄγορά, agora, which means “gathering, assembly, market, trade, traffic agora ‘public assembly’ from the Proto-Indo-European root for “ger- to gather”.88 Nzeyimana’s giving-receiving-giving is thus a prediction, a predicate for gathering, for living together again, after life.

85 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
In “Speech, Belief, Power”, translator Laura Hengehold asks:

What is this elementary but problematic social bond, “living-together”? How can it give authority to the law so that people find courts and legislatures trustworthy—even when their personal interests may be threatened—if not, as Burke warned, through tradition? When living-together becomes an elementary problem, we have to ask how we could ever have expected tradition to maintain our social world in the first place. We also ask how criticism of beliefs, including the belief in tradition, could turn out to be a way of preserving or renewing collective life [vivre-ensemble].

With this, Hengehold introduces her English translation of Law and the Public Sphere in Africa: La Palabre and Other Writings, a volume by Cameroonian philosopher Jean-Godefroy Bidima. Unless I am wrong, my “indisciplinary” reading of Bidima’s synthesis suggests that the “gathering” of Nzeyimana and Barthes through my narration is in itself a form of palaver. This is not unlike gacaca, “the traditional palabre of the Rwandan people, with its defects and its false steps” that, according to Bidima, “was there to say that where justice is concerned, the important thing once condemnation or pardon have been given is what comes next [l’après]”. What comes next, l’après, is Nzeyimana’s insistence on posteriority, a post-genocide that, to invoke the words of Hong Kong feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan, for whom “post” does not merely denote “a temporal period or a political transition of power, but also a reading strategy and discursive practice”, may intervene to separate the past and the present. Like Nzeyimana, it is a “post” that is also Nganang’s “pre-emptive”. However, unlike gacaca, my artistic interest in the continuities and the discontinuities of living together generated by a dialogic practice does not have a juridical aim; it

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91 Nzeyimana, Histoire et pragmatisme, p. 205.

is not “a matter of shedding light on another conception of justice, one that uses truth to bring about peace”.  

Nevertheless, Bidima implies that a thesis is in itself already a palaver: it “is always written in a serious spirit, because authors worry when they imagine being judged by their readership”.  

Furthermore, as Enwezor suggests by way of Adorno, “[t]he only relation to art that can be sanctioned in a reality that stands under the constant threat of catastrophe is one that treats works of art with the same deadly seriousness that characterises the world today”.  

Still, practising an artistic seriousness and rigour in visual culture does not necessarily equate to acceding to the legal practice of rendering justice. Therefore, this thesis should not be read under those criteria.

It is no coincidence that Barthes’s teaching at the Collège took the form of a course titled *How to Live Together* and a seminar titled *What is to “Hold Forth/ Tenir un discours?” Research on Invested Speech*. That is to say, according to Barthes, “[h]uman language, as it is actualised in “discourse,” is the permanent theatre of a power struggle between social and affective partners”. The seminar aimed “to explore language’s intimidating function”.

This brings me to further the reflection concerning the limit raised by the anaesthesia of the history of the present. The reader will have noticed the peculiarity of my somewhat idiosyncratic effort to draw from Kinyarwanda, theology and ancient Greek lexicons. Why does this thesis refer back to *idiorrhythm*, a concept from nearly two thousand years ago? Three points can be made on this subject. Firstly, on Nganang’s and Nzeyimana’s points, each and every discourse that claims to have an answer to how to live together only

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93 Ibid.


97 Ibid. Emphasis original.
tends to reduce this complexity to the question of good or bad governance. The crisis of discourse I experienced in 2011 was in part caused by my muting dissatisfaction with the institutional hold of the historical consciousness of how to live together in the afterlife. It was my dissatisfaction with the saturations of state discourse and corporate discourse, as well as not-for-profit discourse—as crucial and important as these discourses evidently are.98

This dissatisfaction is what engendered a demand for outside and coincidently older discourses. The defining aspect of their invocational address is not their age or historical location: it is their foundational aspect, their paleonymic quality, in the sense given by Jacques Derrida and Nahum Dimitri Chandler. At the heart of my effort to revisit a number of ancient concepts is the ability to return to the foundational moments of the history of the present. This return goes behind in space and before in time the contemporary discourses of good governance that dominate and quarantine the question of how to live together. Idiorrhythm is one of the many ways to exercise an itinerary across “old names”. It is a paleonym set in motion as the lever of intervention into an intramural present, in which the theological and the political is already entangled and already conflictual.

Secondly, I am attracted to such “old names” because I arrived at the question of how to live together through Barthes. But why did I follow Barthes? There is an immediate answer: isolation, despair, fatigue, mourning—in other words, akédia. However, these are not the only reasons. The longer answer could be this: in Barthes’s Comment vivre ensemble, I might have identified the outline of a thought animated by a different way of thinking through what it means to live

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together. This hesitant and—to Barthes’s own admission—incomplete thought,\textsuperscript{99} intimated a rhythm of living together in a way drastically different from a discourse that claims to explain the genocide and the genocidal condition, expressed in political science, developmentalism, truth and reconciliation, or colonial genealogy. Barthes’s approach also suggested a possibility different from discourses that narrate the post-genocide condition, through journalism, fiction, witness testimonies and survival narratives. In listening to Barthes, I sensed a supplementary discourse that, while it does not have answers as such, may intervene with fundamental reflections, in as much that its intellectual locus precedes the dominant ones by almost two thousand years. Barthes turns to these foundational discourses in order to open up a space in his present of 1977.

This begs the question, why did Barthes himself turn to these histories in 1977? What interests did Barthes have in such ancient texts? Similarly, why did Michel Foucault turn to the Cynics and the Stoics in 1979 as a means for the “care of the self?”\textsuperscript{100} Why did these French figures, in the middle of their careers, suddenly turn back two thousand years? While Foucault’s epistemological archaeology project differs from Barthes’s literary simulation, both reconsider the foundational discourses in order to use them as levers of intervention.

Barthes concluded \textit{How to Live Together} with “an imprecise metaphor of Living-Together":\textsuperscript{101} his course had proceeded to “slowly [add] little touches of colour” in the fashion of a painterly “work in progress” whose direction remains unclear. To Barthes’s own admission, the course produced “no final painting”, and this


limit became an invitation. “I don’t have a philosophy of Living-Together”, Barthes conceded. “[A]t best, it would be up to you to produce one”.

Regardless of the theoretical resolve Barthes’s gesture may offer, the intellectual horizon opened up by idiorrhythmy gave me the courage to undertake this thesis, and it gives the thesis the permission and the capacity to spiral back and forth through time rather than being stranded in the present. Instead of remaining in a world defined by the discourse of Otherness, or Truth and Reconciliation, idiorrhythmy has provided philosophical and epistemological movement to the thesis. Movement is not freedom but mobility, and this mobility justifies the importance of a philological and etymological motion in this thesis. This desedimentative motion is not in order to arrive at a fixed position, but to gain permission to go back and forth in time.

As such, and this is my third point, this thesis is not a historical project. If it resorts in part to concepts of philosophical, theological and political elaboration, it is for interventionist reasons, in the sense of Derrida and Chandler: as a lever of intervention.

The above exploration of one of the limits that challenge this thesis can be summarised with this question: in the face of the numbing violence that marks the history of the present, how to remain sensitive? This limit fractures time; it produces a memory of before and it propels life into an after. What is the interior and anterior posteriority of this after?

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102 Ibid., p. 196, fn. 12, oral supplement.

103 Ibid., p. 132. For each trait or figure treated in the course, Barthes speaks of “merely opening a dossier” and of a “completion at a later stage” (plus tard), and invites the listener—(and later the reader, for the courses were never intended by Barthes to be published in book form)—to complete the dossiers themselves.
Limit #2: Narration Against Violence from a Position of “Complicity”

How to speak against such violence from a “complicit” position in or rather acknowledgment of that same violence? Was Roland Barthes aware of the shortcomings of his own writing, accepted/sacrificed to obtain/achieve an “immediate” political use? In the course of this research, a number of curators, activists, artists, researchers and students, who have in some way engaged with my practice, have expressed their frustration with their inability to “read” Barthes’s political project. For example, this sentiment was occasionally expressed by the MA students I worked with at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI) in Arnhem, intermittently between 2013 and 2016. I was at the DAI in the capacity of a visiting lecturer, first in the context of Publishing Class III: How to Live Together (2012-13), a module developed by the Utrecht-based Casco—Office for Art, Design and Theory. The decision to title the third instalment of the Publishing Class after Barthes’s *How to Live Together* was reached by Casco’s director Binna Choi and her colleague curator Yolande van der Heide, following their engagement with my developing research. At that time, I was preparing my exhibition and activities of the same name staged at Casco between 2013 and 2014 for the purposes of this research.

This anecdote—this chorus—is raised to illustrate my experience in learning about the frustration that arises when an attempt is made to understand—and therefore “apply”—Barthes’s political orientation within contemporary visual culture. In her article, Chinese-American literary theorist Yue Zhuo points to this frustration: “When an interviewer jabbed about his “extremely discreet” relation to politics, Barthes basically agreed, invoking nevertheless a distinction he makes between “le politique” and “la politique” to justify himself”. In Barthes’s view, *le politique* (the political) refers to the critical attitude one develops

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104 I write “complicity” in this way in order to signify that of course the position within it, if at all, is mobile.

105 See the Appendix for a detailed account of these projects.

towards the transformation of a given society. In contrast, *la politique* (politics) refers to discourses of nation states, politicians and other such apparatuses whose “uninterrupted and ‘arrogant’ language could only congeal into some kind of *doxa*: ideology, opinion, or consensus”. Barthes understood his political discretion as a search for a rhythm to “deflate” what he perceived as an uninterrupted discourse of politics.

Barthes attempted to manifest such “deflation” at the Collège, by foregrounding a *pathos* as the basis for an ethical and aesthetic pursuit. This can be a trauma, an illness, a desire, or a fantasy. Belgian literary critic Maarten de Pourcq suggests that, for Barthes, this pathos produces a gesture of becoming minor, and this minority would avoid the institutional incorporation into political and specifically patriarchal apparatuses. “For only the son has fantasies”, Barthes says, “only the son is alive”: “the Father is always dead”.

For Barthes, a father figure represents “the violent and conflictual strand” of culture. De Pourcq compares Barthes’s “unease” with culture to Michel Foucault’s “claim[s] that only by means of transgression and thus in the inherently violent conflict between the (Nietzschean) individual and the disciplinary power could (the Greek wonder of) freedom arise”. Similarly, de Pourcq continues, Gilles Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy* outlines “pleads for a more autarkic individual who is not, in the Neo-Hegelian and Marxist tradition,


108 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 108. “Culture, according to Nietzsche, is essentially training and selection. It expresses the violence of the forces which seize thought in order to make it something affirmative and active.—We will not only understand the concept of culture if we grasp all the ways in which it is opposed to method. Method always presupposes the good will of the thinker, ‘a premeditated decision’. Culture, on the contrary, is a violence undergone by thought, a process of formation of thought through the action of selective forces, a training which brings the whole consciousness of the thinker into play. The Greeks did not speak of method but of *paideia*; they knew that thought does not think on the basis of a good will, but by virtue of the forces that are exercised on it in order to constrain it to think”. Quoted in de Pourcq, “The ‘Paideia of the Greeks’”, p. 29. De Pourcq is unsure about Deleuze’s use of *paideia* outlined “in terms of a *dressage*”. For de Pourcq, such use is more “in accordance with the notion of the Spartan *agogè*. Paradoxically, Deleuze derives his notion of *paideia* mainly from Plato, who, according to de Pourcq, rejects the Spartan mode. See: Plato, *The Republic II*, trans. Paul Shorey (London/Cambridge, Mass: William Heinemann/Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 518–19.
determined by the struggle for recognition by others but stands in his own right, affirms his own creative life”. It is here that, according to de Pourcq, Barthes “shift[s] from a Marxist point of view, as in Sartre’s existential Marxism, that holds on to the idea of a social revolution to wipe out social differences, to the Nietzschean individualist revolt eager to affirm individual difference against the mob”. ¹⁰⁹ For de Pourcq:

[Barthes’s turn] can be formulated in terms of a shift from a focus on pouvoir (“power”) to puissance (“potency,” “force”). In his Marxist phase,¹¹⁰ Barthes was interested in the question of how to demystify power, while in the Nietzschean phase ‘puissance’ is considered as a gateway to new horizons, that is to say, to the energy of the transformation of the self. Due to his Lacanian inspiration, Barthes does not bring his own rebellious or revolutionary ‘ego’ to the fore, but attempts to deploy his manque (“lack”) as a creative and affirmative act.¹¹¹

This is how, in Comment vivre ensemble, Barthes is attracted to one’s own creation of a new life—a vita nuova¹¹²—in which Barthes “shift[s] from a socio-political discourse to an aesthetic-creative discourse”, which he had already addressed in Camera Lucida (1980) as a “mathēsis singularis—which he opposes to a mathēsis universalis¹¹³—a singular learning designated as an “active philology”.¹¹⁴ What is the pathos or lack which makes Barthes shift from a “socio-political discourse to an aesthetic-creative discourse”? Is this shift even


¹¹⁰ Barthes’s Marxist phase is analysed in Jean-Jacques Lecercle, “Barthes without Althusser: A Different Style of Marxism”, in Paragraph, Vol 31, Nr.1. Lecercle’s analysis complicates De Pourcq’s reading, as Lecercle demonstrates how there remains a Marxist substratum in Barthes’s later thought at the Collège, despite his avowed withdrawal from any association with Marxism.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 30-31.


¹¹⁴ Barthes, Comment vivre ensemble, p. 149.
convincing? Precisely, is it not such inability to sustain public speech that constitutes a crisis of discourse and, therefore, Barthes’s own discursive limit?

Barthes’s political “discretion” could have been related to his undisclosed pathos, or the limit of discourse in Barthes’s own biography, which is connected to a remarkable moment within the history of French imperialism. This connection was made by Belgian artist Vincent Meessen in his film Vita Nova (2009). The film reveals how Barthes’s maternal grandfather, Louis-Gustave Binger, was “the French explorer and colonial officer who claimed Côte d’Ivoire for France in the 1880s”. Binger even “served for a time as the colony’s governor, and lent his name to Bingerville, the city that remains named in his honour to this day”. Meessen was captured by an encounter with Barthes’s Mythologies, Barthes’s seminal volume studying the meaning (addressed as signification) of language, signs and power, drawing from Barthes’s analysis of the practice of everyday life.

And here is now another example: I am at the barber’s, and a copy of Paris-Match is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture.

In retracing the life behind the image of the Paris Match discussed by Barthes, Meessen determined that it was an edition issued in 1955, whose cover featured, as Meessen learnt, a certain Diouf Birane, a Burkinabe cadet who was in France to partake in the military parade staged by the French Empire. The parade brought together military contingents from the constituents of the French

115 Vincent Meessen, Vita Nova, single channel video, 26 min, 2009.


117 I am borrowing here from Michel de Certeau’s renowned formulation to describe how the gesture of “being at the barber” constitutes an act of critical reflection. In Mythologies, Barthes exerts an “effort to account for the phenomena of mass culture by resorting to a new model” of analysis, as described by translator Annette Lavers. Linguistics is one such model, “whose mark is seen not so much in the use of a specialized vocabulary as in the extension to other fields of words normally reserved for speech or writing, such as transcription, retort, reading, univocal (all used in connection with wrestling), or to decipher (plastics or the ‘good French Wine’)”. See: Barthes, Mythologies, p. 6; de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Empire and that is how Diouf Birane, as a young boy, was featured on the cover of *Paris Match* while saluting the French flag. By the time Meessen visited Burkina Faso in 2009, Birane had already passed away, but some of his then-fellow cadets, now in their old age, were able to accommodate Meessen's visit. It is through this encounter that Meessen learnt about Binger’s role in the history of the French Empire in West Africa. In a way, a public acknowledgement of this biographical detail would have pitted Barthes against his own familial heritage. This point was made in May 2016 by Gauz—the artist name of Ivorian writer Patrick Armand-Gbaka Brede. Gauz was also speaking at the Collège de France during “Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui”, the colloquium convened by Alain Mabanckou mentioned earlier. Gauz, who is also a satirical poet, acted out his pointed astonishment at how, during the worldwide celebrations of Barthes’s centenary birthday in 2015,

[no one reasoned that [Barthes] was [Binger’s] first grandson, no one thought that this man, this [grand]son of a colonialist… At the end, it is no coincidence that [Barthes] developed such a craft for semiotics, for the value of the word. It could not be a coincidence: [Barthes] most likely developed this while dandling upon the knees of his adventurous grandfather who was dreaming of Kong.119

In his biography of Barthes, literary theorist Jonathan Culler describes him as a seminal thinker who uprooted his seedlings as they sprouted. Culler states that Barthes refused to be tied down and was in a perpetual movement “that aim[ed] not to correct errors but to evade the past”.120 This evasion was specific to the impressive disciplinary associations and affiliations Barthes accumulated throughout his career. Culler appraises Barthes’s lack of perseverance and underscores the difficulty of separating a critical engagement in Barthes’s work from “his perpetual attempt to adopt new perspectives, to break with habitual perceptions”. Culler also opines: “A lasting commitment to particular projects would have made Barthes a less productive thinker”.121

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121 Ibid.
Instead, Barthes preferred to shift his discourse into retreat: to become a boy, who effects a symbolic patricide that he cannot publicly avow. Barthes retreated from the discourse of *la politique*—that is, politics and its publics, the fatherland and its father figures (*rhythm*)—into the metaphorical interiority of motherhood, a discursive realm rightly or wrongly associated with privacy (*idios*). Perhaps this explains why Barthes in his later period at the Collège strived to become a boy, or to become minor. This could have been Barthes’s way of gaining permission to perform “an immature politics”: as a gesture of patricide, or of prematurity, as a fantasy of disarmament occasioned by his association with motherhood.122

While I greatly lament the French imperial history and its continuing effect on the history of the present, I am in no position to critique Barthes on account of his silence on his biographical complicity with Binger. By “biographical complicity” here, I mean an affiliation to a figure, agent, group, community or society, by dint of the sheer reality of not being able to choose where we are born.

In a way, I share this position of partial and perhaps even double historical responsibility with Barthes: I was born to a Hutu father—who belongs to the racial group that committed the genocide—and to a mother of Tutsi ancestry, the group which fell victim to the genocide. I am actually not certain about the exact degrees of her ancestral ethnic make-up, and for the purposes of this thesis I have come to consider this acknowledgement, this non-knowledge, not as a limit but a mobility. This biographical inscription imposes a theoretical limit on my narration of how to live together, yet where Barthes was silenced by his own crisis of discourse borne of the convergence of his relatively provincial biography and global history, I am compelled to intervene overtly and to articulate my acknowledgement—derived from my limit of speech—in the open. It is here that a limit becomes an articulation, a horizon, inviting us to return to

122 The First Chapter addresses briefly how, unlike Barthes’s figure of the “father who is always dead”, the figure of the mother features decisively in his method—which he calls a non-method—in his text *How to Live Together* and his subsequent courses at the Collège. See: Barthes, “Inaugural Lecture”, p. 477.
the question posed above: how to speak against the violence from within a position, or rather acknowledgement of complicity?
Limit #3: Discursive Compromise of a Disciplinary Practice

Roland Barthes’s discursive limit was his inability or resistance to “testify” to his own complicity to the violence he was opposing. My own discursive limit is my biography which, like Barthes’s, is partially and doubly inscribed on the “wrong” side of history and partially on the “right” side of history, within post-genocide Rwanda. The object of this reflection in the form of a doctoral thesis is, of course, to overcome the simplicity of such inscription. Does Isaïe Nzyeyimana also face a discursive limit? As we shall see in Chapter Two, nearly all philosophers of African renown, the institutions they represent and their teachings reflect an allegiance to Christianity. However, Nzyeyimana’s thinking can be said to represent but also to contradict the enduring legacies of the intertwined histories of religion and philosophy. It is a tradition set forth by the missionary institution of education that descended from the colonial era. To this day, the Christian (more Catholic than Protestant) institution is formed of the Rwandan general intellects. The general intellect, in singular, is a concept by Karl Marx, who was “groping for a way to think of the role of something like intellectual labor in the production process”. However, I follow another formulation by American philosopher McKenzie Wark, whose general intellects in plural designates:

People who are mostly employed as academics, and mostly pretty successful at that, but who try through their work to address more general problems about the state of the world today. They are, on the one hand, part of the general intellect, in that they are workers who think and speak and write, whose work is commodified and sold. But they are, on the other hand, general intellects, in that they try to find ways to write and think and even act in and against this very system of commodification that has now found ways to incorporate even them.

Through education, this Christian institution extends into governance, across political and literary authority. In addition, as his biography testifies,


125 Lit. Cit., p. 3.
Nzeyimana’s primary intellectual orientation finds its idiom in the work of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.\textsuperscript{126}

What limits does this general intellect formalised through Christianity and Hegelianism impose on the narration of the propriety of life in the afterlife of the post-genocide world? Christianity is a rationality that contributed to the false raciality at the heart of the Rwandan genocide,\textsuperscript{127} yet Nzeyimana’s Christianity is representative of that of the general intellects, who are mostly educated in the Christian seminary. In addition, specifically in the case of Nzeyimana, to paraphrase Rwandan philosopher Maniragaba Balibutsa, aspects of Hegel’s work make him belong to the literary agents that were ideologists of the century-long crimes by Europeans against Africans, who became the object of economic exploitation in the form of slavery, plunder of natural resources, forced labour and political subjection.\textsuperscript{128}

What disciplinary strategies can address such flawed and “complicit” narration? The invitation and, therefore, the risk of this doctoral thesis is to explore this limit through a dialogue between two understandings of the notions of one’s own rhythm. Again, this is a dialogue about \textit{idios/rhythm}, held discursively between Barthes and Nzeyimana, and narrated by myself, artist Christian Nyampeta. The chosen methodology of a dialogue between \textit{idios} and \textit{rhythm} is the expression of a desire to narrate how to possibly live together freely.


\textsuperscript{127} Timothy Longman, \textit{Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda}.

Barthes might disagree as he suggests: “If we call freedom not only the capacity to escape power but also and especially the capacity to subjugate no one, then freedom can exist only outside of language”. However, since “human language has no exterior” and “no exit”, as human language does not have an Other, in what idiom can this dialogue take place? Firstly, as suggested above, this thesis approaches Barthes’s idiorrhythm as a double notion of idios/rhythm. Secondly, where Barthes yielded to the weight of history by remaining silent about his biographical complicity with imperial power, I propose to essentially do the opposite, to mobilise my own practice as a resource for a chorus of the biography of the research. Thirdly, the thesis draws from Antony Mangeon and Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux’s notion of “indiscipline”—a “transgression of disciplinary boundaries rather than a ‘disintegration of disciplines’”—as a meaningful horizon in which to situate this discursive exercise. Such transgression is nothing but a dialogue, a conversation and a movement across knowledge systems. This manifests through the translative methodology, approached as a lever of intervention, in the sense given by Jacques Derrida and Nahum Dimitri Chandler. Otherwise, I wonder, how would Nzeyimana conciliate his own existence as a Rwandan philosopher with his intellectual practice as a philosopher who thinks with Hegel despite the violence of some of his thoughts towards Nzeyimana’s own existence?

My humble supplement in this regard is, as mentioned above, to approach idiorrhythm as a double notion of idios/rhythm where the two are considered separately. This method seems to accommodate a slower crossing through theology, philosophy and visual culture whereby, metaphorically, idios is the self


130 Ibid.


132 A regular translation would use “reconcile” instead of conciliate. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I use the term conciliate because it retains the inherent tension of living-together. Furthermore, the term “reconcile” is too much associated with the grammar of governance, NGOs and corporations in a way that corrupts its use in contexts that are outside of these discourses.
and rhythm is the collective. This theoretical doubling dramatises a dialogical and spiral movement, a chorus, or a conversation, between Barthes and Nzeyimana, narrated by myself, in the field of visual culture. In other words, Barthes, Nzeyimana and myself perform the interchangeable roles of idios and rhythm. Rhythm is history (Christianity, Rwanda, etc.) and also regulated and official disciplines (theology, philosophy, language, etc.). As the narrator, I propose to desediment these fields of knowledge, using idios as a lever to intervene with visual, aural, sculptural and other such artistic devices.

**Origins of the Christian Institutionalisation of Propriety of Rhythm**

In terms of the structure of this thesis, the First Chapter situates Roland Barthes’s study within a wider historical frame that extends in both the temporal directions of the past and the future. It sketches a historical overview of idios and rhythm, through an analysis of the literary traditions which engendered the double notion of idios/rhythm. This literature is located in the foundational moments of Christian asceticism in the deserts of Egypt, and this historical overview helps to unfold Barthes’s own understanding of the relationship between language, power and rhythm.

The chapter then analyses the propriety (idios) of life, its conceptions and its threats, its institutionalisation and its control (rhythmicisation), and the ramifications that these factors have on the present day understanding of the tension between, on the one hand, self-definition or propriety and, on the other hand, institutionality and collectivisation of memory, education and economy. The chapter concludes by mapping the enduring rhythmic manifestations of the institutionalised fight against the propriety of living or idios, by the institution of rhythm, exemplified today in seminaries and monasteries in former colonies such as Rwanda. Considering the profound transformation ushered by the conversion of the Rwandan intellect to Christendom, it makes sense to learn about the emergence of Christian monastic structures.
Intertwined Histories Between Philosophy and Christianity, the Rhythm of Modernity in the Great Lakes Region

The Second Chapter proposes that, once it arrived in former colonies, Christianity was forcefully deployed by the missionaries and the colonial administrations as the rhythm of modernity. The chapter thus outlines the intertwined arrival of Christianity and philosophy in Rwanda, by looking at how the modern history of education in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region is tied up with its colonial history and, in particular, with the conversion to and expansion of Catholic and Protestant forms of Christianity among the general regional intellects. Throughout its Rwandan history up until perhaps after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Christianity, through its authoritative body, supported systems of reason that were antagonistic to common life and the truth of desire in culture, society and politics.

The chapter attempts to map the historical conditions that account for the intellectual plurality of the Rwandan idios, by looking at how the socio-cultural realities are both intertwined and, at the same time, ruptured by Christianity, which in part accounts for the limits of living together that have manifested themselves through war, genocide and exile. The chapter reflects on the tests awaiting the figure of the artist and the philosopher, taking into account the enormous challenges already overcome over the last 25 years by the governmental bodies, educational institutions and other such societal structures. This way, the chapter situates the intellectual ecologies in which the thinking of Isaïe Nzyimana is partially cultured.

The Thinking of Isaïe Nzyimana

The Third Chapter continues from within this cohabitation of paradoxes, and explores how Isaïe Nzyimana understands the question of how to live together in the political reality of the post-colonial and the post-genocide, as well as globally, in an age where intense levels of crisis are the norm rather than the exception.
In the background of this reality, this chapter proceeds by summarising the possible understanding of “rhythm” in Nzeyimana’s key writings which address memory, economy and education. In general, this project on Nzeyimana attempts to think through the limit that is the posteriority of living together from the perspective of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, offering something different or in contrast to the majority of existing literature on the subject which largely consists of “testimonies and monographs aiming at the factual description of the genocide and the post-genocide political climates”.133

**Generosity and the Rest: A Speculative Dialogue Between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana**

This final chapter undertakes a speculative dialogue between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana which centres on the role of “rhythm” in the overcoming of the limit of living together. The chapter aims to bring into dialogue the moral and ethical groundings of Nzeyimana’s rhythmic formulation of giving-receiving-giving with Barthes’s understanding of rhythm as letting-being-letting, for the purpose of combining and consolidating the social realities and ethical tensions that emerge in the encounter between the two rhythms. Drawing on this dialogue, the chapter then speculates on the possible existence of a negative generosity that, as a result of a rhythmic dynamic characterised by Nzeyimana’s notion of ubuvandimwe, is intramurally configured and organised through an intense proximity. This configuration allows speculation on the conditions in which such generosity might have contributed to the eruption of the Rwandan genocide.

**Beyond the Limits of Rest and Generosity: A Practicum**

The Appendix presents the findings of the public dialogues, and the national and international conferences about ethics, aesthetics and cohabitation in Rwanda, which I co-convened with Isaïe Nzeyimana, in the guise of a

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conclusion that reflects on how to overcome the possible limits of the understanding of one’s own rhythm as generosity and one’s own rhythm as rest, in the respective analysis of living together by Isaïe Nseyimana and Roland Barthes.

The themes of these activities were structured around how artists negotiate the demands of the individual (*idios*) and the society (*rhythm*), and the kinds of personal practices (*idiarrhythmy*) which emerge from this negotiation. The artists and theorists involved represent a wide cross-section of visual cultures in Rwanda today. Artists include Epa Binamungu, Georges Kamanayo, Jean Sebukangaga and Crista Uwase, as well as students and staff at Nyundo School of Art and Music (Rubavu). Other interlocutors include architect Marie-Noelle Akingeneye Uwera, priest and philosopher Vedaste Kayisabe, priest, philosopher and musician Faustin Hagenimana, lyricist Sophie Nzayisenga and mythologist Rose-Marie Mukarutabana. The themes were organised around language and translation, history of philosophy and art, memory and aesthetic practices, and aesthetic education. The primary questions were:

If “the language of languages is translation”, what are the histories of the key concept in art and philosophy? What are our present-day models to comprehend and to translate these notions in Kinyarwanda, English, French, or any other language that is proper and meaningful to our current society, while retaining a bearing on the past and the future? Who were the artists working alongside renowned historical figures from philosophy such as Abbé Alexis Kagame? Were there any women philosophers and artists at work? Who are the women visual artists and philosophers working today and what are their lessons?

What is the role of art and philosophy in maintaining the individual, communal, social and cultural memory of the genocide against the Tutsi? What conceptual and material needs are still arising from this historical yet indelible tragedy? What themes and strategies are deployed by artists and philosophers in navigating the past, the present and the future in which living–together involves living–without? How does this individual, social and cultural memory affect and
reflect the symbolic and material production of knowledge?

If “education is not only to teach the mind, but also to look after the heart”, how is forming the mind and caring for the heart undertaken at the hand of “artists” and “philosophers” today? Finally, if we may borrow Martin Luther’s words: “What would you do if tomorrow was the end of the world?—I would plant a tree”. If so, what “trees” are we “artworkers” planting today?
Chapter 1: Rhythm, Language and Power in Roland Barthes

In 2011 I learnt of idiorrhythm through a radiophonic chance encounter with Roland Barthes. At that moment when I was listening to the online freeform radio station WFMU, I could hardly have predicted that this theological notion from late antiquity would become entangled with my own subjects of enquiry and their manifestations in my artistic practice. Idiorrhythm was the subject of Barthes’s lectures at the Collège de France back in 1977, but its theoretical distance reverberated with the sociographic sensibilities I myself perceived in the present of 2011. The permissive frequency of idiorrhythm, transmitted through Barthes’s voice, irradiated with a resonance that gave me a certain artistic mobility. In turn, this mobility allowed me to embark on an intellectual movement full of theoretical transliterations, emotional transformations and long-lasting collaborative transferences, out of which this doctoral thesis emerged.

This First Chapter overviews what is at stake in Barthes’s How to Live Together, and then decomposes idiorrhythm by focusing separately on its components idios and rhythm. In other words, this chapter leaves idiorrhythm behind as it is proposed by Barthes, and desediments “idios-rhythm” according to Jacques Derrida’s and Nahum Dimitri Chandler’s theories, as a lever of intervention for staging a dialogue between Roland Barthes and contemporary Rwandan philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana.

In How to Live Together, Barthes draws his understanding of rhythm from the defining moments of Christian asceticism. Effectively, idiorrhythm is an ascetic conception of the organisation of one’s own life in a group, in a manner that allows each member to retain one’s own ways of life. Nzeyimana also draws from a certain form of Christian monastic practice, but the kind that drastically mutated from its inceptions in the deserts of Egypt and arrived in Rwanda nearly two thousand years later through the missionary form of the trans-European order of the White Fathers who settled in Rwanda from 1901 onwards. This late nineteenth century era was a period in which Rwanda and the wider region were colonies of European nations, but virtually all Western ascetic orders were instituted as cenobitism long before this time, cenobitism
being a monastic structure of organising the lives of the members of a monastery into one uniform “common life”: κοινός βίος, koinos bios. In contrast, Barthes’s configuration of community based on a rhythm that allows each of its members to remain on one’s own is probably informed by the fugitive character of those partaking in these then-new historic communities.

The ascetics were in opposition to the norms of their society and to the uniformity of monasticism. It is likely that Barthes connected with the idea of a community based on exile. As explored above, Barthes might have suffered a crisis of discourse (a limit) because of his biography, as his maternal grandfather was Louis-Gustave Binger, a French explorer and colonial officer who claimed Côte d’Ivoire for France in 1892.134 Ivorian writer and satirical poet Gauz contends that, given how intimate Barthes was with his maternal grandfather, he must have known about Binger’s adventures, “exploits”, writings and official decorations, yet while critiquing colonial “power” in Mythologies and The Eiffel Tower, he obviously felt unable to divulge this “biographical complicity” with the French Empire.

As such, I consider Barthes’s How to Live Together (and The Neutral) as amounting to a search for how to speak against violence one is unwillingly complicit in oneself. How to speak against violence that is constitutive of the very notion of community or, rather, how to live outside of the time of this intimate violence? How to outplay its hold on life and its claims on one’s biography? How to disidentify with its associations without committing more violence, that is, without “betraying” those in one’s circle, in this case, Barthes’s family? Barthes’s How to Live Together is not just a search for a relation with the

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134 For the Treaty signed by Binger and Kongodi Ouattara, King of Diammala, and for other historical documents relating to Binger’s imperial activities, see the hagiographic exhibition catalogue: L’Afrique en noir et blanc: du fleuve Niger au golfe de Guinée, 1887-1892: Louis Gustave Binger, explorateur (Paris: Somogy; L’Isle-Adam: Musée d’art et d’histoire Louis Senlecq, 2009). Article I of the Treaty reads: “The King of Diammala declares to place his states under the protectorate of France”. My translation. Nine articles were drafted on one double-sided piece of paper. At the bottom of the verso, King Kongodi Ouattara and his retainers turn Diammala into Bingerville with a cross, “since [they] did not know how to make a signature”. This point was brought up by Gauz during his lecture at Collège de France in May 2016. Binger’s own writings include Le péril de l’Islam (Paris, Comité de l’Afrique française, 1906); Esclavage, islamisme et christianisme (Paris: Société d’éditions scientifiques, 1891); Du Niger au Golfe du Guinée par le pays de Kong et le Mossi (Paris: Musée de l’homme, 1980); Une vie d’explorateur: souvenirs extraits des carnets de route (Paris: Fernand Sorlot, 1938).
putative “other”, or simply a retreat or “love of the margins”, or merely an essayistic form of intersubjective study of the peaceful relations between two strangers that form a group. *How to Live Together* is a complex study of how to live with the interior, intramural plurality, whose intense proximity is the very source of antagonism that takes on various scales of exterior expression.

A dialogue is one way to address such antagonism and, as mentioned in the Introduction, Barthes’s supplementary seminar that ran parallel to his course *How to Live Together* was *What is to “Hold Forth”?/Qu’est-ce que c’est “tenir un discours”?* The seminar explored language’s holding or intimidating function. Translator Kate Briggs notes the challenges she faced in the translation alone of this title: “The idiomatic expression *tenir un discours* can simply mean to make or deliver a speech, but also to have or hold to a position or point of view”. For Claude Coste, “[t]o Hold Forth’ [...] is to assert yourself through your words and your body” and it is a “discourse that constitutes us and whose aim is often to subdue our interlocutors”. The *Hold Forth* seminar deserves a thesis of its own, but here I mention *Hold Forth* only in supplement to my additional reading on Barthes’s *How to Live Together* as a search for speech of lesser violence, for speech that avoids *only* taking hold. This desire is further articulated in *The Neutral*.

Along its course, this thesis desediments and rearticulates Barthes’s central framing: “What is the intimacy we must develop to create a community? What is the distance we must maintain to retain our solitude?” Where Barthes explores this tension through his study of “a novelistic simulation”, this thesis explores the same by staging a speculative dialogue between Barthes and Nzeyimana about *idios* (solitude) and *rhythm* (community). The dialogue is

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136 Ibid., emphasis original.


narrated in parts through reflecting, or performing a chorus, understood as the
dialogic and colloquial manifestations of this tension in my own practice within
visual culture. In the background of this desedimentation, the chorus raises a
question posed by novelist Patrice Nganang and literary theorist Michael
Syrotinski: what content, shapes and forms can a pre-emptive artistic practice
take, in the wake of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi? Mobilising this
question is not aimed at providing any answers, but merely at exercising a reflection.

*How to Live Together: A Historical Context*

In 1976, Roland Barthes was appointed as the chair of Literary Semiology at the
Collège de France—a position specially created for his appointment. He was
nominated by his friend Michel Foucault, who described him in these terms:

Barthes belongs to a literature of the last twenty years. He has either
appraised it or made its reading possible. Yes, but in any case what he
said about it has taken form into it. Like all critics, he said what will be
talked about, but like few critics, he has given what to say. What became
the novel of the last two decennia, its forms, its developments, its
research, its exasperations, its stubbornness, cannot be disassociated
from the outlook that Barthes has bestowed upon it, and from the
discourse with which he has navigated it.  

According to translator Pier-Pascale Boulanger, “the works of Roland Barthes,
Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard
did not wait very long before they were translated by Americans and received
under the generic banner of ‘French Theory’”. In the writing of these authors,
rhythm emerged as a shared discursive category that articulated a moment of
strong epistemological engagement “in a critique of the metaphysical legacy of
Western philosophy”.

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la journée d’hommage, 1er décembre 2000, Paris (Inventaires),* ed. Nathalie Léger (Caen:

141 Pier Pascale Boulanger, “Introduction”, in Henri Meschonnic, *Ethics and Politics of
Translating*, trans. Pier-Pascale Boulanger (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin
and François Cusset, *French Theory* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003). Quoted in Boulanger,
“Introduction”.

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In that same time period in the 1970s and 1980s, the French philosopher, poet and translator Henri Meschonnic understood translation as a rhythm and a “mode of inventing thought”. Meschonnic also rejected any consideration of language outside ethics, such as postulates that “put the whole of translating into understanding”, an example being Paul Ricoeur who said: “To understand is to translate”.

For Boulanger, Meschonnic belongs to this moment, although Meschonnic’s poems and biblical translations would cause some to hesitate about his inclusion. Nevertheless, Meschonnic’s five-volume essay *Pour la poétique*, for example, “was born precisely out of the effervescent critique of tradition, today called post-structuralism”. Boulanger writes how, for Meschonnic, the post-structuralist opposition of two notions such as “signifier and signified leads to a more or less overt hierarchy and maintains a structure of thought without considering its perniciousness or its sterility”. From this reading, “Meschonnic’s criticism is not so very far from Derrida’s deconstruction”, inasmuch as Meschonnic aims “to analyse a theoretical standpoint and to show its pitfalls as far as the ‘language-poem-ethics-politics continuum’”. This analysis of the continuum between language and power is what constitutes Meschonnic’s understanding of rhythm as a phenomenon that “exceeds traditional definitions, which limit it to meter, repetition and periodicity”. According to Boulanger, Meschonnic professes: “Be it oral or written, rhythm can be produced by such elements as sounds, stressed syllables or words, repetition, parallelism, ellipsis, syntax (linking or dis-joining), pauses and sentence length”. In summary, Meschonnic’s “rhythm supposes that what words do has as much value as what they say”. Indeed, for Meschonnic:

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143 (Paul Ricoeur repeats it after George Steiner in *After Babel*), p. 11. And recurrence of the same on pages 24 and 28. No, to understand is to understand, or believing one understands. Translating supposes understanding, but that is an entirely different thing. Elementary, Doctor Common sense. (2006).

Translating is an act of language, and every act of language implies an ethics of language. Thus, a poetics of translating cannot be simply a regionally specific, autonomous reflection on the nature of translation, or even exclusively on what we call literature. Instead, the poetics of translating shows that each act of translation reveals its own theory of language, and that language itself implies a continuum and an interaction with art, ethics and politics. Translating is the experimental laboratory for this process, the key terrain for a critique of received ideas about language.\textsuperscript{145}

However, “unlike Derrida, Meschonnic did not take texts as pretexts for thinking. While Derrida deconstructed by finding and discussing the contradictions enmeshed in philosophical founding texts”, Meschonnic’s “epistemological position” was made “clear when he asserted that progress in the study of language would not come from new theories, but rather from greater accuracy in our observations of language”.\textsuperscript{146} Effectively, Meschonnic “criticised Derrida for using texts as pretexts, for taking the poem for a philosopheme”. For Boulanger, it “could be that Meschonnic’s criticism of deconstructionism and Derrida cost him inclusion in the importation of French Theory, inasmuch as reception depends on the degree to which theory complies with dominant ideological trends”.

While I am aware that my overview of Meschonnic’s rhythm might strain the reader’s patience, I have elected to give this account here for three reasons. Firstly, it is needless to mention the impossibility of surveying all key writings about rhythm and their intersections with Barthes’s \textit{idiorrhythm}. I do not have the mastery that would be required to do so and, even if I did, I would refrain from performing such a unifying gesture towards the phenomenal plurality surrounding the formulations of rhythm. Instead, and this is my second point, I have resolved to elaborate, “in practice” as it were, the historical conjunction on which Barthes’s idiorrhythm was formulated. My elaboration looks at Meschonnic, because he appears to be an important figure in the study of rhythm, language and power, and the relationship between those concepts and translation. Meschonnic’s experience helps to concretise a historical framing of


\textsuperscript{146} Boulanger, “Introduction”, p. 20.
the “historical site”, the point in time in which idiorrhythm emerged in critical 
theory, and its ramification for the present. Meschonnic’s work embodies a 
historical tension that emerged at the time of Barthes’s teaching at the Collège 
de France. This tension testifies to the heterogeneity, promiscuity and 
contradiction of the phenomenon of rhythm. Thirdly, Meschonnic’s “non-
translation” into English compels me to reflect on the remark made by Susan 
Thompson about the divide that marks the epistemological histories between 
pre-genocide and post-genocide writing in Rwanda.

To return to when Barthes was appointed at the Collège, he was traversing a 
period of personal transformation at the time. An overview of Barthes’s literary 
trajectory would include, from 1950s onwards, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), and 
*Mythologies* and *Eiffel Tower* (1957), in a period that could be described as a 
Marxist and Structuralist phase, whereby Barthes’s writing was indebted to the 
French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and, albeit *in negativa*, Louis Althusser. 
For instance, the essays in *Mythologies* first appeared in newspaper form, many 
of them in the wartime Resistance publication *Combat*, whose first editor had 
been Albert Camus.147 Following this chapter in his life, Barthes underwent a 
post-structuralist phase. The precise periodisation of Barthes’s philosophical 
course is offered by Jean-Claude Milner, who claims that “in 1955 Barthes was 
indeed a Marxist” but that “it can be confirmed that in 1964, the tide 
changed”.148

In fact, in 1977, Barthes did not consider himself ascribed to the Marxist 
position, or as having a structural or, indeed, post-structural affiliation, as 
thorist Maarten De Pourcq suggested above. However, in his analysis of 
Barthes’s “Marxist phase”, French literary theorist Jean-Jacques Lecercle 
somewhat complicates De Pourcq’s reading, for Lecercle demonstrates how 
there remained a Marxist substratum in Barthes’s later “phase” at the Collège,


148 J. C. Milner, *Le Pas philosophique de Roland Barthes* [The Philosophic Course of Roland 
despite his avowed withdrawal from association with Marxism. In 1975, in a
fragment titled “The image-system of solitude”, Barthes write about how

[h]e had always, up to now, worked successively under the aegis of a
great system (Marx, Sartre, Brecht, semiology, the Text). Today, it seems
to him that he writes more openly, more unprotectedly; nothing sustains
him, unless there are still patches of by-passed languages (for in order to
speak one must seek support from other texts). He says this without the
infatuation which may accompany all declarations of independence, and
without the pose of melancholy adopted to avow a solitude; but rather in
order to account to himself for the feeling of insecurity which possesses
him today and, still more perhaps, the vague torment of a recession
toward the minor thing, the old thing he is when “left to himself”.149

Nevertheless, this disavowal only affirms Lecercle’s thesis that there exist “two
different styles of Marxism, one which takes pride in its orthodoxy towards the
classical Marxist tradition, and one which treats it with the utmost flippancy, to
the point that the claim that the texts belong to the tradition of Marxism, even if
intended at its widest, is dubious”.150 For Lecercle, Barthes’s concept of the
ideosphere from The Neutral belongs to the latter way of thinking, and this is
indicative in Barthes’s project at the Collège. Lecercle reaches the conclusion
that Barthes’s thought was still indebted to Marxist thinking, by comparing the
ideosphere with ideology as framed by French Marxist philosopher Althusser.151

The term ‘ideology’ is not unknown to Barthes, who often refers to
‘ideology’ or ‘ideology critique.’ Ideology critique is one of the theoretical
languages, like psychoanalysis and structuralism, that one can bring to
bear upon the analysed text. And ideology is a broadly Marxist concept,
as, for instance, in Barthes’s critique of the Marxist phrase, ‘dominant
ideology’ as a pleonasm and his playful suggestion of ‘arrogant ideology’
as a substitute.152

An ideosphere, on the other hand, is a neologism put forward by Barthes, as a
complex form of ideology; it is “the linguistic system of an ideology” because
“ideology, no matter which, is and is only language: it’s a discourse, a type of

149 Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 108.
151 Ibid., p. 74.
152 Lecercle, “Barthes without Althusser”, p. 73. See: Barthes, The Neutral, p. 94 and Roland
Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 47.
discourse”. Barthes contrasts the ideosphere to other neologisms: “doxosphere: the linguistic sphere of the doxa. Or again, since it concerns discourses of faith: pisteosphere; or again sociolect (‘writing’ in Writing Degree Zero). Or even, more simply: logosphere: which would recall that for [a human] language is a true biological ambience, the one which and through which [one] lives, the one that surrounds him or her.153

This technical detailing is provided here by way of tentative historicisation of the intellectual horizon of Barthes’s How to Live Together, to help situate Barthes’s recourse to a “novelistic simulation” invoked in the function of a living-together that centres on tiredness, exhaustion, withdrawal, rest, and other such biological and psychological phenomena. In the speech he gave during Barthes’s nomination, Foucault described Barthes’s writing as the kind that does not reside in the perfection of the message; it does not dwell in the appropriateness of what is well said; it is rather on the side of what is badly said—too much or too little, of lacunae and excess, of too early or too late, of double meaning and contre-temps.154

Elsewhere, Barthes outlines what he means by contre-temps, a term that usually translates as a setback or delay:

In order to find accents, choices and attentions that are of the highest relevance to modernity, we are compelled to leap across [current] centuries and to turn to the inventions of an ancient society, undoubtedly unjust and hierarchical, but whose euphoria, the “savoir-vivre [life practices]” can manifest to us as utopian models: it is a contre-temps, whose historical theorisation remains incomplete.155


155 Barthes, Contre-temps, paragraph of Variations sur l’écriture, in Oeuvres complètes, tome II, 1994, pp. 1535-1574, p. 1540. “In order to find accents, choices and attentions that are of the highest relevance to modernity, we are compelled to leap across [current] centuries and to turn to the inventions of an ancient society, undoubtedly unjust and hierarchical, but whose euphoria, the ‘savoir-vivre’ can manifest to us as utopian models: it is a contre-temps, whose historical theorisation remains incomplete”. Quoted in Costa, “Leçons sur Leçon”, in Inventaires, p. 20. My translation.
Contre-temps is one of the most enduring theoretical strategies from Barthes’s work. Ultimately, whether as a Marxist, structuralist, post-structuralist, philologist or semiologist, “Barthes describes language as the very space of sociability in all of his work, whether it is a matter of exercising its power through words or of freeing oneself from the code through literature, and How to Live Together is no exception”.\textsuperscript{156}

At the same time, Barthes’s response to the circumstances surrounding the illness and subsequent passing of his mother,\textsuperscript{157} and to the societal pressures of his time, was to theorise about a community organised through a form of withdrawal modelled after the desert hermit from fourth century Christianity. As described by theorist Sabine Hillen, Barthes’s object was to demonstrate that “solitude [is] not anterior to the community”. Rather, for Barthes, it is “the community [that is] responsible for the solitude of the hermit”.\textsuperscript{158} Barthes conceived this culture of distance as a “social” action, as a “socialism of distances”:

Something like solitude with regular interruptions: the paradox, the contradiction, the aporia of bringing distances together—the utopia of a socialism of distance.\textsuperscript{159}

In order to be able to commit to such socialism of distance, Barthes revisited the life practices of the ascetics who, guided by idiorrhythmy, lived alone but together, and eschewed any form of disturbance or distraction. Therefore, in \textit{Comment vivre ensemble}, Barthes’s literary fantasy does not regard solitude as anterior to the community: rather, the community is responsible for the solitude

\textsuperscript{156} Coste, “Preface”, in Barthes, \textit{How to Live Together}, p. xxi.


\textsuperscript{159} Barthes, \textit{How to Live Together}, Session of January 12, 1977, p. 7. Barthes continues: “apropos of strong, ungregarious ages such as the Renaissance, Nietzsche speaks of ‘a pathos of distances’”. By this Barthes refers to Nietzsche, \textit{The Twilight of the Idols, or How To Philosophize with a Hammer}, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 64: “…the gulf between man and man, rank and rank; the multiplicity of types, the will to be one’s self, to stand out—everything I call pathos of distance—is proper to every strong period”. Quoted in Barthes, \textit{How to Live Together}, p. 177, fn. 21.
of the mystic.
How to Live Together: A Summary

The clearest articulation of Roland Barthes’s project at the Collège was given in his Inaugural Lecture of 07 January 1977. As French critic Carlo Ossola writes, “the Inaugural Lecture is an assessment, a goodbye and a renewal”. It is also “an answer, it settles a moral debt toward the Collège Members, those who receive [the professor] by their vote, and those who confer or appoint [the position]”. Introducing idiorrhythm at that occasion, Barthes narrates how, on 01 December 1976, he saw a mother walking with her son:

I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is being forced to keep running, like an animal... She walks at her own pace, unaware that her son’s rhythm is different, And she is his mother!

This anecdote illustrates how “it is when two different rhythms are put together that profound disturbances are created”. Indeed, Barthes’s “literary” fantasy of idiorrhythm is an instrument or, in his own words, a compass by which he undertakes a journey through the question of “How to Live Together” on one’s own rhythm, established through a socialism of distances. Barthes’s course consisted of 13 lectures of an hour each, held weekly between January and May 1977. As the title of the course suggests, Barthes explores cohabitation through a “novelistic” simulation: offering an analysis of how to live together, distilled through a reading of a body of literary works. Through the literary simulation of some living spaces, “Barthes sets out to establish a morality of tact, where geographical space and social space merge around the question of distance”. Once again, Barthes’s course asks: “What distance must I maintain between myself and others if, together, we are to construct a sociability without alienation, a solitude without exile?”

160 Carlo Costa, Inventaires, p. 18.

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163 The first (French) publication of the course is dated 2004, 30 years after the course itself. Following this, a moderate interest in the content was renewed. The review focuses on the study of these seminar lectures for an English readership.

164 Claude Coste, “Preface”, in Barthes, How to Live Together, p. xxv.
Barthes outlines his methodology by referring to Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze, opposing “Method” against “Culture”, and favouring “Culture” because of its ability to move back and forth across different cultural spaces and periods through the avenue of literary texts. Barthes deals with various literary “fragments”, organised in “traits” or “figures” of varying length and resolution, which succeed one another in alphabetical order throughout the weekly sessions of the course. *How to Live Together* can be summarised as follows:

- The central question at play can be formulated thus: what distance must I maintain between myself and others if we are to together construct a sociability without alienation, a solitude without exile?

- To answer this, Barthes takes the opposition of “method” and “culture” as his methodology. Culture, understood as rearing (*paideia*), allows Barthes to take his fantasy “for a walk” across different cultures, histories and disciplines. Barthes considers a fantasy a pedagogical force that engenders desire and difference; for him, a fantasy may fuel the subject through the act of self-formation.

- Barthes’s fantasy is *idiorrhythm* composed of *idios* (particular, one’s own) and *rhuthmos* (rhythm). Idiorrhythm addresses the way of life of certain monks of Mount Athos, who live alone and yet are dependent on a particular monastery. These monks are both autonomous and

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166 A commentator from the audience pointed out the contradiction of referring to both Nietzsche and Deleuze. In the concluding session of 24 May 1977, Barthes returned to this contradiction. “I began this course by recalling one of Nietzsche’s oppositions; the one he makes between method and paideia (‘Culture’). Method [is] the good will of the thinker”, a “premeditated decision”, a direct means, deliberately chosen to obtain the desired result. Method [is] to fetishise the goal as a privileged place, to the detriment of other possible places. [In contrast,] *paideia* [is] an eccentric path of possibilities, stumbling among blocs of knowledge. Clearly, we have not been positioning ourselves on the side of method but on that of paideia or, to put it more prudently (and provisionally), on the side of non-method. Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 133.
members of a community, solitary and integrated at the same time. The organisation of idiorrhythmic monks is situated between the eremitism of the early Christians and the institutionalised cenobitism.167

• The field in which Barthes explores his “idiorrhythmic” fantasy of a sociability of distance is novelistic. The literary texts in Barthes’s corpus are works of a) the pre-cenobitic Christian asceticism of the third to fifth century and b) works of literature. The former are the pre-cenobitic text Palladius, The Lausiac History of Palladius (419-420) and the works of literature: Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (1719); Émile Zola, Pot Luck (1882); Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain (1924); and André Gide, “The Sequestered Woman of Poitiers” (1931). Barthes “wanders” idiorrhythmically across these texts, but also “wanders” across these texts in search of idiorrhythmic moments and situations simulated outside of the monastic contexts proper to this notion.168

• The course is a “novelistic simulation of some living spaces” and these literary works correspond to living spaces thus:

- Palladius, The Lausiac History of Palladius corresponds to “the desert”.
- Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe corresponds to “the hideout”.
- Émile Zola, Pot Luck corresponds to “the (bourgeois) apartment building”.
- Thomas Mann, The Magic Mountain corresponds to “the hotel”.


- André Gide, “The Sequestered Woman of Poitiers” corresponds to “the room”.169

- The field in which Barthes simulates this wandering of idiorrhythm is organised following reference points which Barthes calls “traits” or “figures”. These figures are less keywords and more a map that locates situations, architectural conditions, social organisations, and biological, psychological states and phenomena. The figures and the situated knowledge they call forth simulate the ideal of a cohabitation organised through the appropriate distance. The field remains speculative: Barthes is concerned with an ascetic phenomena, but does not wish to convert to monastic spirituality.

- This field of enquiry is further mapped by a “Greek” network of approximately 30 words which serve to identify and clarify the conditions and problems of cohabitation within (oriental) monasticism. These words include Askēsis, Anachōrēsis, Monōsis, Koinobioσis, etc., some of which are introduced as “figures”, while others are evoked to advance a theme or to support an argument.

- In the course of the lectures, idiorrhythm becomes a metaphor which addresses any attempt to reconcile collective life with individual life, and the independence of the subject with the sociability of the group.

- Barthes considers these daily events as symbolic markers of political autonomy. As such, he draws attention to the ability of the subject to define one’s own rhythm, across which daily life materialises the political agency ideal to the subject. Barthes’s course then attempts to create the necessary distance from any imposition of a rhythm outside of the subject’s own agency. In contrast to withdrawal, Barthes considers the practice of a shared distance to be the practical ethics in which such a personal and ultimately collectivised rhythm can be cultivated.

Up until the fourth century, Christians were a relatively marginal sect, but they were gaining a rapid following. The complete success of Christianity was secured when Constantine, the then Roman emperor, decreed it as the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire. This instance transformed those who were on the margins into powerful leaders of their communities. It also meant the centralisation of Christian ways of ascetic life, such that only cenobitism became the sanctioned monastic life. If cenobitism is opposed to idiorrhythm, then the Rwandan philosopher, inheritor of cenobitism, is also opposed to the type of rhythm which Barthes draws from in his conception of how to live together.

For Barthes, the rhythmicisation of life consists in the sustenance of the flux letting—being—letting, while, for Isaïe Nzeyimana, rhythmicisation is giving—receiving—giving. In order to understand this difference, this chapter sketches a historical overview of idios and rhythm, through an analysis of the literary traditions which engendered the double notion of idiorrhythm. This literature is located in the foundational moments of Christian asceticism in the deserts of Egypt. This historical overview helps to unravel Barthes’s own understanding of the relationship between rhythm, language and power. The chapter then analyses idios as the propriety of life, its conceptions and its threats; and rhythmicisation, its institutionalisation and its control.

In the present day, what are the ramifications of these rhythmic conceptions? What is their bearing on the tension between self-propriety and collectivisation of memory, education and economy? The chapter concludes by speculating on the enduring manifestations of rhythmic structures instituted by monasticism in society, exemplified in seminaries and monasteries in former colonies such as Rwanda. Considering the profound transformation ushered by the conversion of the Rwandan intellect to Christendom, it makes sense to study the emergence of Christian monastic structures.
Rhythm: A Common Concept for Critical Thought

The first time I learnt of *rhythmanalysis* was during my studies in Industrial Design at Central Saint Martins in 2007. In my experience, the obedient, unquestioning market-driven production ethos underwriting the programme made it feel rather uneventful, perhaps even dispiriting. However, I experienced the “theory” component as a solace full of new and long-lasting discoveries. Until I came across *idiorrhythmy*, I had, like most of my colleagues at that time and perhaps also to this day, associated rhythm with the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, yet in the historical and cultural contexts during which Roland Barthes introduced idiorrhythmy at the Collège de France in 1978, the notion of “rhythm” had already received extraordinary attention in the fields of philosophy and cultural studies in the Western traditions.170

In fact, as it turns out, according to Belgian literary theorist Jonas Rutgeerts, “[t]he rhythmanalytical project […] does not begin with Lefebvre’s book, but can be traced back to the work of Gaston Bachelard and, more specific, to his book *La dialectique de la durée* (1936)”.171 In the last chapter of this book, which bears the title ‘Rhythmanalysis’, Bachelard argues that one should never lose sight of the fact that “all exchanges take place through rhythms”.172 Apparently, Bachelard himself is drawing from Portuguese philosopher Lúcio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos, who uses the term rhythmanalysis to “advocate for an active rhythmanalytical theory that never loses sight of the fact that rhythm constitutes “the basis of the dynamics of both life and the psyche”.173 Bachelard


was opposed to Henri Bergson’s differentiation between time and duration, and proposed instead rhythm as the dialectic of duration.\textsuperscript{174}

What exactly is rhythm? What does it do and when? How does it function? I relate to the quest of theorist David Nowell Smith who, when trying to identify “what is called rhythm”, indicates that it “is not a question of determining that rhythm ‘is’ x, but rather of formulating what it is that rhythm calls, calls for, and calls to—what it allows us to think, what it demands that we think”.\textsuperscript{175} Norwell Smith suggests that “rhythm’ functions not as proper name, but proleptically, pointing to this set of broader problematics, most notably regarding how we grasp the dynamic unfolding, and enfolding, of sense”. Nowell Smith also narrates how, already in the \textit{Physics}, Aristotle rejects “Antiphon’s claim that the proton arruthmiston, that which is untouched by the temporality of appearance, is what is “most being” (even if, for precisely this reason, what is “most being” will never enter presence)”.\textsuperscript{176}

It is German philosopher Martin Heidegger who brought up Aristotle’s discussion of \textit{ruthmos} “in his 1939 lecture on Aristotle’s \textit{Physics}, where he translates the Greek term as ‘articulating, impressing, structuring, and forming’ [\textit{Gliederung, Prägung, Fügung, und Verfassung}]. For Heidegger, Aristotle inverts Antiphon’s claim: “Ruthmos does not describe entities that appear temporally, but rather indicates the temporal structure by which the entity remains within appearance. It is only in \textit{ruthmos} that a being can disclose itself as ‘being.’” For Aristotle, being is therefore not a “stable substance”, and Plato opposes \textit{μέτροι} (mêtroi)—meters—with \textit{ῥυθμοῖς} (rythmoi)—rhythm, calling rhythm “the order in the movement”.\textsuperscript{177}

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Remaining on the subject of poetry, the German Romantic poet and philosopher Friedrich Hölderlin “is reported to have said that ‘All is rhythm; the entire destiny of man is one celestial rhythm, just as the work of art is a unique rhythm.’”¹⁷⁸ That is how, for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, rhythm is a “logical necessity”, because the “rhythm of the organic whole” is the way in which the system holds together in differentiation. Speculative philosophy, according to Hegel, is “a scientific method, which consists partly in not being separate from the content, and partly in spontaneously determining the rhythm of its movement”. For Hegel, the vocation of philosophy altogether “is to attend to ‘the immanent rhythm of the Notion’ without intruding upon it”.¹⁷⁹

For others, “rhythm is a ‘law’ of harmonisation”. This is the case for German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who says: “Rhythm is in time what symmetry is in space”. For Schopenhauer’s compatriot composer Richard Wagner, on the other hand, rhythm is the law of ordering the manifold interchange of the “complementary and accenting motions” that may constitute the “law of reckoning”.¹⁸⁰

Returning to around Barthes’s era, for Pierre Maine de Biran—who, according to Philip P. Hallie, influenced Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—¹⁸¹ “rhythm and measure is to memory what order and symmetry is to imagination”, or “[r]hythm is to habits of the ear what symmetry is to the eye”.¹⁸² I have already mentioned Bergson who, like Bachelard, “coin[s]


¹⁸² Ibid.
rhythm as a crucial instrument to understand concrete duration” — even though Bachelard precisely formulated his dialectics of duration in opposition to what he considered to be Bergson’s never-ending duration. Bergson also considered rhythm as an image. This is according to theorist Haun Saussy, who quotes Ezra Pound in his argument: “Rhythm becomes palimpsestic. It becomes, to cite Pound again, “an ‘Image,’ [or] that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”.

In Roland Barthes’s time, Gilles Deleuze considered rhythm an “abstract machine” that constitutes a new reality through montage, with “added and subtracted values, which presents to the soul the idea of a whole as the feeling of measurelessness and immensity”. Félix Guattari, for his part, considered rhythm a chaosmos, an order in chaos. Writing together, Deleuze and Guattari proposed rhythm not as a refrain or a cadence but a synthesis capable of both dividing two events, times or entities, while also holding them together. Jonas Rutgeerts reminds the reader of Derrida’s diagnosis: “Rhythm has always haunted our tradition, without ever reaching the centre of its concerns”. Derrida formulated his own understanding of rhythm through his différence, a notion that “refers to this relation in which machine-like

183 Rutgeerts, “Revisiting Rhythmanalysis”, p. 96.


repeatability is internal to irreplaceable singularity and yet the two remain heterogeneous to one another”.

For Michel Foucault, although he does not use the word “rhythm” as such in his volume *Discipline and Punish*, the question of discipline and punishment is a matter of imposing a rhythmic structure. Foucault also sees rhythm as an apparatus that helps to distinguish various historical “sedimentary strata” and successions in the service of the “archaeology of knowledge” of the “material civilization” and its “peculiar discontinuities and patterns”. For Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, rhythm relates to the processes of rehabilitating an “aesthetic experience, which identifies with abjection in order to traverse it”.

Lesser known philosophers in the English-speaking scholarship who have engaged with rhythm include Henri Meschonnic, Michel Serres, Félix Ravaisson and, before them, Jeanne Nardal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Jean-Godefroy Bidima.

As this subjectively imbalanced review makes apparent, rhythm constitutes an enormous corpus and, in the context of this thesis, it is less than impossible to


give each formulation the treatment it deserves. The fragmentary overview above therefore only navigates a fraction that has informed my own understanding of idiorrhythm in theory and in practice. For example, the recent exhibition cycle organised by SAVVY Contemporary, to which this research contributed, draws from Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis as “that, around which the universe revolves”.\(^{197}\) The 2012 Taipei Biennale, organised around “museums”, also had a “Museum of Rhythm”\(^ {198}\) curated by Natasha Ginwala, which drew from Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre envisioning a method of analysis that could comprehend the interrelations between the temporal and spatial dimensions of everyday life.

The timing of the publication of the primary texts about rhythm coincided with political changes in the society in which these writings were produced. According to British-Italian theorist Paola Crespi, these are paradigmatic shifts “intimately connected with political reforms”.\(^ {199}\) Perhaps this analysis speaks to the current “return” of rhythm, to which this study contributes.\(^ {200}\) Perhaps the history of the present world stage is undergoing a transformation, a certain re-articulation or re-rhythmicisation of living-together, instantiated through Okwui Enwezor’s intense proximities, characterised as the disappearance of geographical distance and the appearance of manufactured divisions. Because


rhythm both structures and exceeds these aspects of human constructs, it lends itself to their analysis in their present manifestations.\textsuperscript{201}

In Barthes’s case, the historical conditions surrounding the intellectual interest in rhythm during the late 1970s and early 1980s could be explained by the birth of “a kind of new intellectual constellation which shared a common distrust for structuralism and individualism, and were trying to find new ways to push further critical thinking without falling into the trap of Heideggerian deconstruction”.\textsuperscript{202}

According to French philosopher Pascal Michon, rhythm seemed to have the potential of becoming a “new common concept for critical thought”. While the respective articulations, genealogies and applications of rhythm in the works of each one of these scholars differ widely, the synthesis of their interest in this potential “common concept for critical thought” is the conception of rhythm as an organising principle of the alternations which constitute being in time and space.

\textsuperscript{201} In addition to the curatorial frameworks I described above in relation to my ongoing work \textit{A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow}, this same work simultaneously draws from one of the first Dutch dictionaries that was published in 1668 by Adrian Koerbagh, who was a companion of Baruch Spinoza and his circle. Koerbagh lived in exile and died in prison in Amsterdam, because of the circle’s then transgressive visions of what came to be called the Radical Enlightenment. By conceiving \textit{A Flower Garden} as a dictionary, Koerbagh attempted to demystify the language of the church and the state. In so doing, Koerbagh intervened against the cultural injustice resulting from the distortion of religious and clerical meanings. I was compelled to revisit this dictionary and the historical contexts in which it was published 350 years ago. My argument is that, although its publication occurred within a vastly different cultural landscape than the present, the historical period in which Koerbagh lived echoes today’s political climate of the Netherlands: internal political turmoil was strife, characterised by increased intolerance towards freedom of affective, spiritual and intellectual expression. Against the limitations of such basic liberties, Koerbagh implicitly opposed modern imperialism at its nascence, and his work landed him in exile and detention. At the same time, the Netherlands was waging colonial wars in what later became the United States, Brazil and Indonesia. Today, although the Netherlands considers itself at peace, the Dutch armies are deployed in acknowledged wars as well as secretive fronts in Africa and the Middle East. Finally, Koerbagh’s work testifies to a blind trust in the supremacy of the mind and its absolute resolve of rationality, a conviction shared by Koerbagh’s contemporaries in their search to separate spirituality, religiosity and governance, the effects of which are still evident in present history.

\textsuperscript{202} Pascal Michon, “A Short History of Rhythm Theory Since the 1970s”, \textit{Rhuthmos}, 6 December 2011. Michon’s text is unique in its synthesis. Between the time Michon published his article and the moment in which I am writing this in 2019, an enormous corpus of literature about rhythm has been published, yet Michon’s synthetic project still stands out. However, Michon’s text appears as a set of preliminary notes and does not reference primary texts. This makes it difficult to resort to its otherwise referential potential. Nevertheless, I am grateful for Michon’s formulation of rhythm as a “common concept for critical thought".
Rhythm was no longer conceived as a numbered order of the movement made by a body or an object, but as the organisation of the processes that produce what appears to us as phenomena, objects and institutions. Such rhythm is thus implemented by dominant forces, in any given societal structure, as a device for the enforcement of spatial and temporal limits. For Barthes, rhythm plays an instrumental role in the processes of subject formation. As such, there is a structural relation between power and rhythm because “what power imposes in the first place is a rhythm: a rhythm of life, of time, of thought, of discourse, etc”.  

Barthes studies language as the medium through which this power manifests and enforces itself, and transmits its grip on the subject. This transmission is effective because of the “ordering” imperative, and the classificatory and therefore corrective structure of language. In his Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France, Barthes announced:

We have believed that power was an exemplarily political object; we believe now that power is also an ideological object, that it creeps in where we do not recognise it at first, into institutions, into teaching, but still that it is always one thing. And yet, what if power were plural, like demons? “My name is Legion,” it could say; everywhere, on all sides, leaders, massive or minute organisations, pressure groups or oppression groups, everywhere “authorised” voices which authorise themselves to utter the discourse of all power: the discourse of arrogance. We discover then that power is not only in the State, in classes, in groups, but even in fashion, public opinion, entertainment, sports, news, family and private

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203 Roland Barthes, How to Live Together, Session of January 12, 1977, p. 9: “Power—the subtlety of power—is effected through disrhythmy, heterorhythmy”. [Oral: “It is when two different rhythms are put together that profound disturbances are created”]. Barthes illustrates this point by describing that same scene of a mother pushing an empty pushchair while dragging her slower-paced child along.
relations, and even in the liberating impulses which attempt to counteract it. Barthes finds that “our battle is against powers in the plural, and this is no easy combat. For if it is plural in social space, power is, symmetrically, perpetual in historical time”. Barthes further assesses that “[t]he reason for this endurance and this ubiquity” of power “is that power is the parasite of a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of [human] history and not only to political, historical history. The object in which power is inscribed, for all of our human eternity, is language, or to be more precise, its necessary expression: the language we speak and write”. For Barthes, this inherent (self-)transference of power has categorical implications:

The human language has no exterior: there is no exit. We can get out only at the price of the impossible: by mystical singularity, as described by Kierkegaard when he defines Abraham’s sacrifice as an action unparalleled, void of speech, even interior speech, performed against the generality, the gregariousness, the morality of language; or again by the Nietzschean “yes to life,” which is a kind of exultant shock administered to the servility of speech, to what Deleuze calls its reactive guise. But for us who are neither knights of faith nor supermen, the only remaining alternative is, if I may say so, to cheat with speech. This salutary trickery, this evasion, this grand imposture which allows us to understand speech outside the bounds of power, in the splendour of a permanent revolution of language, I for one call literature.

204 Roland Barthes, ‘Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France’, in Susan Sontag, A Barthes Reader (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), pp. 461–462. For a more detailed study of power in relation to asceticism, see Richard Valantasis, “Constructions of Power in Asceticism”, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), pp. 775-821. Valantasis explores “the current theories of power generally and as they might relate to asceticism”, surveying “the recent Anglo-American theorizing about the ‘three faces of power,’ as well as present the theories of power by Thomas E. Wartenberg, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Edith Wyschogrod, and the social semiotic theorists Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress”. See p. 776. See also p. 778: The three faces of power are: 1) the naive concept that one social agent has power over; 2) the critique of the first face, indicating that power also limits the exercise of power; and 3) power is not only in causality in interaction and causality in interaction with limitation but to causality, limitations and the question of each agent’s interest.

205 Ibid. In French, there is a difference between langage (language) and langue (something like a common tongue).

206 Ibid.
Barthes outlines the immanent liberation occasioned by “literature” so defined, to “depend not on the writer’s civil person, nor on his [or her] political commitment—for [s/he] is after all, only a [human] among others—nor do they even depend on the doctrinal content of his [or her] work, but rather on the labour of displacement [s/he] brings to bear upon the language”.207 Barthes asserts that Stéphane Mallarmé’s expression “[t]o change language’ is concomitant” to the Marxian expression “[t]o change the world”.208

Barthes further professes:

We often reproach the writer, the intellectual, for not writing “everyone’s” language. But it is good that [humanity], within the same language—for us, French—should have several kinds of speech. If I were a legislator (an aberrant supposition for someone who, etymologically speaking, is an “an-archist”), far from imposing a unification of French, whether bourgeois or popular, I would instead encourage the simultaneous apprenticeship to several forms of speech, of various function, promoted to equality.209

For Barthes, there is a transference of oppression through communion (language), and its rhythm enforces power. At the same time, the formulation “rhythmic medium” suggests the existence of at least two opposed typologies of rhythms: 1) there is one’s own rhythm, idiorrhythm, which is opposed to 2) rhythmic medium.210 The idiorrhythmic ways of life of the hermits and ascetics as one’s own rhythm of life was in tension with the “rhythmic medium”, or the common rhythm of κοινός βίος, koinos bios. This common life formats and unifies the time and the mode of prayer, the schedule of meals and any other activities of everyday life as practised by the members of the respective communities.

In order to better understand the distinction between these two rhythms, it makes sense to visit the literature of asceticism from which Barthes operates, as well as the philological outlines of both idios and rhythm.

207 Ibid., p. 462.
208 Ibid., p. 465.
Poiesis of Worlding: *Rhuthmos* as a Form of Life

Roland Barthes bases his philological understanding of rhythm on the writings of his fellow French linguist Émile Benveniste, for whom “the notion of ‘rhythm’ is one of the ideas that affect a large portion of human activities. Perhaps it even serves to distinguish types of human behaviour, individual and collective, inasmuch as we are aware of durations and the repetitions that govern them, and also when, beyond the human sphere, we project a rhythm into things and events”. For Benveniste, rhythm presents a field of a “vast unification of humankind and nature under time, with its intervals and repetitions”. This unification of human life, its habitat and time “has had as a condition the use of the word itself”.

Again, for Benveniste, the origins of the word rhythm “go very far back” in Greek. Benveniste agrees with his contemporaries on the morphological connection between ῥυθμός and ῥῄω, but then carefully undertakes the task of demonstrating how “the semantic connection that has been established between ‘rhythm’ and ‘to flow’ by the intermediary of the ‘regular movement of the waves’” is incorrect. Benveniste refutes the supposedly etymological explanation of “rhythm”, the then prevailing reading given by his contemporaries, such as compatriot Émile Boisacq, Swiss linguist Charles Bailly, and Henry Liddell and Robert Scott (Liddell-Scott).

Instead, Benveniste demonstrates that ῥυθμός is related to “possessing a form”. Although this word, ῥυθμός (ῥυσμός in Ionian) is not found in the Homeric poems, it is present “in the Ionian authors and in lyric and tragic poetry,

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212 Ibid., p. 282.

213 Ibid., p. 281.

214 Ibid. Benveniste aims to show that the adjective ἐπηρῴσμιος used by Democritus has been incorrectly translated by linguists Charles Bailly and Liddell-Scott, as “courant, qui se repand” and "adventitious" respectively. For Benveniste, the correct rendering is “possessing a form” (p. 283).

215 Ibid., p. 282.
then in Attic prose, especially in the philosophers”.216 For Benveniste, it is therefore “in the vocabulary of the ancient Ionian philosophy that we may apprehend the specific value of ῥυθμός, and most particularly among the creators of atomism, Leucippus (370 BC) and Democritus (460 BC)”.217 Benveniste shows that “these philosophers made ῥυθμός (ῥυσμός) into a technical term, one of the key words of their teaching”.218

Following Aristotle, Benveniste shows that “Democritus invariably and unambiguously assigns “form” to ῥυσμός, and this is always “form,” understood as “the distinctive form, the characteristic arrangement of the parts in a whole,” “to transform,” and also the form of institutions”. According to Benveniste, Herodotus also uses ῥυσμός to denote “form”, as does Leucippus who also writes in the same period and assigns ῥυσμός the meaning, the form or the “configuration of the signs of writing”. Benveniste demonstrates the early appearance of ῥυθμός in the ancient lyric poetry of the eleventh century, “as defining the individual and distinctive ‘form’ of the human character”. This lyric poetry consulted by Benveniste includes passages by Archilochus, Anacreon, Theocritus and Theognis, transmitting the meaning of ῥυθμός as “dispositions”, “forms of mood”, “distinctive traits” and “attitude”.

Benveniste then shows that, among the writers of the Corpus Hippocratium (370 BC), ῥυθμός originates from compounds meaning “of the same form,’ or ‘resemblance,’ ‘of a beautiful form,’ elegant,’ etc”.219 Furthermore, “among the tragedians, the verbs derived from [ῥυθμός] invariably maintain the same sense of “form”, suggesting also a “condition” or an “arrangement”. Benveniste illustrates this meaning of condition by pointing to the tragedian Sophocles (406 BC), who, in Antigone, translates ῥνθμίζω as “picture (the location of the grief)”.

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216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid., p. 284. Benveniste quotes (Hip. 915h, 916b).
a use which renders “to give form” to “picture” or to “localise”.220 Benveniste also shows how “Euripides speaks of ῥυθμός of a garment, of its distinctive ‘form’; of the ‘modality’ of a murder; of the ‘distinctive mark’ of mourning”, “in a suitable fashion” or “a disproportionate passion”.221 Benveniste continues by tracing the early meaning of ῥυθμός in Xenophon (354 BC), in Plato (347 BC) and in Aristotle (322 BC), all of which relate to proportion, form and, metaphorically, reform.222

Based on his listed citations, Benveniste establishes that the meaning of ῥυθμός in ancient Greece was to delineate “form” and:

1. That ῥυθμός never meant “rhythm” from the earliest use down to the Attic period (500–300 BC);
2. That rhythm was never applied to the regular movement of the waves;
3. That its constant meaning is “distinctive form, proportioned figure, arrangement, disposition” in conditions of use which are otherwise extremely varied. Similarly, the derivatives or compounds, nominal or verbal, of ῥυθμός never refer to anything but the notion of “form”.223

How then, Benveniste asks, could this consistent and unchanging “semantics of ‘form’” give rise to the notion of “rhythm”, and what is its connection to ῥυθμός?224 Benveniste answers this by analysing its subsequent history, and by focusing on the suffix of the word ῥυθμός, namely —(θ)μός. For Benveniste,

220 Benveniste, p. 284: “The use of ῥνθμίζω in Sophocles is very instructive (Anti. 318): to the guard whom Creon has commanded to be quiet because his voice makes him suffer and who asks him, ‘Is it in your ears or in your soul that my voice makes you suffer?’ Croon replies, ‘why do you picture the location of my grief?’ Here is the exact sense of ῥνθμίζω “to give form,” and the scholiast correctly renders ῥνθμίζειν by σϰηματίζειν, ‘to picture’, to ‘localise.’”

221 Ibid., p. 284. “He uses εὑϱύθμως ‘in a suitable fashion,’ for the arrangement of a bed, ἄϱψυθμος for a ‘disproportionate passion (Hipp. 529)’.

222 Ibid., pp. 284-285: “The meaning of ῥυθμός persists in the Attic prose of the fifth century”. Xenophon (Mem. 3. 10.10) makes ρυθμός (‘proportion’) the quality of a fine cuirass, which he qualifies by ρυθμίζειν, ‘of a beautiful form.’ In Plato one finds, among others, the ρυθμός the ‘balanced state’ between opulence and poverty (Laws 728e), and expressions like ρνθμίζειν τά παιδιῶτα ‘to form a young favourite; (Phaedr. 253b), μεταφηϱμίζεσθαι ‘reproduce the form,’ in speaking of the images which mirrors reflect (Tim. 46a); this same verb μεταφηϱμίζεις has the moral sense of ‘reform (the character)’ in Xenophon (Econ. 11. 2.3). And Aristotle himself invented ἄϱψυθμιστὰς ‘not reduced to a form, amorphous’ (Metaph. 1014b, 27).”

223 Ibid., p. 285.

224 Ibid., p. 286.
“it is Plato who determined precisely the notion of “rhythm,” by delimiting the traditional value of ῥυθμός in a new acceptation”. Although ῥυθμός in Plato still indicates “distinctive form, disposition, proportion”, Benveniste explains that Plato’s novelty resides in how he applied ῥυθμός to mean “the form of movement which the human body is measured. This ordering, sequencing and determination of a corporeal movement measured by alternating intervals constitutes the first use of ῥυθμός as ‘rhythm.’” It is thus that, “starting from ῥυθμός, a spatial configuration defined by the distinct arrangement and proportion of the elements, we arrive at “rhythm,” a configuration of movements organised in time”.

The emergence of the notion of “rhythm” is thus not “a simplistic picture that a superficial etymology suggests, and it was not in contemplating the play of the waves on the shore that the primitive Hellene discovered ‘rhythm’”. Rather, it is through “slow working out, by the efforts of philosophers” that such a term may still be understood.

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225 Ibid. “In the [Philebus], (17d), Socrates insists on the importance of intervals (διαστήματα), whose characteristics, distinctions, and combinations must be known if one wishes to study music seriously. He says, “Our predecessors taught us to call the combinations ‘harmonies’—(ἁρμονίας). […] They also taught us that there occur other analogous qualities, inherent this time in the movements of the body, which are numerically regulated and which must be called rhythms and measures (ῥυθμός καὶ μέτρα). In the Symposium (187b): ‘Harmony is a consonance, and consonance an accord… It is in the same way that rhythm results from the rapid and the slow, at first contrasted, then in accord.’ Finally, in the Laws (665a), he teaches that young people are impetuous and turbulent, but that a certain order (τάξιν), a privilege exclusively human, appears in their movements: ‘This order in movement has been given the name rhythm, while the order in the voice in which high and low combine is called harmony, and the union of the two is called choral art.’”

226 Ibid., p. 286: “Plato still uses ῥυθμός in the sense of ‘distinctive form, disposition, proportion.’ His innovation was in applying it to the form of movement which the human body makes in dancing, and the arrangement of figures into which this movement is resolved. The decisive circumstance is there, in the notion of a corporal ῥυθμός associated with μέτρον and bound by the law of numbers: that “form” is from then on determined by a “measure” and numerically regulated. Here is the new sense of ῥυθμός: in Plato, ‘arrangement’ (the original sense of the word) is constituted by an ordered sequence of slow and rapid movements, just as “harmony” results from the alternation of high and low. And it is the order in movement, the entire process of the harmonious arrangement of bodily attitudes combined with meter, which has since been called ῥυθμός. We may then speak of the “rhythm” of a dance, of a step, of a song, of a speech, of work, of everything which presupposes a continuous activity broken by meter into alternating intervals. The notion of rhythm is established. Starting from ῥυθμός, a spatial configuration defined by the distinct arrangement and proportion of the elements, we arrive at “rhythm,” a configuration of movements organised in time: ‘all rhythm is tempered by a definite movement’. ‘τὰς ῥυθμοὺς ὠρισμένη μέτρονται χινήσει’ ‘all rhythm is tempered by a definite movement’.”

227 Ibid.
From the outlines in this genealogy, “rhythm” appears to be a much studied phenomena in philosophy and there may be three traditions of it:

• One tradition reads rhythm structurally in rendering reality in its totality. For this tradition, rhythm is an index of differences. This reading includes Aristotle, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Émile Benveniste, Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. This structuralist approach sees rhythm as a telescopic device with which to make inventories of reality from the outside.

• Another likely tradition considers rhythm as a means of describing experience and phenomena from within reality. Here, rhythm is an emancipatory, exteriorising and interventional force. This viewpoint includes Giorgio Agamben, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and uses rhythm equally as an apparatus to study reality, but from within the interior.

• A possible third tradition regards rhythm as a generative work of invention. Rhythm can support the emergence of a new subject and a new reality. This is perhaps how to understand Roland Barthes’s *idiorhythm*, and this reading may include Luce Irigaray, Iris van der Tuin, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Souleymane Bachir Diagne; in the break of Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten; in the waywardness of Saidiya Hartman, etc. Perhaps Isaïe Nzeyimana’s *injyana* can also be understood in these terms: as *ubuntu*, as a genesis of being in common. The next chapter will explore this question in detail.

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228 See also the appendix Christian Nyampeta, “Via Negativa: Literature Review of Rhythm, Commonality, Communality and Sociality”.


101
The Ethical Implication of the Difference Between Flow and Flux in Roland Barthes (and Isaïe Nzeyimana)

When discussing the subject of rhythm with my colleague curator Vivian Ziherl in the winter of 2019 via text message, Ziherl pointed out to me the crucial difference between flow and flux. This differentiation has helped to nuance my subjective categorisation of rhythm in scholarship. Even if I am wrong in my theoretical arrangements, it remains that the spectrum of rhythm has two opposites: a liberatory impulse at one end and a regimental stricture at the other. Roland Barthes found the articulation of his own liberatory flow in *idiorrhythm*, which he opposes to the *rhythmic medium*, a forcefully-common rhythm that uniformises and, in so doing, oppresses its subjects. In Barthes, *idios-rhythm* seems to invent a common concept for critical thought, allowing a movement to initiate, to pulse, to communalise, while also inaugurating one’s own creation of ideas. “Rhythm involves a working on an affective, engaging and collective and complex register. As a conceptual tool ‘rhythm’ has the power to bring together the seemingly contradictory currents”. More recently, Iris van der Tuin argues that such movement is rhythmic, not necessarily linear. “Rhythm implies an embodied and embedded flow that rises and falls, that swells and wanes. But it must be said that nonlinear rhythmic movement does imply a pattern, so it is not without a structure”. This makes rhythm its own enemy, “a spatio-temporality halted by processes that go against its grain”. For example, “shutting down what its members were intending to open up out of fear of essentialism, racist, and heteronormative undertones and generational

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conflict”. As such, “[t]he fact that these limiting pulsations are part of the ontology of rhythm makes it a useful conceptual imaginary”.  

Still, the two spectrums of rhythm do not fully explain why Barthes’s rhythmicisation of life is expressed in terms of rest while, for Isaïe Nzeyimana, it is action, movement or, more accurately, generosity. Barthes’s rhythmicisation of life is letting-being-letting. Towards a better understanding of Barthes’s conception of how to live together as how to rest together, it might be helpful to note the ethical implications of idios, and the difference it causes between flow and flux. An account for the historical genealogy of idiiorrhythm in ascetic formations might also be helpful, alongside an understanding of how idiiorrhythm came to separate itself from cenobitic practices.

From Australian philosopher Andrew J. Mason, we learn that “two quite different notions share the same term in Plato’s dialogues, without being explicitly distinguished. In Plato’s usage of the noun ῥοή and the cognate verb ῥέω there is, besides the sense of ‘flux,’ a sense of ‘flow’ that is irreducible to flux, not adjunctive to it”.  

According to Mason, “Plato posits transcendent, unchanging Forms in opposition to sensible ‘flux.’ Aristotle’s account of the genesis of Plato’s theory of Forms is an important source in this respect”. “According to Aristotle, Plato consistently accepted a (putatively Heraclitean) fluxist account of the sensible world”:

231 Ibid. “A powerful feminist implementation of rhythm-speak can be found in Virginia Woolf’s argument on androgyny as it was voiced in A Room of One’s Own from 1929. The argument, published twenty years prior to Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal text Le Deuxième Sexe [The Second Sex] saw the light of day, picks up on “a signal pointing to a force of things which one had overlooked” (Woolf [1929] 2001, 83). Woolf ([1929] 2001, 83-4) narrates how she finds a certain “rhythmic order” in the actual instance of a coming together of a cab, a young man and a young woman in 1920s London: a natural fusion,” a “co-operat[ion]”. The performance of this particular reasoning in movement is what I hope to have achieved in this book. Performing such a thought is risky; the tools do not have a predetermined programme. What they offer instead is a different methodological register, one that does its utmost to be open to reaching the conditions of possibility of sexual differing. Maybe we can therefore argue that Woolf’s alleged “androgyny” is nothing but a sexual differing itself. Alice Walker’s rewriting of A Room of One’s Own through the story of the eighteenth-century slave Phillis Wheatley, published in the essay “In search of Our Mothers’s Gardens,” demonstrates how halting is part of this rhythmic differing: Yet genius of sort bus have existed among women as it must have existed among the working class. [Change this to “slaves” and “the wives and daughters of sharecroppers.”] Now and again an Emily Brontë or a Robert Burns [change this to “a Zora Hurston or Richard Wright”] blazes out and proves its presence”.

In his youth Plato first became familiar with Cratylus and the Heraclitean doctrines, that sensible things as a whole are always in flux \(\text{ὡς ἁπάντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀεὶ ῥεόντων}\) and that there is no knowledge of them, and he still held these views in later years. (1078b13–18).

According to Aristotle, Plato followed the “Heraclitean doctrine regarding the true nature of reality \(\text{περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας}\): that all sensible things \(\text{πάντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν}\) are always in flux, so that if there is to be any knowledge or practical wisdom about anything, there must be, besides them, certain other entities which are stable and endure \(\text{ὡστ' εἴπερ ἐπιστήμη τινὸς ἔσται καὶ φρόνησις, ἕτερας δεῖν τινὰς φύσεις εἶναι παρὰ τὰς αἰσθητὰς μενούσας}\). For there is no knowledge of things that are in flux”. This is because “‘there can be no general definition of sensible things, inasmuch as they are always changing \(\text{ἀεὶ γέ μεταβαλλόντων}\)’.

Mason aims to show that:

1. There is a clear conceptual difference between flow and flux.
2. In Greek usage prior to Plato, including Heraclitus, \(ρέω\) and \(ῥοή\) denoted flow, with quite different connotations than those associated with flux.
3. There is some evidence that in Pythagorean circles in Sicily these terms were used in a fluxist sense.
4. If the fluxist sense pre-dates Plato, it is likely that he derived it from this source during his first stay in Sicily, and assimilated Heraclitus to it.
5. Juxtaposed with the fluxist sense, the older and more typical usage continues in Plato, without him ever expressly distinguishing them.
6. The distinction is highly significant in terms of Plato’s philosophy and its development.

\(^{233}\) Ibid., p. 2.
Mason distinguishes three levels of flux: “*intrinsic alteration*, typically in the sense of transformation into something else; […] *fleetingness* of what is ‘in’ it, especially if change is constant, and *chaoticness*, both diachronically as tumultuous, haphazard, unpredictable change, and synchronically as a confused jumble of diverse elements”. For Mason, “[w]hen things are in flux we cannot tell them apart, and unity is just as lacking as clear distinctions. And the changes are too fast, too abrupt, too radical, too many, and pull in too many different ways, for us to recognise any subsistent current or pattern of events and infer a clear future course from it”.

In contrast, flow “is unbroken, ongoing, even motion, distinct from ‘spurts’ of water, ‘surges’ of electricity, or any motion that proceeds ‘in fits and starts’”, even though this does not “preclude tumultuous motion”. For instance, “a river ‘flows’ whether its flow is smooth and stately or a headlong rush, if only it be a continuous, sweeping motion—analogue rather than digital, as it were”. Flow is also directed motion. “A third characteristic is effortlessness. Something ‘flows’ if its constancy is lightly and easily sustained, not a grim perdurance amidst a ‘sea of troubles’. This is also integral to flow in the sense of logical or causal entailment”. For Mason, “a fourth characteristic is copiousness. If something flows there is a lot of it, and it is given or gives itself freely and continuously, at least until it runs out, like wine at a party”.

Following this understanding, it seems that both Nzeyimana’s *giving-receiving-giving* and Barthes’s *letting-being-letting* are flows.

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234 Ibid., pp. 7-8. In Footnote 10, Mason clarifies: “So, for example, if a relationship is in flux, what is unclear is not just how it will pan out, but what it is and if it is. Much the same applies when our views about something are in flux. This can be said in the watered down sense that they are simply changing. But the full force of the expression is that ‘my views’ are changing so much that I can no longer claim to hold views at all. I do not know what to think. My mind is swimming”.

105
**Idios: A Philosophical Overview**

Before the use of *idiorrhythm* in Catholic theology to denote the emergence of the ascetics in the Egyptian deserts, *idion* (ἵδιοςν), *idios* (ἵδιως) and *idiotēs* (ἵδιωτης) were notions already found in the “Greek” philosophical and political literature of the fourth century BCE, predating Christianity. The reader might be familiar with the term “idiosyncratic”: it is sometimes said that a person has an idiosyncratic way of speaking, meaning that they speak in a peculiar manner that stands out from the usual way of speaking. The reader might also be familiar with the derogatory term “idiot”, being a “person so mentally deficient as to be incapable of ordinary reasoning”, or a “simple, uneducated person, or layman”. The meaning of the word idiot derives from the Old French *idiote* and from the Latin *idiota* meaning “ordinary person, layman; outsider”. However, in ancient Greek languages, *idiotēs* transmits the idea of a “layman person lacking professional skill”, as opposed to a writer, a soldier or a skilled workperson. This would literally mean “a private person”, as opposed to one taking part in public affairs. All these uses derive from *idios*, meaning “one’s own”, and some notions related to this ancient usage have retained this meaning.

Specifically, *idiom* is a “form of speech peculiar to a people or place”, meaning a “phrase or expression peculiar to a language”. According to etymology dictionaries, this meaning dates back to the 1620s, from the Middle French *idiome* which, in turn, comes from the Late Latin *idioma*, “a peculiarity in language”, from the Greek *idioma*, “peculiarity, peculiar phraseology”. The consensus is that “a manifestation of the peculiar” is “the closest possible translation of the Greek word”, from *idioumai* “to appropriate to oneself”, from *idios* “personal, private” or “particular to oneself”.

It is said that “the Athenian populace was regularly conceived as consisting of *rhetores* (or the synonymous *politeuomenoi*) on the one hand and *idiotaik* (private citizens) on the other. This historical manifestation of the social category of *idiotēs* is studied by classicist Claude Mossé. For Mossé, the primary difference between *idiotaik* and *politeuomenoi* is the political action, expressed through speech. She arrives at this analysis through her studies of the Greek thinkers and theoreticians, including Plato and Isocrates. For Mossé,
when Plato and Isocrates mounted a critique against democracy, they tended to distinguish the citizen-body from their corrupt leaders, orators and demagogues, whose flattery was their weapon of choice, employed to mislead the demos and to drag them into (mis)adventures that only benefited them. “To designate such bad shepherds, [philosophers] often used the terms of *demagogoi* or of *rhetores, and sometimes also proestôtes or de prostatai.*”

In “The Athenian Political Perception of the *Idiotês*” (1998), historian Lene Rubinstein contends that “the noun *idiotês* does not have strong negative connotations in Greek literature of the fifth and fourth centuries.” Rubinstein finds that in prominent philosophical texts *idiotês* was sometimes used to refer to the *apragmôn*, the apolitical, which need not have a negative connotation, considering that “the philosophers were not exactly the most enthusiastic supporters of the Athenian democracy”. This use of *idiotês* for the *apragmôn* is found in a number of philosophical works including Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle. Rubinstein lists an extensive bibliography to evidence the varied uses

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235 Claude Mossé, “Politeuomenoi et Idiôtai: L'affirmation d'une classe politique a Athènes au IVe siècle”, *Revue des Études Anciennes*, Volume 86 Numéro 1, 1984, pp. 193-200; p.197: “Je voudrais toutefois, avant d’aborder ce problème de vocabulaire, faire un détours du côté des penseurs et des théoriciens. Platon comme Isocrate se plaisent à distinguer, lorsqu’ils abordent la critique de la démocratie, l’ensemble des citoyens des mauvais dirigeants, des orateurs et des démagogues dont la flatterie la plus basse est l’arme principale : ils s’en servent pour tromper le démos et l’entrainer dans des aventures dont ils sont seuls à tirer bénéfice. Pour désigner ces mauvais bergers, ils emploient le plus souvent les termes de *demagogoi* ou de *rhetores*, parfois aussi de *proestôtes* (Isocrate, *Panégyrique*, 172) ou de *prostatai* (Isocrate, *Sur la paix*, 3-5). Fait intéressant et qu’il faut souligner: lorsque les théoriciens s’en prennent aux hommes politiques, c’est leur fonction d’orateurs qui est d’abord mise en avant, c’est leur «persuasion» qui est cause de leur influence plus ou moins grande et généralement néfaste. Quand Platon évoque Périblès, c’est l’orateur qui est mis en cause, pas le stratégte auquel pourrait être imputée l’erreur d’avoir entraîné Athènes dans la guerre du Péloponnèse. Autrement dit, on s’en prend à des gens qui influencent le démos et dirigent sa politique, on ne met pas en cause le détenteur d’une arche. L’individu importe plus que la fonction qu’il remplit, dans la mesure précisément où la démocratie permet à un nombre considérable de citoyens d’accéder aux archai.

Ce détour du côté des théoriciens nous a permis de distinguer parmi ceux qui jouent un rôle dans la cité deux groupes: d’une part les détenteurs d’une arche, dont le nombre en vertu de l’alternance est considérable, et d’autre part les orateurs, ceux qui parlent devant l’assemblée et les tribunaux et qui demandent au démos d’être d’abord et avant tout celui qui «écoute». Deux discours de Démosthène et ce qui nous a été transmis des discours d’Hypéride vont nous permettre de préciser cette distinction, en notant d’abord que tous les discours dont il s’agit datent de la période qui suit Chéronée, c’est-à-dire des dernières années de l’indépendance d’Athènes”. See also: Isocrates, *Panégyrique*, 172 and Isocrates, *On the Peace*, 3-5.

236 Ibid., p. 126.
of idiotēs in opposition to polis or to koinon in fourth-century philosophical works.\textsuperscript{237}

It emerges that, despite this apparent opposition to politics, “the word does not in itself indicate that the person concerned has withdrawn from the public life of the polis in order to mind his own business in the non-political sphere. Rather, the idiotēs who plays a part in the political life of Athens as early as the middle of the fifth century, is active in his own way: he is better known as ho boulomenos tōn Athenaiōn hois existen, the Athenian who acted on his own initiative as a speaker in the assembly and the courts”. Rubinstein clarifies that “[t]he use of the term ho boulomenos is not confined to the legal sphere. In Dem. 13.11 and Aeschines 2.65, for example, the expression is applied to volunteer speakers in the Assembly”.\textsuperscript{238}

Further historical uses of idios and occurrences of idiotēs transmit the idea of an elective opposition to the mastery of skill or possession of knowledge, as a manner of speaking against power. This argument is the subject of theologian Christian Abraham Preus’s The Art of Aeschines: Anti-rhetorical Argumentation in the Speeches of Aeschines (2012). In this sense, idion, privacy, allows one to claim a certain exteriority to public life. The idiotēs is therefore an outsider with an interior of one’s own, because s/he is electively situated outside of the public, that is, outside of political action and claim.\textsuperscript{239}

What may qualify “as idion is effectively what later in the Aristotelian tradition came to be called a proprium. The notion of a proprium […] refers to the sort of property that is deeper than an accident but not yet essential”.\textsuperscript{240} Therefore,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{237} Ibid. See: Xenophon, Kyn. 13.11; Plato Apology 32a, Gorg. 515b; and Aristotle EN 1116b, and Pol. 127b, 1324a.
\item\textsuperscript{240} Aristotle, De Anima 402a7.
\end{itemize}
from the Aristotelian perspective, it can be said that *idios* means proper, propriety and property. According to political philosopher and gender theorist Arlene Saxonhouse, Aristotle suggests that

concern with governance comes from a concern with what is one’s own, from the particular love of what one has created. He describes love (*philia*) as the greatest good for the city; but it is love for a specific other. Far from diluting the care for what is public, as Socrates fears, the love of one’s own is essential for [the] support of the public realm. The destruction of *philia* through Socrates’ reforms [would] lead to apathy.241

In contrast to Socrates, “Aristotle concludes that there are two things which cause people to care (*kedestain*) and to love (*philein*): the private (*to idion*) and contentment (*agapeton*)—as opposed to passionate desire, *eros* or *himeros*.242

It follows that *idion* is of importance in the acquisition and reaching of the final good for humans, *eudaimonia*, considered “good living” or “happiness”.243 For Aristotle, this final good for humans necessarily involves the happiness of others as well as the individual. *Eudaimonia* is the activity of soul in accordance with virtue and reason, and “there are two things above all that make persons love and care, that is, live well and do good”. These are 1) a sense that something is one’s own or proper to oneself—*to idion*; and 2) a sense that such object is all one has, meaning it must do—*to agapeton*.244

It is in this manner that *idion* plays a crucial role in the definition and the description of *theoria* and *praxis*, the philosophical life and the active (political) life in Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. This notion precisely touches upon the “strangeness” or propriety of philosophy, which has been expressed in various ways. Political theorist Terence Ball asserts this condition thus:

Indeed, they were often outsiders, even complete strangers. The Philosopher was also an outsider, but in a rather special sense. The

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241 Ibid., p. 214.
242 Ibid., p. 215.
244 Ibid., quoting Aristotle, *Topics*, iog8a3-i8; iog8bzi; and iz6za8.
citizens of his polis regarded his activity as an alien activity, though for quite different reasons than citizens of present-day America might give. For, if “being a man” was synonymous with being an active participant in the life and affairs of the city, the theorist was only half a man; or, rather, part human and part something else. His activity of contemplation, unlike that of politics, was not wholly of this world; it had, both Plato and Aristotle agreed, an element of divinity about it.²⁴⁵

Specifically, in regards to this “strangeness” “or one’s own-ness” of philosophy, Ball writes that

Plato made much of Socrates’ daemon, with which the latter consorted while in trance like states, and which advised him to stay out of politics. Elsewhere Plato emphasises the loneliness, the privacy (idion) bordering on madness, of the contemplative life. He even suggests that theorising means taking leave of life, a kind of separation or death. These themes run through Plato, especially, as a leitmotif or better, perhaps, as a defence, the theorist’s own apologia pro vita sua. There is a poignant and moving passage in the Republic, in which Plato has Socrates justify his abstention from political life. His abstention is not that of a coward or shirker of his rightful duty; it has a lonely, heroic quality about it. Socrates laments the fallen state of politics, which he has observed, as it were, from the outside. “One who has weighed all this keeps quiet and goes on his way, like the traveller who takes shelter under a wall from a driving storm of dust and hail; and seeing lawlessness spreading on all sides, is content if he can keep his hands clean from iniquity while life lasts…” This outpouring of bitterness, leavened only by a sense of resignation to fate, seems to betoken an antipolitical sentiment of the strongest kind. And yet bitterness immediately gives way to a sentiment which is political in character.

Both Plato and Aristotle emphasise the alien or foreign character of theoria or contemplation. In his later dialogues the image of the “stranger” is that of the theorist. In the Statesman, the Laws and the Sophist, for example, the “stranger,” who has traveled far and seen much, is the central figure. In casting the theorist as a stranger, Plato deliberately heightens and dramatises the “foreign” character of the theorist, who is given no name, age, or any significant attributes other than his vocation or “way” (aporie). In an almost Jungian fashion, Plato reduces the theorist, as stranger, to an archetypal figure.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Terence Ball, “Theory and Practice: An Examination of the Platonic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Political Theory”, pp. 539-540.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.
Aristotle wonders “which way of life is more desirable—to join with other citizens and share in the state’s activity, or to live in it like an alien, absolved from the ties of political society?” However, Ball points to the significant difference between Plato’s alienated philosopher and the theorist envisioned by Aristotle. For Aristotle, the theoretical life can more readily exist independently of the political. Politics and philosophy are two “ways”; it is not necessary, nor would it be desirable, to subordinate one to the other. In contrast, concerning the role of the individual and the political action, and the foundations of democracy, Plato finds freedom to be the defining characteristic of democracy.

Democracy may allow the koinon, “the sharing of friends, property, and family”, but democracy should also encourage the development of a world of one’s own. “The democratic regime exalts the idion, that which separates, makes us distinct from others; and the democracy of [Aristotle’s] Book 8 has the openness to incorporate all those distinctions, to allow for what is our own, and not to demand the sharing of qualities, place, friends. Democracy here is the private regime in which we act as individuals, not as parts of a common enterprise”. Concurrently, in her treatment of democracy, Saxonhouse refers to this privacy of democracy as “idiocy”, “in the sense that derives from idion, that which is private and distinctive, that which separates an individual, a family, a species from another, that which does not attend to the public”. Nevertheless, such separation “does not bring faction to democracy; it leads rather to an egalitarian gentleness that imposes neither eidê nor hierarchy. Differences do not matter, as “each arranges his [or her] private thing [idian]” and “this regime’s emphasis on particularity results in a vast variety of human types”. In such democratic configuration, multiplicity is rendered without sorting or categorising. This sociality thus defies any theoretical model that can distinguish and unify

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247 Ibid., quoting Aristotle, Politics 7. 2. § 3.


249 Ibid.
multiplicity into *eidê*. “Democracy as it appears here is pre- (or post-) *eidêtic*, allowing for a wide array of visual and sensual experiences”.

In Book 8 of *Republic*, Plato explores the fundamental tensions of a regime identified by freedom and equality, which he presents as characterised by formlessness and the epistemological and theoretical problems posed by the absence of forms ειδής (*eidê*). “*Eidê* give structure and identity to regimes and to their citizens; they are necessary for intellection and philosophy, but they are also the grounds for compulsion”. Consequently, Saxonhouse is led to conclude that “Plato’s analysis of democracy thus becomes a more serious challenge for democratic theorists than previously recognised”. This is because Plato actually “does not merely assert the pre-existence of *eidê* waiting to be forcefully stamped on individuals to set them into an ordered world. Instead, inquiring into the principles of a democracy, he explores the premises of a fluid nature, of a world without *eidê*”. Plato’s Socrates in Book 8 seems to claim a form of equality, “whereby no individual so differs from another that s/he can claim authority over others”. This is “a view of a natural world of flux without point, lacking beginning and form”. For Saxonhouse, “[i]t has been a truism almost since the birth of liberal theory that freedom and equality are at odds. The democracy of Book 8 suggests not that they are incompatible, but that the mistake is the failure to recognise that true equality can only come from the freedom from tyrannising *eidê*”. For Roland Barthes, the tyrannising *eidê* is an accurate description of the “rhythmic medium”.

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250 Ibid., 279. Quoting Aristotle, *Republic*, Book 8, 557b; and *anthropoi*, 557c.


252 Ibid., p. 282.

If *idios* is indeed constitutive of a community, contemporary understanding of nationalism and democracy, then a movement opposite to emancipation also exists. This is the argument of political philosopher Erik Ringmar. In his article “Nationalism: The Idiocy of Intimacy” (1998), Ringmar is led to *idios* by analysing that, while “[d]emocracy and nationalism are closely related”, “the two principles are not logically connected, and can even be understood as antithetical. Both terms share the intellectual heritage rooted in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Nationalism gives the most convincing, practical, answer to the problem of how a certain demos was to be delineated. If the people are to rule, they can be ruled neither by kings nor by foreigners”. Ringmar further writes:

There can be no “we” among strangers since it is difficult to identify with people very different from ourselves; the only people we really trust tend to be people who in one way or another are like ourselves. We do not trust a politician who we do not know as a person, and consequently we are interested not only in his or her policies, but also in his or her private life. Since politics no longer takes place in an impersonal sphere, communities based on common interests—international working-class movements, for example—have become much more difficult to form. Compared to the Greeks, we are now all living in “our own,” idion, and for this reason we are all living lives which have become “idiotic”.254

Fortunately, for Saxonhouse, in the prevailing narrative of the gigantomachy between ancients and moderns, theories of equality and inequality have divided the two traditions. It is argued that the ancients—Plato, Aristotle, Cicero—offer a hierarchical worldview in which political regimes succeed insofar as the order they impose matches the natural hierarchy of talents, whether they be those of the philosopher rulers of the *Republic*, the freemen of Aristotle, or the well-born *De Officiis* by Cicero. In contrast, and against his usual reading, Plato’s Socrates in Book 8 breaks down the “hierarchy based on some natural criterion of worth”. Instead, the students of this philosophical tradition urge “men to

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imitate beasts, women to imitate men, and men, in order to outwit Fortuna, to imitate fickle women”.  

255 Ibid., p. 281. Saxonhouse finds that Plato’s Socrates in Book 8 relates to the thinking of Machiavelli. See: J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1975). This thought resonates with the New Materialist thinking of Generational Feminism, as introduced by Iris van der Tuin. Quoting Virginia Woolf, van der Tuin writes: "The conclusion about sexual difference that she is led to make reads that: [i]t is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties. Perhaps the mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than the mind that is purely feminine… perhaps… the androgynous mind is resonant and porous;… it transmits emotion without impediment;… it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided". Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own”, *A Room of One’s Own & Three Guineas*, ed. Hermione Lee, 1 – 98 (London: Vintage, 1929/2001, p. 85).
Asceticism, the social practice in which idiorrhythm is located, is resolutely inscribed within the transhistorical and transregional philosophical practices, in which the above philosophical exhortation is taken to heart: “men to imitate beasts, women to imitate men, and men, in order to outwit Fortuna, to imitate fickle women”. At the same time, asceticism is a distinct social and cultural phenomenon developed by hermits, nuns, ascetics and monks.

The scholarly consensus maintains that the lives, stories and histories of these ancient hermits, ascetics and monks of Egypt are only available through the works of a quantitatively reduced group of writers and anonymous texts. Of these texts, Palladius’s Lausiac History—a central text in Barthes’s corpus of How to Live Together—has been analysed thus by Marxist philosopher and...

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Jesuit Michel de Certeau:

These stories depict relations. They do not treat statements (as would a logic) or facts (as in a historiography). They narrate relational formalities. They are accounts of transfers, or of transformational operations, within enunciative contracts. Thus, for example, there is a missing and seductive otherness of the idiot woman or idiot man only in relation to the wise man. The story, a theoretic fiction, sketches enunciative models (challenges, summons, duel, seduction, change of position, etc.) and not content (true statements, meanings, data, etc.). What is essential to it, therefore, is that which, in the form of ‘coup’s,’ transforms the relationships between subjects within the systems of meanings or of facts—as if, in speech, one were to consider only the changes of place among the speakers and not the semantic or economic orders from which these illocutionary exchanges nevertheless receive a field and a vocabulary for their operations. It is to this problematic that our accounts of madness pertain. [...] They defy differences, which are transformed into simulations against a background of absence. But here the play is ‘stabilised,’ so to speak, thanks to a difference that makes possible the eclipsing of the others: the relation that simulated madness bears to the body. A relation to the body makes possible practices of the infinite or, if one prefers, the actual, a spatial bringing into play of the unanalyzable. That relation acts as a limit. It stops the fading away of the Other into simulacra that replace one another indefinitely.

That relation to the body is presented in three modalities: (1) the masculine and the feminine (not to be identified with sexual difference); (2) hole making orality (food, latrines, etc.) and garbage dissemination (kitchen, baths, etc.), which are the correlative to the genesis and loss of all bodies; (3) asceticism, a taking charge of the other by the body. These three modulations all lead back to the absolute point of a ‘common’ life, that is, to the gesture of ‘losing oneself in the crowd.’

It is from this “theoretic fiction” that the ascetic notion of idiorrhythmy originates. It almost feels obsolete to repeat this, but this notion is a composite “Greek” term that, in Christian theology, describes ascetic communities whose members lived together but alone, by retaining each one’s own ways of prayer, one’s own

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259 “Greek” is here in quotation mark to signify how this denomination differs or should differ from the meaning conferred to contemporary Greece by modern philosophers, who regarded Greece as a unified cultural entity that originated Western philosophy. I have already mentioned Maarten de Pourcq, who critiques Barthes’s use of the Paideia of the “Greeks”. The critique of a unified Greek was brought home by African-American philosopher Lewis L. Gordon on 19 April 2017, at the occasion of his seminar held in the series “Burning Questions in African Philosophy” convened at Columbia by Souleymane Bachir Diagne and American philosopher Drucilla Cornell. Lewis Gordon clarified that to describe ancient “Greek” as one stable cultural entity would be the same as designating all contemporary English speakers as British.
practices and cultures around food, and one’s own manners of dress—sharing instead a water well, a bakery or a library. Important concepts and manners of life were modelled after the “Greek” philosophical traditions, the latter also a political mixture resulting from both forceful and elective convergence of social flows and transregional cultural influences.

Numerous members of these new desert ascetics were fugitives, fleeing military service or eluding taxes of the Roman Empire. The term idiorrhythmy still applies to the monastic communities living on Mount Athos in Greece today. I focus here on the ascetic communities of Nitria and Scetis, which thrived from the turn of the millennium until 4 CE. The fourth century was characterised by a “social upheaval” in which a “mixture of traditional cults and new ideas” enabled “contact with various cultural traditions”, conditions which allowed “Christianity, gnosticism and Manichaeism [to] spread rapidly”. According to historian Samuel Rubinson, “[t]he papyri show beyond doubt that this spread of


262 Roland Barthes, How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Living Spaces, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). In the Session of January 19, 1977 (p. 178), Barthes notes that the survival of the idiorrhythmic tradition on Mount Athos can be attributed to the Athos’s disaffiliation with the church, an event which inaugurated the rupture from Catholic ties and spurred Athos’s importance as a monastic centrality in the Orthodox Church. At times, Barthes’s lectures seem to suggest that all the monks on Mount Athos are idiorrhythmic, it would be erroneous to account all the monks who inhabit Mount Athos as idiorrhythmic: today the Mountain has a total population of some 2,200 monks, a figure that is steadily rising. Most monks follow the cenobitic tradition which brings them into communities where they live, work and worship together. The members therefore inhabit a variety of different establishments, although some do follow the eremitical tradition and live as hermits, either in small groups or as solitaries. For more about this, see Graham Speake and Kallistos Ware, Mount Athos: Microcosm of the Christian East (Bern: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2012).

263 Where it makes sense, this transtemporal study also considers later idiorrhythmic manifestations between the eleventh and seventeenth century, as a number of ascetic communities renewed the practices of the early ascetic period of the Egyptian desert during that time.
ideas and writings was not confined to the larger cities, nor to the Greek population".264

Prior to the fourth century, Christianity had been a relatively minoritarian practice, and members of the Christian communities were considered sectarians.265 “It is thought that at most 5–10 per cent of the population of the Empire (possibly seventy million inhabitants in all) were at this time Christians”.266 The persecution of Christians peaked between 303 and 311, and only came to an end when Emperor Constantine of the West Roman Empire converted. The Roman Empire then stretched over an immense territory governed by four emperors who shared power.267 Two were augusts of the West and the East, and two were caesars, future augusts, or emperors: Constantine was the august of the West, with Maximus as his caesar, and Licinius the emperor of the East.268 Constantine and Licinius met in Mediolanum, modern-day Milan, and issued what came to be known as the Edict of Milan, which granted Christians tolerance throughout the entire Roman Empire;269

Cum féliciter tarn ego [quam] Constantinus Augustus quam etiam ego Licinius Augustus apud Mediolanum conuenissemus atque uniusera qua3 ad commoda et securitatem publicam pertinerent, in tractatu haberemus, hsec inter cetera quae uiidebamus pluribus hominibus profutura, uel in primis ordinanda esse credidimus, quibus diuinitatis reuerentia continebatur, ut daremus et christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem


267 That figure is double in some largely Christian regions, especially in Africa and the Greek East, where diffusion could well have taken place, spreading from one neighbourhood to another, in a process of imitation. See Klaus M. Girardet’s excellent Die Konstantinische Wende: Voraussetzungen und geistige Grundlagen der Religionspolitik Konstantins des Grossen, 2006, Darmstadt, pp. 82–83.

268 Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, trans. C.F. Cruse (London: Samuel Bagster, 1898), Book 10, Ch. 5.

sequendi religionem quam quisque voluisset, quo quicquid [est] divinitatis in sede cælesti, nobis atque omnibus qui sub potestate nostra sunt constituti, placatum ac propitium possit existere.\textsuperscript{270}

When I Constantine Augustus and I Licinius Augustus had met under happy auspices at Milan and discussed all questions pertaining to the general welfare and the security of the state, we decided that among the other things we knew would benefit the majority of men, first consideration should be given to the regulation of the affairs which affect the worship of divinity. [Hence, we resolved] to grant the Christians and all [others] the right to follow freely whatever religion they wished, so that whatever divinity there be in heaven might be favourable and propitious to us and to all of our subjects.\textsuperscript{271}

From here on, there occurred a “blending of civil and ecclesiastical authority in [this] later Roman Empire”. American Historian William Kenneth Boyd suggests: “In it the philosophical historian has seen only one of the many evidences of a decline in classical civilization; while the moralist has found it to be the source of all the humane and beneficent influences of the age”.\textsuperscript{272} In effect, once the Christians were no longer persecuted, a new school of understanding of the person of Christ—Christology—emerged. This was Arianism, named after its chief proponent Arius. Like the Gnostics of the second century, Arians disputed the divine essence of Christ. Indeed, Arius’s letter sent to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia in 321 reads:

\begin{quote}
What we say and think we both have taught and continue to teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor part of the unbegotten in any way, nor is he derived from any substance; but that by his own will and counsel he existed before times and ages fully God, only-begotten, unchangeable.\textsuperscript{273}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{270} Lactantius, \textit{De mortibus persecutorum} [On the Death of the Persecutors] p. 48, 2-12. Lactantius’s full name was Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, Caecilius sometimes being spelled Caelius. Lactantius was born in 240 in North Africa, and died in around 320, in what was then called Augusta Treverorum, Belgica—present day Trier, Germany, the birthplace of Karl Marx.

\textsuperscript{271} Henry Bettenson, \textit{Documents of the Christian Church} (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1947) pp. 22-23. \textit{Cunctos Populos}, 381 \textit{Cod. Theod. XVI}. i. 2. The Edict of Milan was actually preceded by the Edict of Toleration issued in 311 by “Galerius on his death bed, after years of strenuous persecution, and bearing the names also of his colleagues Constantine and Licinius”. p. 22.


For Arius, if “there was a time when the Son of God was not (ἦν ποτε ὁ οὐκ ἦν)”, then the Son did not emerge out of the same essence as God, but was made by God, created by God’s will and energy, like all other creatures. Ergo: if God was a “creation”, then there was no essential bond between the Father and the Son; and if Jesus Christ was not God either, then he could in no way be the Saviour of mankind, because what good would Christ’s crucifixion be as a sacrifice to God, if Christ himself was not a divine entity?

Arianism grew widely and its controversies intertwined themselves with matters of the state and the governance of the Roman Empire, to the extent that Constantine, who by now was the sole emperor of the entire Roman Empire, resolved to call the Council of Nicaea in 325, in an attempt to put an end to the emergent schisms resulting from the philosophical disagreements about the substantial nature of Christ. “Constantine had no grasp of nor the patience for the subtleties of the controversies, since he was not even concerned with Christ at all”, Constantine was only interested in adopting “the God of the Christians against Sol Invicrus [because] it had seemed to offer the best promise of divine favour for the Roman state, which it was the emperor’s duty to secure by the proper forms of worship. The church had been granted many special privileges by him, and in return he wanted unity in it, not continual quarrelling over hair-splitting matters”. Therefore, Constantine aimed to establish an ecumenical—that is empire-wide—orthodoxy, and the resulting Nicene Creed declared the Arian confession as heresy, and upheld that Christ is “true God” and “of one essence with the Father”. However, the strife within the Church did not end with Nicaea, and Constantine worried he might have chosen the wrong side.

“By Constantine’s death [in 327], two camps were solidifying, the divisions very roughly following the Latin and Greek halves of the empire (except for Egypt). In the West, especially at Rome, there was a fervent attachment to the identity of

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276 Ibid., p. 51.
essence of Father and Son, and limited patience for fine philosophical distinctions; in the East, a subtler leaning to Arianism which spawned several variants, and a disdain for the Western bishops as intellectually naive. The difference of languages certainly contributed to the disputes over definitions and meanings".\textsuperscript{277} In any case, the strife continued. The Arians looked set to win and the Niceans to lose, but ultimately, on 27 February 380, the Niceans prevailed and Theodosius the Great (347–395 AD), together with the two other Roman Emperors Gratian and Valentinian, issued the famous Decree of Thessalonica:

\textit{Imppp. Gratianus, Valentinianus et Theodosius aaa. edictum ad populum urbs Constantinopolitanae.}

Cunctos populos, quos clementiae nostrae regit temperamentum, in tali volumus religione versari, quam divinum petrum apostolum tradidisse Romanis religio usque ad nunc ab ipso insinuata declarat quamque pontificem Damasum sequi claret et Petrum Alexandriae episcopum virum apostolicae sanctitatis, hoc est, ut secundum apostolicam disciplinam evangelicamque doctrinam patris et filii et spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub parili maiestate et sub pia trinitate credamus. Hanc legem sequentes christianorum catholiconur nomen iubemus amplecti, reliquos vero dementes vesanosque iudicantes haeretici dogmatis infamiam sustinere nec conciliabula eorum ecclesiarum nomen accipere, divina primum vindicta, post etiam motus nostri, quem ex caelesti arbitrio sumpserimus, ultione plectendos.\textsuperscript{278}

Emperors Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius Augusti.

Edict to the People of Constantinople.

It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue in the profession of that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it hath been preserved by faithful tradition; and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since, in our judgment, they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics,

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.

and shall not presume to give to their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of the divine condemnation, and in the second the punishment which our authority, in accordance with the will of Heaven, shall decide to inflict.\(^{279}\)

By these exact words, Christianity became instituted as the ruling religion of the Roman Empire, but only incidentally so. The primary aim of the decree was in fact to put an end to the internal fighting among the Christians, who by now had a fundamental role in the affairs of the Roman Empire. The decree effectively also solidified the division of the Roman Empire between East and West.

Considering these intrigues, controversies and rivalries arose from “[t]he blending of civil and ecclesiastical authority in the later Roman Empire”, this history is “of vast and permanent […] interest”\(^ {280}\) and cannot easily be contained. Following Nahum Dimitri Chandler’s method, I have merely outlined specific moments of this history in order “to help expose or bring more into relief a path or better, paths, of interwoven tracks for retracing and reformulating the question through the operation of a kind of desedimentation and paleonymic practice in thought”.\(^ {281}\) The path that comes into relief is that language played a role, and that the origins of the institutionalisation of Christianity were haphazard, incidental and heterogeneous.

In today’s terms, I could say that Christianity was crafted through a creolisation, adaptation and appropriation of existing socio-cultural practices from across the vastness of the Roman Empire and outside thereof.\(^ {282}\) This event is described


\(^{281}\) Ibid.

by scholarship as the end of antiquity. Through the adoption of Christianity, the Roman Empire undertook a statecraft aimed at forging a politically-manageable narrative, and a governable formation of a cohesive identity within a geographically expansive, socially divergent and culturally diverse polity. Monotheism became an imperially persuasive *ideosphere*, which sought to contain the multiplicities of beliefs and life practices.

By extension, the unicity of a singular belief system outplayed the threatening anti-imperial and emancipative potentials of the multiple religions. The convergence of Christianity and Roman imperialism resulted in the formalisation and uniformisation of the disparate religious communities into “orders”. Christianity moved from being tolerated by the Roman state to an intolerant religion of the Roman Empire, and its mode of ordering the ways of life and the dwelling places of the religious communities formalised into rigidly regulated environments such as monasteries. This regulation also resulted in the separation of East and Western Christianity into Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, defining and establishing these respective geopolitical boundaries.

Across this dazzlingly elongated and enormously momentous historical development, I am singling out instances specific to idiorrhythm found within the Christian practice of “asceticism”. The practice of asceticism draws from *askesis*, a cultural and intellectual practice associated with “Greek”

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284 2. Maijastina Kahlos, *Forbearance and Compulsion: The Rhetoric of Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Late Antiquity* (London/New York: Bloomingtton Academic, 2013), p. 190, fn. 2. “E.g. in [Codex Theodosianus] 16.10.12 (in 392) sacrifices that previously had been the markers of loyalty in Greco-Roman society (see Chapter 2.4) were characterized as superstition”. For development, see Cracco Ruggini 1986, 34-6 and M. Meslin, “Nationalisme, état et religions à la fin du IVe siècle”, Archives de sociologie des religions 18 (1964), 3-20.  

285 Ibid.
However, these two phenomena differ in practice. Concerning asceticism, the classicist John Pinsent makes a useful comparison:

There is no word in French for “home” and none in British English for the American “home town”. Similarly, there is no word in Greek for “asceticism,” even though the word itself is derived from the Greek. The explanation is the same in all three cases: that the concept is in each case peculiar to the culture in which the word belongs. In our case, “asceticism” is a concept peculiar to the Christian culture of late antiquity.

Pinsent summarises the history of the word asceticism, and its emergence and difference from “Greek” philosophical traditions:

The word ἀσκησις, the abstract noun from ἄσκεω, means “practice” in the two senses of that word; the practice of an art, craft or profession (πολεμική ὁποκής, Xenophon, Cyropedia—but this may mean “practice for war”); or the process by which this former is acquired and improved, as in the phrase “practice makes perfect”. The word is coupled in the Hippocratic treatise Vatera medicina with γυμνασία (exercises) [or γυμναστήριο, gymnasium], nicely establishing an athletic connotation never entirely lost. From this mundane use the word was applied to the more important sphere of the acquisition of desirable traits of character, and, more broadly, of the acquisition of virtue. From Democritus comes the phrase ἐξ ἀσκησίος ἄγαθοι γίνονται (from practice good men are made). For Plato, virtue is οὐ δεδακτοῦ ἄσκητικοῦ, and this applies also to a particular virtue, one important for this study, σωφροσύνη (temperance) (Gorgias, 487C, 507D). The concept of ἀσκησις (practice) has thus moved over into the sphere of moral education and moral philosophy. In its systematised form the Spartan ἁγώη can be regarded as an ἀσκησις, a regimen and discipline designed, like that of an old-fashioned English public school, to inculcate certain approved habits of behaviour. So far, religion has made no appearance in this account, although philosophy has, and philosophy in the ancient world filled some of the cultural niches that are now occupied by religions, religions that, unlike most Greek and Roman religion, enjoin upon their practitioners certain standards of behaviour. Some philosophers, rather like mendicant friars or traveling missionaries, were recognised by their idiosyncratic way of life, which could also be called an ἀσκησις. Thus Lucian in Toxaris 27 talks of ἡ κυνική ἀσκησις (Cynic practice), and Strabo uses the term of the Brahmins (15.1.61) and of the people of Heliopolis (17.1.29), identifying them as a kind of sect without referring exclusively to what the editors of the ninth edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek Lexicon call their “asceticism”.

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Same as in philosophy, in theology *idios* also translates as particular, private or one’s own.\(^{287}\) Equally, *idios* relates to the notions of *idiot* and *idiom*, as well as relating to other concepts of identity formation including *idea*.\(^{288}\)

**Anachōrēsis: Desertion, Invention and Movement**

Concerning this search for an ascetic way of life in the early days of Christianity, from Roland Barthes we learn that, around the turn of the first millennium, a growing number of individuals from around the Eastern Mediterranean gradually left their societies behind and made their way into the deserts of Egypt. These men and women became ascetics, hermits and, later on, monks and clergy, and their influence is still felt in our language today: in English, the word hermit (*ερημίτης*) derives its meaning from *ἐρημός, ἐρῆμος*, “Greek” and Attic words for desert, while the English word “desertion” originates from the literal meaning of going to the desert.\(^{289}\)

What political pressures compelled these individuals to renounce the privileges of their surroundings and to embark instead on solitary journeys across the arid deserts?\(^{290}\) There is no single answer to this question, as it touches upon major historical shifts at the turn of the first millennium. Some of these individuals electively sought the renunciative path of desertion. Others were compelled towards the exterior of their society, in search of political exile, and others still were deserting military service or fleeing imperial taxes.

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\(^{290}\) This phrasing is inspired by Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Minnesota: Duke University Press, 2006).
What all these individuals shared was a questioning of the norms of their society, and this resulted in a mass exit, an exodus or an exile. Journeying through and settling in the Egyptian deserts, these ascetics instituted new communities founded upon the common practice of the preservation and the maintenance of each member’s own rhythm of life.

Three types of ascetic practices appear to have flourished in the Egyptian deserts at this time. While there were movements between these three typologies which mutually influenced each other, it can be said that these individuals broadly settled in three geographical regions, namely Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, and the deserts of Nitria and of Scetis.

Lower Egypt was associated with the hermitic life, from which St. Anthony (c. 254-356) emerged, while in Upper Egypt, monks lived in organised communities, practising cenobitic monasticism (the etymology of the word “cenobitism” referring to a common or shared life has already been mentioned). Pachomius (c.254-356) also emerged from this form of monastic community, which was united not around a spiritual father, but was bound by a mutual commitment in a life of prayer and work.

In contrast, the regions of Nitria and Scetis were associated with groups of ascetics, who lived together alone, where each member’s own rhythm was maintained despite the members forming a settlement. These members sometimes congregated around the guidance of an “abba” (father) or “amma” (mother), whose counsel and direction they followed, but they also retained their own ways. Macarius the Egyptian was a founder of a key settlement in Scetis, and Amoun founded two major settlements in Nitria and Kellia.

Ultimately, the asceticism of Upper Egypt, and of the Nitria and Scetis deserts, was decisive in the development of Western monasticism. In fact, these early forms of monastic rules and life proved instrumental in establishing and modelling the necessary foundational institutions for the Western cultural and political apparatus. These institutional forms are to this day found in
timekeeping, in various forms of accountancy, and in institutions such as hospitals.

As already mentioned in the Introduction, the principle of anachōrēsis inaugurates the becoming of an ascetic, for it refers to a change or movement that distances the subject from its society in an upward direction. The moment of anachōrēsis denotes the decision and resolution of the calling towards asceticism as an individual response against a cultural or a societal crisis.

In the fourth century, as mentioned above, such crisis could have included compulsory military service in the Roman imperial legion or the levy of imperial taxes, among other things. In such contexts, anachōrēsis symbolised the moment of separation from societal bounds, whose separation was effected both symbolically and physically, by attaining a spiritually-elevated consciousness, and undertaking a possibly-challenging journey to a distant and secluded desert.

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293 Rosemary Morris, “The Origins of Athos”, in Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham, Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism; Kallistos Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?”, Wimbush and Valantasis, Asceticism. See also: Graham Speake and Kallistos Ware, Mount Athos: Microcosm of the Christian East. The term anachōrēsis is composed of the prefix ana-, which means upward—in contrast to cata-, the word-forming element of the Latinised form of Greek kata-, of catastrophe or category—and khōrēsis related to “place, space, free space, room” from which “choreography” derives its meaning. Scholarship suggests that the anachōrētes did not strictly withdraw from society but, rather, that they formed communities in which they lived in close proximity to each other, in a sociality that produced each member’s own rhythm. Such rhythm of one’s own was punctuated with elective communal activities such as communal prayers and meals.
Erēmos: The Desert as the Laboratory of the World

What did the ascetic seek in the desert? What is the productive and communitarian dimension of his or her departure? Is there any affirmation in the anachōrēsis of those who deserted and never returned? How does the study of this historical phenomenon contribute to the idea of the propriety of life today? Historian and theologist Kallistos Ware affirms the value of the flight into the desert, evident “when we take into account the meaning that the desert possessed for these early Christian ascetics” because desertion had a twofold significance:

[The desert] was both the place where God is to be found—here the classic prototype was Moses, who met God face to face in the desert of Sinai—and at the same time it was the place where the demons dwell. The second meaning is vividly emphasised in the Life of Antony: as Antony withdraws into the desert, he hears the demons shouting, “Depart from our territory. What business have you here in the desert?” So the solitary, in withdrawing into the desert, has a double aim: to meet God and to fight the demons. In both cases [the ascetic] is not being selfish, and his [and her] purpose is not to escape but to encounter. He [and she] goes out to discover God and to achieve union with [the divine] through prayer; and this is something that helps others. Equally [the ascetic] goes out to confront the demons, not running away from danger but advancing to meet it; and this also is a way of helping others. For the devil with whom he [and she] enters into combat is the common enemy of all humankind. Thus there is nothing self-centred in [the] act of anachōrēsis. Every prayer [offered] protects on behalf of the human family as a whole. Such, therefore, is the positive value of anachōrēsis, even when it is not followed in any visible or explicit fashion by a movement of “return”. Of course, many twentieth-century of early Christian literature do not believe in the existence of demons or in the efficacy of prayer; but such persons need to recognise that the authors of the literature that they are studying believed keenly and intensely in both these things.294

What does praying actually mean and do? As explained by Eastern Orthodox Christian theologian Tito Colliander:

Prayer is action; to pray is to be highly effective... Prayer is the science of scientists and the art of artists. The artist works in clay or colours, in word or tones; according to his [or her] ability he [or she] gives them pregnancy and beauty. The working material of the praying person is

living humanity. By his prayer he [or she] shapes it, gives it pregnancy and beauty: first himself [and herself] and thereby many others.\textsuperscript{295}

Ware highlights that “[t]he ascetic in the desert […] helps his [or her] fellow human not so much by anything that he [or she] does, but rather by what he [or she] is”. “First himself [or herself] and thereby many others”: “[the ascetic] serves society by transforming himself through prayer, and by virtue of his [or her] own self-transfiguration [the ascetic] also transfigures the world around him [or her]. By weeping for his [or her] own sins, the recluse is in fact altering the spiritual situation of many others”, “even though he [or she] knows nothing about them; and they, on their part, are unaware of his or [her] very existence”. For Ware, “[t]he rationale of ascetic anachōrēsis is summarised by St. Seraphim of Sarov”: “Acquire the spirit of peace, and then thousands around you will be saved”.\textsuperscript{296} “Such then”, Ware writes, “is the service which the solitary ascetic renders to society around him. He [or she] helps others not through active works of charity, not through writings and scholarly research, nor yet primarily through giving spiritual counsel, but simply through his [or her] continual prayer”.\textsuperscript{297}

The point is effectively summed up by Palladius in the phrase “guarding the walls”. In his chapter on Abba Macarius of Alexandria, whom he met around 391 CE during his early years in Cellia, Palladius recounts: “Once, when I was suffering from listlessness (\textit{akēdia}), I went to him and said: ‘Abba, what shall I do? For my thoughts afflict me, saying: You are making no progress; go away from here.’ And he replied to me, ‘Tell them: For Christ’s sake I am guarding the walls.’”\textsuperscript{298}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{296}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{298}{Ibid., pp. 6-7. See also: \textit{Lausiac History}, 18:58.}
\end{footnotes}
The monks keep watch like sentries on the walls of the spiritual city, thus enabling other members of the church inside the walls to carry on their daily activities in safety. But guarding the walls against whom? The early Christian ascetics would have had a clear and specific answer: against the demons. Then, guarding the walls by what means? With the weapon of prayer. In the words of the *Historia monachorum*: “There is not a village or city in Egypt and the Thebaid that is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls, and the people are supported by their prayer as though by God himself”.299

In the words of Father Irénée Hausherr: “All progress in sanctity realised by one member benefits everyone; [...] every oasis of spirituality renders the desert of this world less savage and less uninhabitable”.300 Such world-forming is thus what the desert makes conceivable. *Anachōrēsis* can be understood in its exterior sense, as a physical withdrawal into solitude. The term can also denote an inner, spiritual state, as when Abba Isaias of Scetis (who died in 489 CE) states: “The ancients who were our fathers said that *anachōrēsis* is [a] flight from the body and meditation upon death”. John Climacus also states: “Withdrawal (*anachōrēsis*) from the world is a willing hatred of all that is materially prized, a denial of nature for the sake of what is above nature”. *Anachōrēsis* is the break of the generalised rhythm: it is the idiorrhythmic departure from the world, as a manner of combating *the common enemy of humankind*.301

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"Desertion" is thus a place and a time of action, of encounter and commoning. This early Christian way of inhabitation and invention of life in the desert still reverberates in today's political urgencies of the desert's own historical materialism.

The likes of "Isis" strive in desert-like environments. The US-Mexico borders and the drama of the migrants attempting to cross the deserts there are well documented, as is the inhumane plight of the Black African immigrants who cross the same historical, ascetic sites of the Saharan deserts today, in search of better lives in the North. This historical materialism underwrites the current study.

What I retain from the desert is its filtering role of either good or evil subjeckhood. This laboratorial, shibboleth-like attribute of the desert has informed the Christian—and in so doing the Western—understanding of key

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moral definitions of subjecthood. In turn, this has had a bearing on the differing understandings of rhythm in Roland Barthes and Isaié Nzeyimana.

This becomes apparent while reading about the evolvement of the figure of the demon in the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (1999). The term “devil” is explained by archaeologist and classicist John F. Healy as a rendering of the Greek word διάβολος [daibolos], used as a loan word by Latin Christian writers as diabolus. As a proper noun in intertestamental Jewish texts and Christian writers, the word denotes the great Adversary of God and righteousness, the Devil. It is so used in the Septuagint as a translation for the Hebrew satan (e.g. Job 1 and 2; I Chr 21: I), and appears often with this meaning in the New Testament (e.g. Matt 4:1). In ancient Greek usage, however, διάβολος; was an adjective generally denoting something or someone ‘slanderous’ and ‘defamatory.’ So Aristophanes speaks of a ‘most slanderous slave’ (διαβολοστάτος ; Eq. 45), and Plutarch views the word as one function of the ‘whisperer’ (ψιθυρος; Mor. 727d) and ‘flatterer’ (κόλαξ Mor. 61c). The Pastoral Epistles admonish women not to be ‘evil gossips’ (διαβολούς; I Tim 3: II; Tit 2:3: cf. 2 Tim 3:3). Socrates describes the reason for his condemnation at his trial as the ‘slanders’ (διαβολαί) which had for long years been spoken against him (Plato, *Apol.* 37b). This noun (διαβολή) could also mean ‘enmity’ or ‘quarrel,’ and the verb διαβάλλω (meaning literally ‘to throw across’ or ‘to cross over’) could mean ‘to be at variance,’ ‘to attack,’ and ‘to accuse’ (cf. Luke 16:1), as well as ‘to slander.’ So the Septuagint used the verb (ἐν)διαβάλλειν of the Angel of the Lord who ‘opposed’ Balaam (LXX Num 22:22), and the noun διάβολος to mean ‘enemy’ (for the Hebrew Sorer in LXX Est 8:1) and ‘adversary’ (for Satan LXX Ps 108:6). It is in this sense that the Septuagint used the word διάβολος; to render the Hebrew Satan, the super-human Adversary of God.

In the same *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, classicist and historian G. J. Riley summarises the notion of the “demon”:

The term ‘demon’ is the rendering of the cognate Greek words δαίμων and is to be used for ‘Satanic demons,’ especially substantivised neuter adjective δαίμόνιον; post-classical Latin borrowed the words in the forms daemon and daemonium.

As Riley demonstrates, from Homeric times onwards, δαίμων meant “divinity”, which was a rendering of “either an individual god or goddess”, or the Deity as
an unspecified unity.\textsuperscript{303} From this meaning, religion itself is described as δεισιδαιμονία, meaning the “‘reverence for the Divinity,’ or simply ‘religion.’”\textsuperscript{304} It is thus that “Plato derived the word from the near homonym δαήμων meaning ‘knowing,’” derived “from the root *δαω, ‘to know.’”\textsuperscript{305} Even if this last etymological origin is rejected by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 AD), an influential Palestinian Doctor of the Church, his proposed derivation of δειμαίειν, “to fear”, still speaks of a certain form of aesthesis, of knowing and feeling.\textsuperscript{306} The etymology more likely stems “from the root δαίω, ‘to divide (destinies).’” Thus the word could designate one’s ‘fate’ or ‘destiny,’ or the spirit controlling one’s ‘fate, one’s ‘genius.’”\textsuperscript{307}

Typically, “the term δαίμονιον in the classical period meant similarly ‘the divine power’ or ‘the Divinity.’” This meaning of the demon also “designated the famous daimonion of Socrates”\textsuperscript{308} However, in later authors such as Eusebius of Caesarea and in other Jewish and Christian writings, the cultural ambiguity of the demon developed into a threatening entity that operates in association with the Devil. From this new cultural and ascetic vision, the demon “came to mean

\textsuperscript{303} Riley explains: “as nearly all deities in the classical period”, the demon was ambiguous, neither a good nor a bad entity. Of Aphrodite in Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 3.420 and in \textit{Odyssey}, 3.27: “the Deity will put it in your mind”. See: “Demon”, in Dictionary, p. 235.


\textsuperscript{307} Karel van der Toom, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst eds., \textit{Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible} (Boston/Leiden/Köln: Brill, 1999), p. 235: Such is the prevalent understanding of the development of the demon from an ambiguous, neither good nor bad, polyvalent and polydeitic entity, into the negative polarity and enemy of a positive, monotheistic god. It should be noted that this dualistic view in Christian and Judaic authors is challenged, on the basis of the supposed monotheism of all ancient Jewish communities of the Old Testament. See: Judit M. Blair, \textit{De-Demonising the Old Testament: An Investigation of Azazel, Lilith, Deber, Qeteb and Reshef in the Hebrew Bible} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) pp. 9–12. The consensus, however, reveals that the demonic is always a sensitivity, an aesthetic, a rhythm.

\textsuperscript{308} Plato, \textit{Republic}, 382e; cf. Acts 17:18. Quoted in “Demon”, in Dictionary, p. 235. It could also mean the class of lower divine beings “between gods and mortals” who mediated between the human and divine spheres. See Plato, \textit{Symposium}, 202e; Plato, \textit{Apologia}. 24b, 40a. Again, after the Exile and the rise of dualism, it came to be used for “Satanic demons”, especially among Jewish and Christian writers and in non-Christian magical texts.
‘to be possessed by a demon’ which caused bodily infirmity or insanity; in the
sense ‘to be insane’ it was used pejoratively of the ‘ravings’ (= ‘doctrines’) of
heretics”.

This adversarial dimension of religiosity has a defining imprint on the conception
of one’s own rhythm. The desert is a laboratory in which to oppose and to
separate the Devil and its demons from God. The ascetic combat and defence
against demonic forces was achieved through the maintenance of one’s own
rhythm, a rhythm that flows uninterruptedly. Christianity developed this
dualism that opposes the Devil, aided by its demons, against the divine, and
rhythm emerges as an instrument with which to combat the Devil and to
maintain contact with the divine.

What role does the locality of the desert itself play in the ascetic understanding
of the divine and the demonic? The centrality of the desert in asceticism might
be explained in part by its meteorological or atmospheric conditions, in that the
combination of heat, sun, sand and hazy horizon can generate visions or
apparitions. Once the ascetics’ spirituality is applied to these images, they
may be perceived and narrated as non-human entities: devils, demons or God.
The desert is thus where geography activates itself theologically; it is where
theology materialises into a geography.

The desert is thus not only a location where the ascetics took flight. Rather, the
desert is where both God and demons dwelled and could be fought or
encountered. Seen that the desert is already a zone of intense force in which
the divine and the demonic stage a war against each other, the desert is not
simply a background for the demonic and the divine. The desert is that which

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309 (Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica, 7.31.1). Available in Eusebius of Caesarea, The
Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine, vol. 1, trans. with intro. and notes by H. J.
challenged (see footnote 177 above).

310 Hazel Johannessen, The Demonic in the Political Thought of Eusebius of Caesarea (Oxford:
463-73, in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (Leiden: Brill, 1995). See also

311 Karel van der Toom, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst eds., Dictionary of Deities
and Demons in the Bible (Boston/Leiden/Köln: Brill, 1999).
actually produces the divine and the demonic. In other words, through these intense proximities, the desert is a place that creates its own forms of media; it is a media-generating system and a geo-atmospheric media in itself at the same time.\textsuperscript{312}

This reading does not aim to minimise the historical importance of the Christian god or the “demon”, and certainly not as far as these ancient ascetics from two thousand years ago were concerned. Rather, this translatable reading, this theoretic fiction—and in effect material fiction—highlights the potent agency of the desert itself. The geographical and atmospheric specificities of the Egyptian desert played a role in the development of the cenobitic monastery and, consequently, of any Western institution modelled after the monastery. If the demonic and the divine are issued from the specificities of the atmospheric conditions, then asceticism, namely the mastering of one’s own rhythm is even more compelling, for it is that rhythm that allows one to combat the demons on the one hand, and to receive God on the other. In other words, the definition of one’s own rhythm is what allows the formation of one’s own subject, and to institute communities in which such subjecthood can regulate itself and be regulated.

In what way does the demonic figure still inform the combative operations of present day state apparatuses and institutions, which inherited their structural organisation from the monastic traditions, such as formal education? Before answering this question, I will look first at a more interior aspect of the same problem, namely the psychological state caused by the desert, accounting for the need of a strict and centralised rhythmic medium, as opposed to \textit{idiorrhythm}, in the development of the monastic order.

Christianity and its social phenomenon of asceticism in the desert were composed of philosophies, belief systems and life practices, from Northern, Southern and Eastern origins, alongside influences of Hebraic, “Greek” and Roman traditions. However, this theological mixing receded at the moment of the division of the East and West, which occurred at the collusio of Christianity

\footnote{\textsuperscript{312} Werner Herzog, \textit{Fata Morgana} (1971); Abderrahmane Sissako, \textit{Timbuktu} (2015).}
with the Roman Empire in 380, following the edict of Theodosius. Particularly in the new “West”, the ascendance and centralisation of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire resulted in the gradual “ordering” of all ascetic life practices into “cenobitic” monasteries.

This making of “order” marginalised and criminalised most other types of ascetic life, in the Egyptian deserts and elsewhere in the Roman Empire; the cenobitic monastery became the model institution of subject formation and ethical governance, and the “desert” became an interior state. Because the ascetics and hermits were fighting against the “demon” symbolised by the desert, this “demon” remained the enemy against which the monastic infrastructure defended itself. Perhaps then there remains a demonological defensiveness towards the Western institutions modelled after the monastery, including the missionary school. Despite the enormous temporal distances—historical transformations and geographic expanses—it could be that the seminaries and convents in former Western colonies exemplify some of the material legacies of these early Christian cenobitic histories.

**Akēdia: The Noonday Demon, Commo(u)nality and Interiority**

The ecological dimension of the desert has a defining role in the ascetic vision, but the agency and the mediality of the desert depend in equal measure on the interior state of the ascetic. If the desert is the image, then the ascetic interior is the camera. The severity of the ascetic interiority that is both combative against the demon and receptive of God is rendered by the condition of *akēdia*. This condition is alluded to in the passage by theologian Kallistos Ware already quoted above, in reference to the imperative of “guarding the walls”:

In his chapter on Abba Macarius of Alexandria, whom he met around 391 CE during his early years in Cellia, he recounts: “Once, when I was suffering from listlessness (*akēdia*), I went to him and said: Abba, what shall I do? For my thoughts afflict me, saying: You are making no progress; go away from here.’ And he replied to me, ‘Tell them: For Christ’s sake I am guarding the walls.”

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313 Ibid., pp. 6-7. See also: *Lausiac History*, 18:58.
Historian and theologian Bernard McGinn explains that, in the writings of the canonical ascetic Evagrius, the *Praktikos* and the *Antirrheticus* are not manuals or rules detailing external practices, but rather the speculative considerations and advice about the more important internal asceticism by which the monk learns to master the *logismoi* (the evil tendencies within) that are the work of demonic forces and the main obstacles to the return of *nous* (soul, spirit) to its true goal or perfect union with the Trinity. Evagrius’s subtle teaching about the eight *logismoi* (*gastrimargia, porneia, philagryia, lypē, orgē, akēdia, xenodoxia, hyperphania*), the ancestors of the “Seven Deadly Sins” of the later Western tradition, make up the bulk of his ascetical writings.314

McGinn continues by highlighting that although “the struggle against the demons is most evident on the level of *praktikē*, their opposition is also experienced in *physikē* and *theologikē*”. “Among the demons, certain oppose the practice of the commandments, others oppose thoughts of nature, and others oppose words (*logoi*) about divinity because the knowledge of our salvation is constituted from these three”.315

Similarly, philosopher Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung reminds the reader:

Evagrius famously called *acedia* the noonday demon, who struck just when the sun was beating down at its hottest and the temptation to sleep was at its maximum. Sticking to one’s prayers and religious study required the effort of fighting against one’s bodily needs, especially given the physically demanding practices of the Desert Fathers. In the later monastic tradition, acedia was the name of the desire to sleep in rather than rise for early morning prayers, or to shirk one’s manual labor in favour of relaxation or wasted time chit-chatting or gossiping.316


315 See KG 1.10; and Ascetic Behaviour, p. 178.

This transformation of the desert notion of akēdia into its more popular understanding of sloth is outlined by DeYoung, through her studies of Thomas of Aquinas:

[Aquinas’s] account deserves special attention because it stands at a key point in the history of sloth: a point at which previous strands of the Christian virtue tradition converge and after which the heuristic force of the traditional schema of virtues and vices is considerably dissipated.317

In this, Aquinas’s account provides a link between ancient Christian and modern conceptions of the vice and, by extension, of theological demonology. This is because “Aquinas conceives of moral formation teleologically, both in terms of Aristotelian flourishing and ultimately, of Christian sanctification. [He] defines the vice of acedia as “sorrow over...an internal and divine good [in us]”.

This condition is experienced today, outside the field of theology. Akēdia is the despair I felt at the time of my anecdotal radiophonic encounter with Roland Barthes. Coincidentally, akēdia was the first subject explored by Barthes in his Comment vivre ensemble in 1977. It is a transliteration of Ancient Greek ἀκηδίᾱ, a word derived from κῆδος, kêdeuô, meaning accuracy, care or interest. In English, akēdia is acedia or accidie. The current use of this word in Greek relates to negligence, or prostration. By extension, a-kēdia, means not to be interested, to be careless.318 In this instance, a “permutation of the active and the passive” takes place in akēdia, such that “to abandon an invested object”, for instance, the elective idiorrhythmic ascetic way of life, equals to

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317 Noel L. Brann, “Is Acedia Melancholy? A Re-examination of this Question in the Light of Fra Battista da Crema’s Della cognizione et vittoria di se stesso (1531)”, Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Vol. XXXIV, Issue 2, 1979, p. 180: “Acedia and melancholy address the same psychological state viewed through two independently evolved conceptual frameworks”. “The first framework, adhered to by the ecclesiastical writers and their lay followers, consists of seven principal or capital vices—the vita capitalia septum (mnemonically signified by the neologism SALIGIA in accordance with their initial letters): superbia (pride), avaritia (avarice), luxuria (lust), invidia (envy), gula (gluttony), ira (wrath), and acedia (a combination of sloth and sorrow). The second framework, subscribed to by the Hippocratic-Galenic medical writers, consists of four basic physiological infirmities brought about through an imbalance among the four primary body humours: sanguine or blows, yellow bile or choler, black bile or melancholy, and phlegm”.

318 Barthes, How to Live Together. Session of January 19, 1977, pp. 21–24. Occasioned by his chosen method of alphabetical order, akēdia was the first trait to be explored in Barthes’s lectures. Footnote 27 (p. 180) of that same Session points the reader to “How this Book is Constructed”, in A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments, pp. 6–8. “Barthes defends the use of the alphabet as a way to avoid imposing a progression or overall direction to the book”.

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being deserted, abandoned. Consequently, at the moment the ascetic abandons the desert, the ascetic equally feels deserted.

The characteristic states of akēdia are the fading of desire and the disappearance of the subject. Akēdia curtails the panoramic vision occasioned by dwelling in the desert, producing instead a “sensation of circularity, of blockade, of impasse”. Akēdia is “related to the psychoanalytical notion of aphanisis—proposed by neurologist and psychoanalyst Ernest Jones—indicating a state of non-desire”, the disappearance or dissipation of sexual desire, resulting in the disappearance of the subject itself. Indeed, American writer Kathleen Norris compiled “Acedia: A Commonplace Book”, in which she provided a literary timeline invoking the words associated with akēdia. The timeline starts with the Psalms and continues through Roman Stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 B.C.– A.D. 65), entering into the era of the desert ascetics by way of Anthony the Great (b c. 251) and his contemporaries. The timeline continues in chronological order via the likes of Dante Alghieri, to arrive in modern and contemporary literature with American-German theologian and philosopher Paul Johannes Tillich who it is believed, once defined boredom as “rage spread thin”, and English poet and playwright Dorothy L. Sayers, who called sloth “the sin that believes nothing, cares to know nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing … and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die”. Indeed, kēdeia, in both ancient and modern


Greek, also means to bury. Akédia thus invokes a mourning without a burial which is a serious condition because “in symbolic terms, the height of desolation is the death without a grave”.325

If the description of akédia as the “noonday demon” by Evagrius is taken seriously, considering that the demon was seen as the “common enemy of all humankind” in addition to the characteristic of akédia as the death of the subject without a burial, it is possible to imagine that the ascetic afflicted by akédia becomes a demon to her or himself, and to their community. The fight against akédia within loose ascetic formation is thus of foundational and ultimately of infrastructural importance to the institution of cenobitic monasticism.

This internal battle implies that the desert is a site of a double fight against demonic forces: it is a battle comprising both an internal and external fight. The ecological, geographical and meteorological phenomena afflict the ascetic, as well as the internal, psychological struggle that emerges from dwelling in such affecting conditions. These internal and external threats reinforce each other to constitute redoubtable psychic realities, which are then recorded as either forms-of-life (God) or forms-of-non-life (Devil).

**Koinos Bios: The Institution of the Monastery—Against the Desert**

As explored above, withdrawal from society is essential to Christian asceticism, as evidenced by the men and women of the Roman Empire from regions around the Eastern Mediterranean, who withdrew into the Egyptian deserts, in an “effort to withstand the devil’s temptations”. This effort materialised through the elaboration of a rhythm: at first, through the individuals’ own hermetic rhythms and, later on, as the communities grew in shape and size, through a new cenobitic rhythm.

Pachomius (who died in 312/313) and others living along the Nile River concurrently pioneered an alternative to cenobitic monasticism, in which

members retreated into a community of like-minded ascetics committed to a daily regimen of work and prayer.

The word monasticism comes from monachos, μοναχός, which means a solitary person, in the sense of monosis: being one with oneself, wholesome, stable, unchanging, devotional. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the founders of new orders often codified new rules, but these did not vary significantly from the previous ones. One remarkable exception is the rule devised by Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–534) for the monastery at Monte Cassino, which was widely adopted in religious communities throughout Western Europe, encouraged by such powerful promoters as Pope Gregory I the Great (d. 604) and Emperor Charlemagne (742–814).

However, the ascetics who inhabited the desert to face the demons and to be in touch with God considered themselves the protectors of humanity against what they perceived as the forms-of-non-life. Up until that time, the ascetic fight against the demons, this “common enemy of all humankind”, was structured around the rhythmic sociality of 1) hermitism, the secluded life; 2) idiorrhythm, a form of living that allowed the instituting and the maintenance of each member’s rhythm of life; and 3) the institution of cenobitism. With the advent of Christianity as the imperial religion, the cenobitic monastery grew to become the only accepted form of ascetic life.

Cenobitism is, as seen above, derived from koinos bios, κοινός βίος, also a composite “Greek” word that means the common life. The meaning of koinos is the opposite of ἰδιός, idios. At the moment of the Christian ascendance to political power, idiorrhythmic asceticism became a threat to cenobitic monasticism. This is because the plurality of the ascetic practices of idiorrhythm presented a political menace to the centralising and ultimately imperial structure of the coenobites.

The complete dissipation of the desert ascetic practices in Egypt enfolded gradually over the course of a century, but their decline coincided with the centralisation of Christianity in the Roman Empire through the Edit of Constantinople in 380. “Pooling” the ascetics was a political motivation, effected in order to minimise the potential challenge carried by these eccentricities against canonical orders.

This plurality was also negated in terms of its demonic potential borne out of ascetic eccentricities, regularly illustrated by the metaphor of the animal. In the narratives of the evil animal associated with ascetic practices, particularly those which developed in the East—where anchoritism and hermitism still flourished—a number of anchorites are considered to have lived wildly (their animalistic and, therefore, demonic being is suggested in the passage with a metaphor). For instance: “Acepsimus walks ‘on all fours,’ getting himself put into iron shackles, after which a shepherd mistakes him for a wolf and just misses killing him with his ‘slingshot;' Thalelus gets a squirrel’s cage built for himself, with a wheel inside”, after which “he is discovered ‘curled up in his cage, his knees up against his chin,’ reading the Gospels, having thus turned himself into a squirrel. The anchorite is thus an animal”.327

Other demonic metaphors were also conferred upon extreme ascetic practices, exemplified by Symeon the Stylite (390–459), who practised his form of asceticism through self-sequestration. Symeon buried himself up to his head in a garden ditch for a whole summer, spending forty days holed up in this cave with no light, causing the cenobitic monastery to send him away. Finally, Symeon settled near Antioch, on top of a pillar, initially a low one, that gradually increased in height to about twenty metres.328

327 There are four images of the animal in the theological tradition: 1) the animal is seen as nature, opposed to society; 2) the animal is seen as evil, and its demonic appearances take shape in certain animals. This is exemplified in St Anthony: demons enter his cave as wild beasts: snakes, bears, leopards, bulls, wolves, asps, scorpions. This vision is retained in the figurative traditions of animality as an infranature, depicting fear, greed, flesh, in other words, the absence of law. 3) Animals are also seen as miraculous, in the inversion of nature. Examples include lions burying Paul of Thebes, a lion bringing Simeon his meal of dates, or Elijah being fed by the raven. 4) The last image is the good, domesticated animal, which is effectively humanised. Barthes, “Animals” and “Enclosure”, in How to Live Together.

Once at the top, he constructed a balustrade. Symeon is renowned for having exemplified an athletic performance of asceticism, an ascetic Olympics of sorts, with reclusion as its object. Cenobitism was thus established in order to limit such excesses, resulting in the ultimate Benedictine virtue of discretio.

At play here is the structural categorisation of, on the one hand, the monastic “order” of cenobitism and, on the other, the undermining “disorder” perceived as a demonic force of the anchorite. Specifically, the intensity, the duration and the frequency of the latter’s animality is what turns these exceptional anchorites against the monastic order. What sets them apart from regularity is their rhythm: “how often” and “how long” they “perform” their animalistic asceticism, and this propriety requires an “ordering”.

Thusly, the cenobitic monastery became the structure through which the centralised Christian powers sought to “order” the ascetic life of the desert, in all its manifestations. This ordering is exemplified in the writing of John Cassian. Emerging from Scetes in Egypt, Cassian founded the first monastery in the West, near Marseilles, and the Benedictine order and its subsequent derivations are modelled after Cassian’s teachings;³²⁹

Where, we want to know, have such a variety and diversity of powers opposed to man come from, which the blessed Apostle enumerates as follows? Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spirits of evil in heavenly places.³³⁰

The cenobitic monastery is thus a rhythm instituted against hermitic and idiorrhythmic ascetic rhythms, which were characterised by particularities in the proprieties of living, or forms of life. If these forms-of-life were modelled after the desert Fathers and Mothers, then the cenobitic monastery became opposed to

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the desert. Throughout its development, the cenobitic monastery remained an ordering against the demonic forces, recorded also in the individual habits that may occasion the apparition of these forces. In this regard, the cenobitic architecture can be seen as a twofold defensive infrastructure. On the one hand, the monastic architecture remains engaged in a fight against the demon, the form-of-non-life. However, in addition to this existing fight, the monastic architecture of the new imperial Christian power also entered a war against the idiorrhythmic ascetic desert practices, which were a way of life open to all forms-of-life: this was an idios-rhythm, the validation of all rhythms, the equality and plurality of all forms-of-life.

In contrast, cenobitism is the institution of one single, medial, centralised rhythm; it is koinos bios, the singular common life. In the name of the centralised “common”, cenobitic monasticism erased theological differences by insisting on one singular form-of-life organised following one single rhythm.

The cenobitic monastery is thus an architectural, temporal, social and behavioural twofold ordering. In the advent of cenobitic monasticism, a conflation of two demonic forms occurred: the demonic form-of-non-life, and the forms-of-life of the desert ascetics newly declared as demonic.

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331 Jean Sorabella, “Monasticism in Western Medieval Europe”, in Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (New York: The Metropolitan Museum, 2001). Online article. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mona/hd_mona.htm. Accessed 14 January 2015. Sorabella writes: “Monasticism posed a continual challenge for builders, for there was always a conviction that monastic life would flourish best in surroundings most conducive to it. The authors of the fifth- and sixth-century rules say little about the design and disposition of buildings, but later authorities devised careful instructions for the form and arrangement of monastic communities. The ninth-century plan preserved at the abbey of Saint Gall in Switzerland, for example, depicts an ideal meant to inspire both emulation and devotion. As in this plan, each actual monastery had at its heart a church of adequate size to hold the whole community, ideally constructed of stone and proportioned for the most resonant acoustic. Some monastic churches were intended only for the resident nuns or monks, but others had accommodations for visiting pilgrims or lay worshippers as well. Other spaces reserved for special functions typically adjoined the church. These include the refectory, where the monks or nuns assembled for meals; the dorter or dormitory, where they slept; the chapter house, where the community met for business matters and reflection on the rule; and the cloister, an enclosed garden surrounded by covered walkways. The columns, arcades, and arched portals devised for these structures create architectural rhythms that seem to echo the ordered patterns of monastic life”.

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The open communality of idiorrhythm, which does not necessarily have to produce a commonality and is not conclusive of a political common, came to be seen as demonic.

The cenobitic monastery, no longer isolated and secluded, became part of the imperial infrastructure. The monastery fought the desert inside the lived environment, architecturally, and through ordering and disciplining. The ordering and disciplining of cenobitism has become transposed from the monastery onto other state apparatuses tasked with the formation of the subject. Consequently, any institution modelled after the monastery has a certain defensive element against demonic forces. If the monastery, as a mode of order, has been effectively transposed onto other institutions of subject formation, then there exists a demonological dimension to institutions such as the hospital and the school. If the monastery is devoted to fighting demons then, to a certain degree, any institution modelled after the monastery is also fighting against demons. What if the demons that inhabited the desert became transposed onto the plague and onto the bacteria in school, onto sexuality, onto morality, onto sociality itself, onto the Other and onto raciality?

**The Common Enemy of All Humankind, A Conclusion**

The suggestion of idios-rhythm as “a common concept for critical thought” is opposed to cenobitism, because the historical idiorrhythm considers cenobitism the rhythmic medium. At the same time, the cenobitic rhythm claims to fight against the demonic rhythm.

What is the relation between rhythmic medium, as a mode of power that imposes itself, and the notion of the demon? What happens to the “common”

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332 Foucault finds that “discipline cannot be compared to monastic asceticism, which seeks to ‘obtain renunciations rather than increases of utility’ (137); the monastery wants the individual to give up his or her body and abstain from its use, while discipline wants individuals to make their bodies more useful. Discipline seeks a new ‘art of the human body’ (137) that creates a relationship where obedience and productivity are mutually constituting. ‘Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)’ (138). The body is not only made to do more, but the process of gaining useful labour is made easier to control as well”.

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when it is articulated in relation to the question of the “enemy”? In the idiorrhythmic understanding of the demon as the enemy of all humankind, the ascetics are defenders of the threshold between the human and the non-human: the demon is the form-of-non-life, for the demon is that which is outside the human, that which threatens life itself.

However, the cenobitic recuperation and co-option of this same pronouncement—that the demons are the common enemy of all humankind—renders any xenos (stranger) a demon. Not only is the demon that which is outside the human and threatens it, but also any spiritual way of life outside the “common life” of cenobitism is demonic. The demons thus become not only that which threatens humankind theologically, but also that which is outside the forceful common life of cenobitism, ecclesiastically and (infra)structurally.

This marks a transition of cenobitism into the rhythmic medium of global power and, if the rhythmic medium is also the common enemy, then this collusion means that the desert has moved, and that it has become interior to the institution of “power”.

Here we must ask, how seriously can we take my narration of this definition of the demons as the common enemy? Scholarship reminds us that the authors of the writings referred to here were earnest and firm in their practical embodiment of their own theories. The phrase, “the common enemy of all humankind” is by no means a simple metaphor. Rather, the phrase implies that the term common is mobile in meaning and that the common is not inherently virtuous. Cenobitism presupposes that the production of the common, κοινός βίος, koinos bios, the common life, is a good in itself, in so far as the common produces the communal, as the highest good of humanity.

However, if humanity can face its common enemy, then the common is able to exist outside of the human. Whereas the production of the common in the communal seems to be an inherently human act, now the common is leveraged against the human. The common enemy is what comes outside of the human and menaces it. Otherwise, how could humanity—which results from the
transference of the common into the communal—become menaced by a common enemy?
Chapter 2: Rhythm, Theology and Philosophy in Rwanda

In the previous chapter I examined the sources of Roland Barthes’s *idiorrhythm*, which he finds in early Christian asceticism. I charted the emergence of this social phenomenon, its cultural and historical contexts, its geographical settings located in the Egyptian desert, and the localised psychological contexts informing its theological and literary formations. I also analysed idiorrhythm as a double notion composed of *idios* and *rhythm*: here, I studied *idios* in pre-Christian “Greek” literature that was influential in the birth of Christianity, and I have concluded that *idios* is one’s own conception of the flow of life.

Equally, I have studied rhythm as the structuring of such flow of life in time and space, drawing from pre-Christian philosophy, philology and literature. I have analysed how such principle of “one’s own conception of life” in asceticism came to be at odds with the changing societal norms, at a moment when Christianity ascended into the ruling religion of the Roman Empire. This ascendance of Christendom to central imperial governance accelerated the “ordering” of all Christian ascetic life into cenobitic monasteries.

These accounts have been offered in order to understand how Barthes frames the relationship between rhythm, language and power. For Barthes, idiorrhythm offers a way out of what he considers the oppressive, omnipotent and omnipresent hold of power upon life, a grip that he terms “rhythmic medium”.

In fact, for Barthes, power is *powers* in the plural, like a legion of demons. The plurality of power extends in social space and is “symmetrically perpetual in historical time”. This is because power derives its endurance and ubiquity from “language” which, again for Barthes, is “a parasite of a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of [human] history and not only to political, historical history”.

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333 Once again, “Greek” is in quotation marks to indicate that, as suggested by philosopher Lewis Gordon, Greek was not a unified culture. It is helpful to think of Greek cultures in linguistic terms borne of cultural, economic and historical dominations: in the same way that it would be absurd to consider all English speakers as British.
In Christian theology, “the Word” is the synecdoche of God and its powers, namely the Bible. For instance, in Genesis, the Word creates all that exists in the universe: “And the Word said, ‘Let there be light.’” Since it is impossible to operate outside language, Barthes says there are few options available to us and he suggests “cheating” language by way of “literature”.

Idiorrhythm is such literature: it is a set of “idiosyncratic” inventions of life, ways of life or biographies, “written” outside the medial grip of the “rhythmic medium”. From this perspective, I have made an analogy between the rhythmic medium and the common life of cenobitic monasticism, suggesting that the common rhythm of cenobitism became instituted far beyond the monastery, in the practices of education, culture and governance.

While I am aware of the extraordinary scales of time and space between early twentieth century Rwanda and the events that took place in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century, this chapter looks at how the missionary religious institutions set up by European colonial forces in Rwanda and its wider Great Lakes region—in particular the seminary— inherited this cenobitic ordering of the rhythmic medium.

Since the seminaries are sites of philosophical formation in Rwanda, this inheritance accounts in part for the ethical differences arising from two readings of the notion of rhythm between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana. In this sense, the adherence to the “Word” in seminaries renders these sites scenes for culturing the “parasite of a trans-social organism”, the language of power being “linked to the whole of [human] history”.

Furthermore, this new culture of the “Word” takes on a specifically Christian accent, and uniformises life through its rhythmic medium. Then surely there must be aspects of idiorrhythm in it and, if so, how do they manifest themselves and where?

This chapter suggests that Christianity can be understood as the rhythm of the enforced “modernity” promoted by colonial forces, to the extent that Christianity contributed to the racialist discourse at the heart of the genocide against the Tutsi. Nevertheless, scholarship suggests that the devastating transformations ushered by this “modernity” have not fully erased the idios of the formerly colonised Africans and Rwandans.

This retention of one’s own conception of life is apparent in the life and work of philosophers such as Nzeyimana. Concurrently, Christianity is now also “African”, such that it is imperative to revisit its histories as I did in the previous chapter, in order to desediment the ramifications Christianity has had on the Rwandan understanding of the propriety of life.

This chapter analyses the intellectual histories of philosophical formation in Rwanda, their intertwinement with cenobitic missionary Christianity, and their contemporary manifestations in the wake of the Rwandan genocide.

The chapter also acknowledges that the discipline of philosophy has contributed to the wholesale dehumanisation of Africans, and that it is an intellectual tradition that seems to downplay the many contributions from women and other marginalised social groups.\(^\text{335}\)

However, philosophy existed well before its delimitation as a solely “Western” practice. The survival of humanity depended and still depends on our sensitivity,

and our ways of making sense of our own feelings and worlds: whether these practices are called philosophy or otherwise, intellect is a shared human faculty.

These historical and ethical contexts are the basis for analysis of Nzeyimana’s own formulations of rhythm, which I offer in the next chapter, through an account of my recorded conversations with Nzeyimana and his colleagues, and through studying his three writings on memory, education and economy. Finally, this chapter concludes with outlining the ethical ramifications of Nzeyimana’s and Barthes’s rhythms.
Footnotes on How to Live Together: Philosophy in Rwanda, Then and Now

At the beginning of 2012, I was invited by my then research supervisor, French-American philosopher Jean-Paul Martinon, to co-organise a public forum at Goldsmiths, University of London. This forum took place on the 5th of May that same year, at the Richard Hogarth Building on the New Cross campus. It was the Fifth Visual Cultures Public Forum and explored the question of “how to live together” by drawing attention to and outlining the implied consensus from the perspectives of the writings of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Alongside Martinon and myself, the other participants were philosopher Isaïe Nzeyimana, and Andy Stafford, a British theorist at the University of Leeds.

Because of financial and logistical limitations, and immigration issues relating to travelling from Rwanda to the United Kingdom, Nzeyimana made his contribution to the public forum through a video interview. This was made possible by Martinon who, in the months prior to the forum, had been in Rwanda working on his volume “After” Rwanda: In Search of a New Ethics (2013). Martinon had given me the opportunity to address a question to Nzeyimana, and my question was to reflect on the question Barthes had posed: how to live together. The resulting video was 15 minutes in duration, recorded by Martinon, at Nzeyimana’s home in Butare, in sound and colour on a readily-available digital video camera mounted on a tripod. Nzeyimana’s face and upper body occupied most of the frame, and Martinon’s voice was only audible as he posed his questions:

Nzeyimana:

My name is Isaïe Nzeyimana. I am Rwandan as you can see, and I was born in Butare. Butare is one of the cities of Rwanda, which was at a time the second city of the country. I was born near the border of Rwanda to Burundi in 1964. I completed my primary education there, in my village. The secondary school was twofold: first in Butare, in a secondary school, followed by my studies at Kabgayi, a lower seminary. If I continued like this in a direct way, it is because I wanted to become a priest. I just


harboured a positive sentiment towards the religious life. I enrolled in a religious congregation called The Pallottine Fathers. It is in this way that I went to the seminary. I was sent to the seminary and there I followed all the circuitry of the religious training: Postulant, Noviciate... After, I went to the [grand] seminary. This seminary was in Yaoundé, in Cameroon. That was in 1990. There, I did three years of philosophy. Then, it turned out otherwise; I did not want to continue the priesthood vocation. I changed my mind: I enrolled at the University of Yaoundé. I believe at the time it was called Yaoundé I.

Martinon:
What caused this change?

There is, I believe, only one cut, and the rest is an unedited conversation. Ever since editing Martinon’s footage, watching the resulting video, subtitling and transcribing its dialogue for the purposes of screening at the public forum and later also for my own studies, I have engaged in conversations with Rwandan and Congolese philosophers at their homes, universities and cultural institutions. Some of our conversations have focused on the subject of rhythm and its role on subjecthood and belonging.

My films *Comment vivre ensemble* (2015), *Words After the World* (2017) and *A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow* (2019) bring together extracts and fictions from these dialogues, whereby rhythm is a metaphor for hospitality, class, ethnicity and race: it is a regulating device consisting of subjective and objective criteria. In this way, rhythm can give us insight into how to live together with those with whom we do not share a similar outlook on how to structure our private and public spaces, times and memories, and the formation of our subjects.

Philosophers in Rwanda often hold important positions in education, as well as other infrastructures for the formation of the subject, and are also involved in standardising processes in society: Isaïe Nzeyimana is the founding member of Nile Source Polytechnic of Applied Arts in Butare, and his writings are used as the basis of textbooks in universities nationally; Quinet Obed Niyikiza is a senior lecturer at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences also in Butare; Father Fabien Hagenimana is the rector of INES-Ruhengeri; Sylvestre Nzabwanayaho has led the education programme for senior police officers at
the former Kigali Institute of Education (KIE); and Olivier Nyirubugara is a senior lecturer at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Like the work of these individuals’ African colleagues, to paraphrase the Gabonese philosopher Grégoire Biyogo, their writing seems to highlight what the world is ceasing to be without the world yet being aware of it ending. Their thinking fights against the permanent degradation of life and of living together, but also against the threat to life caused by the disappearance of our relation to each other, and the habitable environments on our planet. This philosophy revives what would otherwise be lost, and carries a meaning and a promise which compels us to rethink life.338

The themes explored by these philosophers include authenticity, development, education, generosity, history, memory, testimony and witnessing. Their references and interests reflect the influences acquired through their education in Rwanda and, as exemplified by Nzeyimana, in Bangui (Central African Republic), Kinshasa (the Congo) and Yaoundé, as well as in Bamberg (Germany), Rome and elsewhere. These philosophers are versed in the “Western” Christian philosophical idioms, while also cultivating their own thematics and treatises that address the local urgencies, which equally respond to worldly events from the perspectives of their own localities.

The question of “how to live together” is indeed a shared concern. These philosophical works tend to imply but also to contest a consensus, by outlining the meaning of this consensus, not only in relation to our Western context, but also with regard to the extreme situation that led to and followed the genocide against the Tutsi that took place in Rwanda in 1994.

Victims and perpetrators have cohabited for the last 25 years, and philosophers continue to explore ways of addressing memory, education and economy in the wake of such large-scale ending of life. At the same time, a number of theoretical and practical aspects of their life and work—such as the adherence to Christianity and intellectual references to controversial figures such as Georg

Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel—necessitates an excursus in outlining the intellectual histories accounting for their philosophical education, and how it contextualises Nzeyimana’s understanding of rhythm in relation to the question of how to live together.

A Visit to Lubumbashi, the Congo

In December 2018, I visited Lubumbashi in the Congo at the invitation of one of my colleagues at Centre d’art Waza.339 The context was a workweek organised in the framework of research on the history of arts education in Lubumbashi and in the wider Congo. These studies were undertaken in collaboration with a cluster of other working groups, as part of Another Roadmap for Arts Education, a network of educators, artists and researchers working in 23 cities around the world, initiated by the Institute for Art Education at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). At the level of the African continent, the working groups of Another Roadmap include members of Keleketla! Library and Wits School of Arts (University of the Witwatersrand), who compose the Johannesburg Working Group; the Kampala Working Group in Uganda, operating at Nagenda International Academy of Art & Design (NIAAD); the Nyanza Working Group in Rwanda, which I convene in collaboration with Isaïe Nzeyimana, operating from the former Nile Source Polytechnic of Applied Arts (NSPA); the Maseru Working Group in Lesotho, at Ba re e ne re Literature Festival; and the Cairo Working Group in Egypt, hosted by the Contemporary Image Collective (CIC).340

I was particularly grateful to receive this invitation, because Lubumbashi was once a significant location where a number of important philosophers studied, lived and worked, most notably V. Y. Mudimbe, an influential Congolese philosopher, poet and novelist concerned with the formation of African cultures.


340 See: Another Roadmap for Art Education online portal: https://another-roadmap.net.
and their intellectual histories. In my conversations with Lushois philosophers of various generations, we reflected on questions of a somewhat oedipal nature: Despite the noted philosophical achievements originating in this region, why did the atrocities in Rwanda and the Congo happen “on your watch?” In what ways did you and your elder philosophers fall short in anticipating and preventing the emergence and the recurrence of violence on such a scale?

The year was coming to an end and my mind was orbiting around the gravity of the then-forthcoming 2019, a year that would mark the 25th commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi. As recorded in the Introduction, Patrice Nganang declared that the Rwandan genocide should be read as a metonymy for a wider self-destruction in the world at large. It is inscribed in a history of world barbarism, a genocidal humanism that marks the epoch of the history of the present: it is an era in which the crisis is the norm rather than the exception, an afterlife that violently produces a memory of before, propelling life into an after. 

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The reader might recall how, for Nganang, the genocide against the Tutsi points to the limit of rationality as it was known before its advent. Philosophy reached a limit: by not foreseeing, by being silent during, and by offering a belated response to this genocide. Effectively, for Nganang, the Rwandan genocide is “a foundational moment for African philosophy”. Addressing my question in Lubumbashi to philosopher Emmanuel M. Banywesize was even more charged because Nganang’s Manifeste makes a special attack on Mudimbe’s work:

Rwanda would effectively render obsolete the philosophy of a thinker like Valentin Mudimbe, whose patient archaeological uncovering of the historically determined misrepresentations, or ‘inventions’ of Africa, allied with the promise of founding an African subject anew as a moment of Fanonian revolutionary rupture, would appear to have been leading African thinking up a blind alley all along. Naming him explicitly, Nganang implicates Mudimbe when he says: “even the most patient of African philosophers fell asleep while the dead bodies were adorning his back yard”. For him, this underlines “the inability of [African philosophy] to have foreseen the catastrophe of the genocide, and the sudden appearance of the unthought at its very heart”.

Regardless of whether Nganang’s accusation of Mudimbe holds, if thought did reach a limit then, even within the minds of the most esteemed African thinkers, in what way are we, their mere students, equally failing to rise to the demands of the history of the present, now? If genocidal politics is the norm, what are the ongoing genocides and how to intervene?


In response, Banywesize took off his glasses, scratched his head, and noted the confronting tone of my questions: was I indiscriminately accusing entire generations of Rwandan and Congolese scholars of being bad parents? A noticeable pause ensued. It was an actual moment of unwitting confrontation, resulting from displacing Nganang’s questions from their originary discipline and bringing them into the field of philosophy. All my philosophical encounters are conducted with a certain tone of hospitable patience; their speech is characterised by a reverential ethos and referential procession. I am generally not received as a philosopher, nor have I ever authored a monograph. Indeed, I am at best a student, and therefore a minor in the disciplinary and institutional sense, and in terms of age.

Yet here I was, in Banywesize’s office at Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Lubumbashi, of which he is the director, asking him difficult questions and inadvertently putting his authority into question, thereby trespassing the horizon that delineates the receptive benevolence of the teaching host towards the visiting student. This gesture could only have been translated as impolite. My “indisciplinarity” was a breach of the bounds of a philosophical encounter. However, the confrontation arose from adopting Nganang’s questions and conjuring them in this context—an act Nganang himself had not performed. For Nganang, “Rwanda” was the graveyard of African philosophy, and Nganang’s claims of the failure and limits of philosophy were formulated within comparative literature. Perhaps the oedipal tone of my own address to philosophers was required to open an enquiry that had not yet happened. Returning to Nganang’s

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questions, reworking them and addressing them to philosophers generates an extension that reaches a new depth of examination. This exchange also addresses further issues raised by Michael Syrotinski in regard to Nganang’s *Manifeste*: why remain faithful to literature, or “writing” for that matter, as the only mode of address and constitution of a “pre-emptive” ethical practice?

Banywesize set out to elaborate on the historical context of his generation’s philosophical development, and pointed out the conceptual difficulties previous generations of philosophers had faced. He acknowledged that earlier philosophers had neglected to commit to the burning questions of their times. These included the analysis of the impact of popular culture on society, studying the domestic realm and its gendered violences, the role of minor figures such as street hawkers and market women in the functioning of the economy, etc. He cannot cite a single text about exile authored by a Rwandan or Congolese philosopher between 1950 and 1997.  

Yet exile was central to the recurrent violence that continually flagged regionally. For the philosophers of that time, not reading or writing about exile was the result of the dangers of addressing problems of the locale from within the conditions of oppressive regimes. Additionally, Banywesize suggests, the then received disciplinary philosophical wisdom did not provide much antecedent in confronting exile socially.

Avoiding such subjects was an orderly application of the disciplinary tradition of philosophy. This absence of working from the experiences of life—or a chorus—on the ground resulted in a condition whereby it was only possible to write metaphysically. This discursive limitation is severe, because crucial subjects affecting society—particularly the increasingly ethnicised definitions of citizenry and subjecthood devoid of class—were insufficiently included within the questioning of education, policymaking and other fields which, arguably, fall

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347 Admittedly I do not know of any. Neither does Banywesize. This could be either because such a text does not exist, or because, if it does, it is not distributed widely enough to have reached the likes of him.

under the responsibility of philosophical scholarship. Instead, the theorists withdrew into ethnophilosophical metaphysics, a field which itself became a form of intellectual exile.

Although Nganang considers Achille Mbembe to be the only pre-emptive thinker, Paulin J. Hountondji has expressed a vigorous critique of Negritude and ethnophilosophy, in as much as it leads to a racialism that Nganang critiques. Hountondji took a “firm stand against intellectual self-imprisonment and unanimism”\(^{349}\) resulting from “the idea of an implicit, silent, latent philosophy” which Hountondji coined as ethnophilosophy. It results from “a reconstruction of implicit philosophy behind the habits and customs of the host society through a lot of non-verifiable hypotheses which always amount to overinterpreting the facts”.\(^{350}\) In that sense, Mbembe and Hountondji cannot be the only pre-emptive philosophers. Indeed, in Syrotinski’s view,\(^{351}\)

Nganang’s dismissal of Mudimbe is harsh and unjustified, and needs to be at the very least nuanced. Like Mbembe, Mudimbe is also critical of both indigenism (or what he would describe as the derivative nature of Africanist discourse, including its theologians like Mbiti, its linguists like Alexis Kagamé, its ethnophilsophers such as Placide Tempels, and its historians like Cheikh Anta Diop and Joseph Ki-Zerbo), as well as of the “philosopher kings” of the early independence years, such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, and so on), and of Marxism, which he sees as yet one more version of a universalizing “will to truth”. Mudimbe notes that the limits of Marxist-inspired political radicalism were clearly seen in the African countries that adopted Socialist programmes following Independence, and he states bluntly: “African socialisms were a mystification and everyone knows it”.\(^{352}\)


The above discussion provides the wider background in which modern and contemporary philosophy in Rwanda finds its expression. More specifically, philosophy in Rwanda owes its formation to Catholic Christianity. American historian Timothy Longman narrates how the first Catholic missionaries arrived in Rwanda in 1900, and how they committed themselves to becoming major political agents.

The Society of the Missionaries of Africa—better known as the White Fathers—reached Rwanda from the neighbouring Burundi where, after several failed attempts, they had just succeeded in establishing their first mission near Bujumbura in 1898.

“Two years later, in February 1900, the first White Fathers arrived at the Rwandan capital in Nyanza to request permission to begin mission work in Rwanda”. Rwanda fell under the missionary authority of Monsignor Jean-Joseph Hirth, the apostolic vicar of the vast geographic region comprising Congo, Ruanda and Urundi, then known as Nyanza Meridional. Hirth wished to establish his mission near Burundi: the location was advantageous for the mission as it was “heavily populated”, situated near the supply stations in Burundi and near the royal seat. After overcoming the royal resistance he at first faced, a site was granted to the mission on Save, and “within a year, the king granted two other stations, Zaza in the east near the Tanganyika border and Nyundo in the north, and two years later another northern mission was founded at Rwaza and one in the southwest, Mibirizi”.

According to Longman, some attributes “that marked mission work in Rwanda from the beginning appear in hindsight to have shaped indelibly the nature of Christianity in Rwanda”. For one, the missionary emulation of the conversion of Emperor Constantine in Rome led Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, founder of the Missionaries of Africa, to believe that “once the chiefs and kings were...

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converted, they would create an accommodating environment for the conversion of the masses and that where tension existed between missionaries and civil authorities, the church would never develop a firm footing”.  

Longman describes that “the success of the strategy of building up political power and developing strong alliances with state leaders (success in terms of rates of conversion and ease of operation for the church) led church officials in subsequent decades to seek to maintain a close alliance with the state. The value placed on popular obedience to civic authorities and the acceptance of church involvement in ethnic politics have also shaped subsequent church social engagement in Rwanda”.

This is due in part to the ethnic interpretation given by the missionaries to the Rwandan power relations. This understanding led them to “set as their primary goal gaining the support and ultimately the conversion of the ruling class, necessitating that the missionaries consciously avoided defending the interests of the masses against their chiefs, for fear that the chiefs would view them as rivals for power”.

At first, the missionaries failed in converting the royal court, so they instead focused on enrolling the youth of the ruling class into their education programmes. They further relied “on the support of the [initially German] colonial state, particularly after the transfer to Belgian control in 1916”, when “the missionaries eventually achieved their goal” in converting the royal court, which was followed by “the subsequent conversion of much of the populace”.  

Philosophy inherited this Thomist tradition of missionary education, and to this day philosophy sustains and preserves theological views on culture, society, education and governance. According to Congolese philosopher Kasereka Kavwahirehi, “pioneers and contemporary leading figures of African philosophy


[were formed] in missionary institutions”, and this stamp of Christianity on the
general regional and Rwandan intellect is still widely evident.356

The dominant ideologies, the institutions they represent, and the types of social
sciences privileged in education also reflect this Christian idealism,357 which
dates back to the colonial era when churches, cloisters and seminaries were
established as sites of ideological conversions.358 However, this colonial
enterprise of cultural conversion motioned through Christianity “was
appropriated by Africans who perceived it as a vehicle of modernity or found in it
tools to resist colonialism and domination, that is, tools of liberation”.359

Nevertheless, missionary institutions were, and still are, technologies of
transmission and enforcement of colonial exploitation. Writing in 1979, the then-
priest and now-Archbishop Smaragde Mbonyintege attests:

The missionary activities had a common goal with that of the colonisers.
For Rwandans, to become a Christian was not only a matter of
conversion to Christianity: it was a total act of abandoning “imico ya
kinyarwanda,” the Rwandan rhythms, which were suspected, rightly or
wrongly, to be vectors of paganism. Between 1900 and 1960, the
Rwandan Christian moved toward a cultural death. Through the Christian
religion, the new Rwandan Christian was formed at school, at work, to
become an admirer of the White, and to become his often clumsy

356 Kasereka Kavwahirehi, “Have We Failed Christianity? Or How Violence in the Great Lakes
Region Challenges Christianity and the Nation State”, in Citizenship Studies, 21:2, 2017,
210-223. “From Placide Tempels, author of Bantu Philosophy (1945), to Fabien Eboussi
Boulaga, author of Muntu in Crisis: African Authenticity and Philosophy (2014) and Christianity
Without Fetishes: Revelation and Domination (1981), and V.Y. Mudimbe’s Tales of Faith:
Religion as Political Performance (1997) through to La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’être
(1956) by Alexis Kagame, Visage africain du christianisme (1965) by Vincent Mulago, and
African Religions and Philosophy (1969) by John Mbiti, not to mention L’Afrique dans l’Église.
Paroles d’un croyant by Engelbert Mveng, Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et État en
société postcoloniaire (1988) by Achille Mbembe, and Théologie africaine pour temps de crise
(1993) by Kâ Mana... all these scholars bear witness to the challenges and issues born from
extending to Africa a bourgeois Christian model of being. Hence, theologies of cultural identity,
liberation or reconstruction, ethnophilosophy and critical philosophies represent moments when
Africans try to recover coherence in their individual and collective lives by inscribing themselves
in the open horizon of colonial modernity and the evangelising mission. This involves trying to
think critically about the integration of traditional values in the modern world while ensuring that
modernity fulfils its promises within the African experience of history”. p. 215.

357 Kavwahirehi, “Have We Failed Christianity?”, p. 210-223.

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

359 Kavwahirehi, “Have We Failed Christianity?”, p. 212.
imitator. Becoming a Christian meant speaking differently, eating differently, dressing differently, praying differently. More dramatically, becoming Christian meant to hate one’s own tradition and to admire all that is European.\textsuperscript{360}

It is suggested that, despite this devastating transformation making Christianity the rhythm of modernity,\textsuperscript{361} what is truly African was not fully erased. Further, the appropriation, adaptation and cultivation of Christianity by the new African Christians led to a distinct emergence of African Christianity and modernity that used the same arguments to fight against colonial injustice.

However, other thinkers such as Congolese priest and philosopher Bénézet Bujo find that the civil wars, genocides and massacres “that plague Africa today are signs of an anaemic political sphere” that is a product of foreign institutions enforcing an external order on African societies.\textsuperscript{362} Simultaneously, Christianity, “which arrived in Africa within the colonial context of subjugation and domination” is now “profoundly linked to the African experience of history in its multiple manifestations: spiritual, social, political, ethical and intellectual”.\textsuperscript{363}

\textbf{Christianity: The Rhythm of Enforced Modernity}

Therefore, “all analysis of African issues that does not take into account the Christian (or Islam) factor as well as African religious systems ends up by renouncing an understanding of African societies’ dynamics”.\textsuperscript{364} The institution of Christianity erased the Rwandan rhythms, \textit{imico ya Kinyarwanda}, such that


\textsuperscript{361} My article “One’s Own Rhythm” addresses Christianity as the rhythm of modernity; Nyampeta, “One’s Own Rhythm: Footnotes to How to Live Together”, in \textit{That, Around Which The Universe Revolves: On Rhythmanalysis of Memory, Times, Bodies in Space}, ed. Savvy Contemporary (Archive Books, forthcoming).


\textsuperscript{363} Kavwahirehi, “Have We Failed Christianity?” p. 212.

\textsuperscript{364} Ibid.
Christianity caused the cultural death of the Rwandan ways of being in the world, decimating existing life practices that did not separate “its expression in social action, nor readily classified as theological, political, or sociological”.\textsuperscript{365}

If the conditions described above evidence that the institution of Christianity erased the Rwandan rhythms, \textit{imico ya Kinyarwanda}, then Christianity is itself a rhythm. Christianity was essentially deployed as “a powerful tool for the transformation of physical and human spaces” and “as an institution of domestication of bodies and minds, forcing integration into a manner of being, living and thinking presented as the actualisation of a revealed Word, and as the truth and norm of all authentic existence”.\textsuperscript{366}

In part, this fragmentation explains the extraordinary flare in the civil wars and atrocities in Africa in recent years. According to Bujo, “in the genuine African tradition, the genocide in Rwanda would be impossible. Palaver and rites of reconciliation in the name of the ancestors would ensure that the worst would be avoided and peace re-established”. Perhaps “the recognised or concealed genocides, massacres, intercommunity clashes, rape and violence, are… signifiers of the obvious failure”\textsuperscript{367} of modernity, Christianity and other rhythmic apparatuses enforced upon the Africans by colonial governments of before and their contemporary military technocratic surrogates.

Although African Christendom and its Rwandan variants have developed new idioms that differ from those of Roman Christianity, Christendom remains an ideological instrument that is central to the formation of the subject in all aspects of education. Even more so, Christianity and philosophy are linked, and both take on more importance under conditions of recurring violence.


\textsuperscript{366} Kavwahirehi, “Have We Failed Christianity?”, p. 212.

\textsuperscript{367} Bénézet Bujo, \textit{Foundations of an African Ethics}, p. 96, quoted in Kavwahirehi, “Have We Failed Christianity?” p. 212.
As we know, the genocide against the Tutsi is unique, but sadly violence as such is not a single event; it is a recurring condition that attempts to take hold of life. This recurrence means that philosophy only becomes necessary over time, since violence is never consigned to a single event in time. Violence continually ruptures time. “Philosophy” may be continually called upon to account for, to understand and to come to terms with these ruptures: a rupture that has occurred, and the rupture that is coming. A rupture, an exile, is always ahead as well as behind. Philosophy seems to have become even more of a necessity under such conditions.

**Interdictory Exiles of Philosophy**

Isaïe Nzeyimana jokes about how members of the public are often surprised or confused as to why he has chosen to be a philosopher:368 “It is so difficult!” they remark. Nzeyimana retorts that philosophy is difficult because life is difficult! Philosophy is but the narration of the world and, if living was easy, philosophy would be as well.

The type of Christianity which gave form to philosophy in former colonies is a practice of interdictory exiles, symbolised by withdrawal from society, embodied in its demands for seminaries, convents and monasteries. In one way, philosophy in the Great Lakes region laboured under political, moral, ethical and disciplinary interdictions, although some of these interdictions were external to

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368 Isaïe Nzeyimana co-founded and directed the former Nile Polytechnic of Applied Arts, an arts and architecture school located in Huye. Nzeyimana is also a lecturer at the National University of Rwanda, also in Huye, and at the Grand Séminaire Philosophicum in Kabgayi, the only university with a philosophy department in Rwanda. Nzeyimana is the founder and director of ARPHI, the Association Rwandaise pour la Philosophie. Nzeyimana’s main philosophical contributions are in the field of education and political theory. His books are used as textbooks by Rwandan students in the humanities and social sciences. Some of these books include: *Finalités de l’Éducation: essaie d’une anthropologie philosophique au Rwanda* (2000); *Philosophie et rationalités: philosophie de la connaissance, des sciences, de l’homme et de la société* (2010); *L’Afrique et son concept: Penser le développement de l’Afrique avec Hegel* (2017); *Histoire et pragmatisme: Le Rwanda, sur sa route* (2017); *Critique de l’école rendue publique: Recentrer l’école avec Hegel et dans les proximités du temple* (2017); *Philosophie et rationalités Livre I: Introduction générale à la philosophie: Qu’est-ce la Philosophie?* (2018); *Philosophie et rationalités, Livre II: Logique, Méthodologie scientifique et épistémologique: Cohérence, validité et vérité* (2018); and with Josias Semujanga, Faustin Rutembesa, Évariste Ntakirutimana, eds., *Le Manifeste des Bahutu et la diffusion de l’idéologie de la haine au Rwanda, 1957-2007* (2010).
philosophy; for instance, the actual political conditions at the time, exemplified by the oppressive regimes of Juvenal Habyarimana (Rwanda) and Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire/Congo).

At the same time, philosophy already understood itself as an interdictory discourse: it was a form of knowledge forbidden to be studied in “ordinary life”. It also prohibited itself from writing about this “ordinariness” which, in hindsight, was a continual crisis. Philosophy’s role then was to analyse philosophy from within devotional segregation. The predominant role of philosophical practices had been to elucidate particular moments in canonical works by Gabriel Marcel, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Martin Heidegger, or from the perspective of Thomist philosophers.369

During the period of post-independence until the Rwandan genocide (1959–1994), these external and internal interdictions forced philosophy into a metaphysical domain. At first, philosophy saw itself as ethnosophy.

This is thus an ethnographic effort concerned with the aim of asserting the existence of “rationality” in African cultures, as an undertaking opposing the then-dominant European discourse which justified the “civilising missions” partly

on account of the absence of reason in Africans.\footnote{370} Gradually, philosophy became an impenetrable metaphysical empire which saw itself as the master discourse, the discourse of all discourses.

In so doing, philosophy suffered from a principled impotence, by forbidding itself from dialogue with the outside. While philosophising socially might have been prohibited by political authorities at that time, philosophy’s own disciplinary heritage equally prohibited itself from undertaking exterior analysis.

In the previous chapter, I addressed how this “self-exiling” aspect or “strangeness” of philosophy has been expressed in various ways across time. As the reader might recall, I have addressed how political theorist Terence Ball asserts that philosophers were “often outsiders, even complete strangers”, in a sense that differs from the regular use of “stranger”\footnote{371}.

For the sake of clarity, it is worth repeating how, according to Ball, Aristotle wonders “which way of life is more desirable—to join with other citizens and share in the state’s activity, or to live in it like an alien, absolved from the ties of political society?”\footnote{372} There are significant differences between Plato’s alienated philosopher and the theorist envisioned by Aristotle. For Aristotle, the theoretical life can more readily exist independently of the political. Politics and philosophy

\footnote{370 The outstanding work in this regard is by the late Alexis Kagame, a Rwandan philosopher, linguist, historian, poet, and Catholic priest born in Kiyanza in 1912 and died in 1981 Nairobi. His primary philosophical contributions were in the field of “ethnophilosophy” and mainly rest on two works: \textit{La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l’Être} (1956): an analysis of Kinyarwanda and Rwandan culture as it relates to their concept of “being”, and \textit{La Philosophie Bantu Comparée} (1976): a broader study including all the Bantu languages. In these works, Kagame attempts to demonstrate that the structure of Bantu languages reveals a complex ontology that is uniquely African in nature. Achille Mbembe and V.Y. Mudimbe are critical of both indigenism (or what Mudimbe would describe as the derivative nature of Africanist discourse, including its theologians like John Mbiti, its linguists like Alexis Kagame, its ethnophilsophers such as Placide Tempels, and its historians like Cheikh Anta Diop and Joseph Ki-Zerbo), as well as of the “philosopher kings” of the early independence years, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amilcal Cabral, and so on); and of Marxism, which he sees as yet one more version of a universalising “will to truth”. Mudimbe notes that the limits of Marxist-inspired political radicalism were clearly seen in the African countries that adopted Socialist programmes following Independence, and states bluntly: “African socialisms were a mystification and everyone knows it”.

\footnote{371 Terence Ball, “Theory and Practice: An Examination of the Platonic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Political Theory”, \textit{The Western Political Quarterly}, vol. 25 no. 3 (September, 1972), pp. 539–540.}

\footnote{372 Ball, “Theory and Practice”, p. 540, quoting Aristotle, \textit{Politics} 7. 2. § 3.}
are two “ways”. It is not necessary, nor would it be desirable, to subordinate one to the other. In contrast, concerning the role of the individual and the political action, and the foundations of democracy, Plato finds freedom to be the defining characteristic of democracy. Democracy may allow the koinon, “the sharing of friends, property, and family”, but it should also encourage the development of a world of one’s own.\textsuperscript{373}

“Hereditary” philosophy has thus long contemplated the merits or downfalls of removing itself from the world, but so did vocational Christianity, out of which the educational missionary institutions were issued. The previous chapter explored how this development is connected to the period starting from the first century and culminating in the fourth century, which saw the emergence of asceticism and monasticism through the withdrawal of what came to be known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. The chapter also discussed the ascendance of Christianity to the position of imperial power in 380, following the edict of Theodosius that declared a specific form of Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Particularly in the new “West”, the ascendance and centralisation of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire resulted in the gradual “ordering” of all ascetic life practices into “cenobitic” monasteries.

In any case, naming, accounting and defining the levels of social commitment is an age-old concern of paramount importance in both philosophy and theology. In Rwanda, it is as if philosophy placed an obligation on those who studied it to give up on everything other than philosophy, by entering a seminary or convent. Once inside, the philosophical canon is predefined as the only meaning of value. This pre-agreement turns the motions of thought into a predefined circle. I am repeating these details in order to highlight how philosophy is inseparable from theology, and how this intertwinement continues to extend to Rwandan intellect, via the cenobitic order of the missionary forms of education.

Philosophy and theology seem to be entangled in a theoretical circle. In facing this circularity, I return to questioning my own ability to trespass its horizon: I am hardly qualified to author a work of political science, conflict resolution, peace studies or philosophy. As I conceded in the Introduction, even if I were qualified in any of the disciplines required, there would be a horde of theoretical limits opposing my passage. For instance, how to speak against violence from a position—by which I mean acknowledgement—of “complicity” within that same violence? What disciplinary strategies can address such “complicit” narration?

As mentioned in that same Introduction, Nahum Dimitri Chandler teaches that a limit can point out a theoretical metaphor, which could propose a certain “hyperbolic re-narrativization” of the problem at hand, “not only as pasts, but as futures”. A limit then can be seen as a “necessity in the form of a certain finality, even when placed under the mark of death”, which “may well be understood to yet always remain distended in its own possibility”.

In this sense: “limit can only manifest through its other side: possibility. Limit, approached on the order of necessity itself, is still, always, thus already a thought of the future as possibility”. What possibility can arise from the limit of speaking against violence from within a position of “complicity”?

Here I am writing “against” Christianity, yet my name is Christian. I am arguing with philosophy, yet I share most of my intellectual intimacy with Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana. Barthes’s biography, as previously mentioned, is complicit in French imperialism: Barthes’s grandfather Louis-Gustave Binger was “the French explorer and colonial officer who claimed Côte d’Ivoire for France in the 1880s”.Nzeyimana could be said to represent the general intellect formalised through a dual seminary and Hegelian tradition. As outlined above, Christianity is a rationality that contributed to the false raciality at the


heart of the genocide against the Tutsi. In addition, aspects of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s work make him belong to the literary agents that were ideologists of the century-long crimes by Europeans against Africans, who became the object of economic exploitation in the form of slavery, the plunder of their natural resources, forced labour and political subjection. These crimes were given literary accents by thinkers and ideologists, who conducted “a systematic campaign of denigration of the Black Race, so as to reduce its peoples to a sort of biological species that wanders like a somnambulist between human and animal”.

Worse than material denigration, the “West” wanted “to kill Africans spiritually, by denying them the human quality of exercising their intellectual faculties”, for “it is less serious for a people to be exploited economically than to be stripped of the quality of humanity in its own right and, above all, to be forced to believe oneself incapable of being anything other than slaves”. Moreover, it is likely that “slavery and colonisation would not have occurred if the Europeans had not first achieved in their own psyche the step of reducing the quality of a humanity into those they wished enslaved or colonised”. Concurrently, for the exploiters, “it was necessary to convince themselves that ultimately, their captives have no value other than that of a beast of burden or a simple instrument, in order not to have too bad a conscience while abusing them as such”.

376 Longman, Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda.


According to Rwandan philosopher Maniragaba Baributsa, Hegel contributed directly to this forceful globalisation and dehumanisation of reason, developing subdivisions of the epochs of universal history according to the people he wanted to privilege. Hereby, universal history moves from the patriarchal Natural world corresponding to the Eastern world and ascends to the Greek world, and then to the Roman world. History culminates in the autonomous moment of the spirit in the Germanic era or the Christian world.

The Dehumanisation of Life in Philosophy

For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Africa south of the Sahara is nowhere near any of the stages of Universal History: “Africa represents a state of humanity still below the values that constitute History and Civilization”. According to Maniragaba Balibutsa: “Hegel expresses upon Africans a set of very violent ideas… which can practically be summed up in one sentence: ‘Black Africans represent a degree of evolution of humanity still so low that we cannot talk

379 Maniragaba Balibutsa is a late Rwandan philosopher whose last known position was maître de conference at the University of Omar Bongo in Gabon. His main philosophical contributions are in the field of contemporary Rwandan philosophy, resting on two primary works: Les Perspectives de la pensée philosophique Bantu-Rwandaise après Alexis Kagame (1985): a study that attempts to further Kagame’s linguistic and philosophical work; and Une archéologie de la violence en Afrique des grands lacs (Libreville: Editions du CICIBA, 2000): an anthropological and philosophical analysis of violence in Rwanda and neighbouring countries. In his more philosophical work, Balibusta, like Kagame, insists that the Bantu languages reveal ontological structures that defy Western paradigms. Some saw Balibusta as one of the intellectual leaders of Hutu culture before 1994. His other writing includes Les sacrifices humains antiques et le mythe christologique (Kigali: Editions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1983); “Le Mythe des fils de Gihanga ou L’histoire d’une fraternité”, in Les relations interethniques au Rwanda à la lumière de l’agression d’octobre, Genèse, soubassements et perspectives, ed. François-Xavier Bangamwabo (Editions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1990), 61-129; “Le philosophe, conscience du peuple”, in Philosophie africaine et développement, Actes de la 8e Semaine philosophique de Kinshasa, 1984 (Recherches Philosophiques Africaines,10) (Faculté de Théologie Catholique, 1984), 17-25; Le Potentiel ontologique des langues Bantu face à l’ontologie classique (Editions du CICIBA, 2000); Eléments de noographie africaine (Editions du GRESHS, 2003); “La Mobilisation des ressources intellectuelles des peuples dans le règlement et la prévention des conflits identitaires”, in Le Dialogue entre les civilisations: Actes de la Conférence internationale sur le dialogue interculturel et la culture de la paix en Afrique Centrale et dans la région des Grands Lacs, Libreville, Novembre 2003, ed. F.W. Russell (UNESCO, 2003), pp. 343-354.

about history, culture, the state, religion, social institutions in general.” It is “ahistorical”; its “humanity is in a state of barbarism and savagery” and “it is the land of gold, folded onto itself, the country of childhood which, beyond the day of conscious history, remains wrapped in the black colour of the night”.

According to Balibutsa, Hegel’s further elaborations on religion, human relations and political constitution among Africans are similarly “deeply violent” and, in summary, “Hegel exiles Africans forever from the history of human culture, past, present, and future”. Although Hegel’s writings on this subject have long been demystified, it is not indulgent to revisit Hegel’s views here.

One must bear in mind however that Hegel “formulated these [ideas] from the stories narrated by slave traders, who needed to justify their inhuman behaviour, and from the accounts of colonisers and missionaries who also needed to pretend to be heroes or saints in the mind of their peers who remained in Europe”. Hegel’s words about Africa are ultimately but one example, which “summarise the opinions of the ‘white’ world on us during these last centuries”. They reflect the ideology of slavery, colonisation and missionary work, and their reality extends into the post-genocide present. Balibutsa is not the only philosopher who faults Hegel’s wholesale intellectual violence towards the Africans, nor is Hegel the only European philosopher to have formulated similar claims: I can briefly mention Denise Ferreira da Silva’s critique as well as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze’s studies here.

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How do Rwandan philosophers conciliate their existence as “Africans” with their intellectual affection towards Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s and other violent philosophies? Despite its violent expression towards Isaïe Ngeyimana’s own existence, how to account for his attraction to the German idealism Hegel professes, and his elaborations of a comprehensive and systematic philosophy from a purportedly logical starting point?

This is an instance in which “what appears as conflict of rationalities is probably only discomfort (on the part of those who are ‘monorational’”). Indeed, “polyrationality” is one of the effects of colonialism’s imposition of Western methods: Ngeyimana retains “his own” philosophical methods alongside the “Western” ones, and his work motions us to “shift and forth between multiple models”.383 This is because the current and historical forceful realities have materialised new experiences: Islam and Christianity are now also African experiences, in the same way as Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne proposes English, French and Portuguese are also African.384 The reverse question—then, is Hegel also perhaps “African”?—would be pushing too far.

In any case, according to Diagne and Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux, “profusion or multiplicity” that is characteristic of African philosophers “is first and foremost at the level of languages and if there is a connecting point from which the African philosophers draw and maintain the attention and the reflection it is the fact that philosophy speaks all languages, and not only the European ones, those in which the verb “being” plays a grammatical and philosophical role since at least Aristotle”.385 Furthermore, Paulin J. Hountondji is wary of the categorical


distinctions between what is supposedly a purely “African” philosophy, and what is not. Like Kodjo-Grandvaux, Jean-Godefroy Bidima and Diagne, what is at stake in Hountondji’s mind is the creating of “an autonomous debate, not a far-flung appendix to European debates but one that will bring African philosophers together, thus creating within Africa a human ambience in which it will be possible to ask the thorniest theoretical questions”. This is necessarily a physical dialogue that cannot but proceed from geographical, epistemological and cultural encounters. Indeed, for Hountondji:

> The Africanness of our philosophy will not necessarily reside in its themes but will depend above all on the geographical origin of those who produce it and their intellectual coming together. The best European Africanists remain Europeans, even (and above all) if they invent a Bantu “philosophy,” whereas the African philosophers who think in terms of Plato or Marx and confidently take over the theoretical heritage of Western philosophy, assimilating and transcending it, are producing authentic African work. And they are even more authentically African if instead of merely sharing that heritage with their European counterparts, instead of drowning their own discourse in the tumultuous streams of European debate, they decide to subject that heritage first and foremost to the appreciation and criticism of their own fellow countrymen.³⁸⁶

Regardless, the brutalities and extinctions committed in the name of “history”, “modernism” and its “rationality” call for a complete rejection of its rhythms in African societies, cultures and politics. For instance, the possible benefits of Christianity throughout the Great Lakes region pale in the face of the atrocities committed by missionaries, and by Christian (and Muslim) African leaders, and their wilful or manipulated followers. Yet in the wake of these terrible encounters, those tasked with subject formation are still Christians. As exemplified in *Comment vivre ensemble*, two of the philosophers are priests, one is a pastor and further conversations with nuns are forthcoming. So how to understand this contradiction?

This contradiction embodies one of the challenges facing current and future generations of philosophers, educators, artists, policymakers and other civic bodies: how and where to bury the ghosts of defunct modernisms, and the ghosts of its victims?

Now that Christianity has become “African”, where to bury its African ghosts? The ghosts of “our” troubled histories have no resting ground. Some are addressed as living and others are buried in the wrong graves. The “Christian”, the “French”, the “English”, the “Islamic” and the “African” now have ghosts in common, intertwined and fused.

Burying the defunct Christianity would bury the living “African” with it, again in the wrong grave. How to ascribe proper graves to our common ghosts?

Attending to this question could foreground the conflicted historical mutuality and reciprocity in a way that implicates “us”, for example, in thinking negatively—morbidly even, according to Nganang—with Hegel or Christianity, in order to survive it all.387

Sharing Time and Planting Trees

In January 2019, I co-convened a conference with Isaïe Nzeyimana on the occasion of World Philosophy Day, an event organised annually by the National Commission of UNESCO, in collaboration with ARPHI (Association Rwandaise des Philosophes). Myself and Nzeyimana decided on this year’s theme: we focused on the conditions of possibility arising from the imagined or actual relationship between art and philosophy. The conference was hosted by the Grand Séminaire Philosophicum de Kabgayi St Thomas Aquinas.

Guests included Archbishop Smaragde Mbonyintege, Senator Laurent Nkusi, members of the Philosophers’ Association, artists and staff from various universities. The majority of the guests were current students of the Grand Seminary, the future philosophers and priests. The conference was organised following what Nzeyimana and I call the “postcard method”. In the preceding months, we visited artists and philosophers across the country, and held

recorded conversations with them on themes of translation, memory and education.\textsuperscript{388} During the conference—with the use of two simultaneous projections—we screened the resulting audio video fragments from one projector, while highlights from the transcripts of our visits were beamed from the other projector. Nzeyimana animated the room; a microphone circulated, and anyone present could pose questions or offer commentaries, opinions and remarks. At one point, the discussion was on how to define “art”: What translational models are meaningful towards such understanding? Should the artist/philosopher follow the world’s major tendencies, or should they invent solely from the contexts and “languages” of the locale? Archbishop Mbonyintege remarked how concerns about translations had already been considered by earlier generations.

For instance, Alexis Kagame and Aloys Bigirumwami\textsuperscript{389} represent respectively the school of translation and the school of interpretation. This generational repetition led Archbishop Mbonyintege to lament how contemporary artists lack “historical inspiration”. The next speaker to request the microphone was a Natacha Nsengiyumva, a youthful artist and singer, one of the very few women present, who objected to the archbishop’s typifying.

“Why do you consider the singers and artists of your time more inspired than us?” she asked. “Our experience of the world is vastly different from yours, and therefore our artistic delivery cannot be the same. You may not like our forms,

\textsuperscript{388} Our hosts included: artist Epa Binamungu, philosopher and musician Fr Fabien Hagenimana, cinematographer Georges Kamanayo, philosopher and historian Abbé Vedaste Kayisabe, mythologist Rose Marie Mukarutabana, sculptor Jean Sebukangaga, artist Crista Uwase and architect Marie Noelle Akingeneye Uwera.

\textsuperscript{389} Aloys Bigirumwami was the first African Bishop of the Belgian colonies and the sixth African Catholic Bishop. He was born in 1904 and died 1986. He was an adept thinker and pedagogue, who worked tirelessly to reunify Rwandese in his lifetime, in politics, in theology, and in culture. His enormous corpus of manuscripts published by the diocese of Nyundo has focused on the tradition, thought and locution of Rwanda. He is credited with building schools and hospitals in Rwanda, and for promoting girls' education in general, including the first secondary school for girls, and the first and still only remaining school of art, L'École d'art de Nyundo. His writing includes “Les rites rwandais autour de la mort”, in Colloque: Ethique chrétienne et valeurs africaines (Kinshasa, 1969), pp. 40-58; Imigani “timangiro” y'u Rwanda – Les Contes moraux du Rwanda, trans. Bernardin Muzungu (Editions de l’Université nationale du Rwanda, 1987); Paroles du soir, with Pierre Crepeau (Editions David, 2000); Umuntu (L'homme). Vol. I: Jyejyejyewe-Jyejyenyine (Une anthropologie rwandaise traditionnelle); Vol. II: Imibereho y’umuntu (La vie morale traditionnelle) (Diocèse de Nyundo: Manuscript), 1983.
but you cannot accuse us of not being inspired and, therefore, of not having any context”. The archbishop welcomed the artist’s sentiment, but pointed out how her response might imply that she, and the youth she represents, live in a time entirely separate from the time in which the archbishop and his colleagues live whereas, “in truth”, he said, “we all share the same time”.

In the guise of a conclusion, I return to my visit to the Lushois philosophers. Maybe Emmanuel M. Banywesize was discerning: unwittingly, I might have been “accusing” philosophy indiscriminately, in the same way that the archbishop was questioning the “artistic” contribution to society. The encounter between the artist and the philosopher involved “a language that holds us hostage and yet we are the hostage takers”.

It was a “logically absurd” movement of re-affirmation of one’s own limits and contradictions. Supposedly, one of the many “functions” of art is to “heal” the ruptures of history, and to “puncture” a hole in the membrane of the future, so as to make its advent felt in the present. In other words, artworking is to invent the sense of a shared time across geographical expanses and ideological divides. But why does today’s art or philosophy not achieve this?

The underlying question is: why does “art” or “philosophy” not prevent violence? Ultimately, artists and philosophers are reproaching each other for their failure to solve problems that belong to the fields of medicine, education, political science, architecture, history, design, engineering, psychology, anthropology, genocide studies, etc. By artists and philosophers I mean on the one hand colleagues such as Nsengiyumva at the conference, whose sentiments I share in terms of the perception of a growing discursive distance that insists on a recognition of—one on the one hand—a philosophical parenthood.

Is it only art or philosophy that fails in the face of the genocide against the Tutsi? Have not politics, technology, science, journalism (the list is endless) also

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391 Martinon, After “Rwanda”: In Search of New Ethics, p. 280.
relapsed? What aspect of living does not face its limit under such marks of death? I myself have no illusions that mere philosophers or artists are able to save the world! Why blame the inadequacies of entire societies solely on the ethics and the aesthetics of two cultural bodies? Why does Patrice Nganang feel obliged to fault philosophy alone and to only bring philosophy to account? Why did I adopt Nganang’s tone in my address to Banywesize? As we have seen, philosophy is a self-exiling and self-reflexive practice. What else can humanity expect from it? In his essay “Que peut faire la philosophie [What Can Philosophy Do?]” Paulin J. Hountondji clarified the ascetic structure of philosophy I addressed above in Terence Ball’s strangeness: “fundamentally philosophy cannot do much, that the first and most important condition of its efficacity is lucidity. Philosophy is first and foremost a school of lucidity, it is first and foremost a vow of poverty or an avowal of poverty [...] It is only to the degree that we cast off all forms of illusions that we will be able to finally see reality”.392 Therefore, the question of “why cannot philosophy prevent violence”, to use Nganang’s vocabulary, is a question that should be posed by more people in more fields.

Philosophy should not have to answer to the crimes committed outside its field any more than any other discipline should, except in so far as philosophy claims to provide or to be concerned with the foundational questions of essence and existence. If philosophy claims to be a general anthropology of the human, then it does have to answer to all crimes, since other disciplines do not set themselves up as master discourses in the same way. Philosophy claims to answer the question of “why is there evil; why is there evil in the world?”—as does theology. This might explain why Nganang asks the questions he does, and why he manifests an anger towards African philosophers. They cannot have it both ways: their discipline cannot claim to be a master discourse but then its practitioners take offence the moment they are questioned about the uses of such philosophical mastery at the instance of the conception, preparation and execution of violence.

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392 Paulin J. Hountondji, Interview with Abiola Irele, in Research in African Literatures; Winter 1997; 28, 4; Arts & Humanities Database, p. 201.
Perhaps this feeling of a deflated mastery is also what causes the tension between the figure of the artist at the conference and the figure of the philosopher, respectively exemplified by artist Natacha Nsengiyumva and Archbishop Smaragde Mbonyintege. At the heart of the inability to share time identified by Mbonyintege is a failure of transmission of the gift of relations, and perhaps even “parentage”. The possibility of the latter is punctured by the limits of living together resulting in part from the intertwined histories of theology and philosophy. The confrontation between myself and Banywesize and the encounter between artist Natacha Nsengiyumva and Archbishop Smaragde Mbonyintege is a moment in which the negative gift of heritage is increasingly rejected by the figure of the artist who—fatigued by having to constantly respond to the normalisation of the crisis—desires a pre-emptive articulation that befits the post-genocidal condition.

Perhaps it is worth pausing here for a moment and mentioning briefly that today, as I am making the last revisions to this thesis, the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg and her fellow school students are leading a global climate crisis protest. Thunberg is visiting New York, to which she travelled by sailing boat, in order speak at the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 74), scheduled to take place during 17–30 September 2019. I am mentioning this news item to highlight how the narrative surrounding Thunberg’s climate activism against ecocide is marked by a generational formation of a “negative unity of a community”, in which the divide borders a certain kind of parricide: the overcoming of the generation of the parents, whose actions or inactions are causing the catastrophic ecological collapse awaiting every living generation, but whose effects will be longer felt by the younger generations.

To continue, as Kodwo Eshun observed during my supervision meetings, a clever philosopher would relish the challenge against philosophy’s own mastery,

393 Here, I am making a connection between the emerging strikes and the London Riots recounted at the beginning of this thesis in Endnotes, “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Crisis Era Struggles in Britain”, in Endnotes 3: Gender, Race, Class and Other Misfortunes (London: Endnotes, 2013).

a challenge which would not yield answers but reflections. In 2015, during our conversation for my film *Comment vivre ensemble* with philosopher Quinet Obed Niyikiza at his home in Huye (Rwanda), Niyikiza described his understanding of “philosophy” as a task of mutual help in inventing the needed tools for refusing misery. For him, some of the forms in which his refusal of misery manifests itself include running a gardening association.

Niyikiza’s garden is an application of a thought attributed to German theologist Martin Luther. Reputedly, Luther said: “If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would plant a tree”. Should there be survivors, then they would benefit from the fruits of that tree. The soundtrack to the harvest of such fruit is a song whose lyrics are our own critical elegy for our intellectual formation and inheritance as formerly racialised and colonised modernists, post-modernists, Christians, and so on.

If the history of present life really resembles an afterlife, as Nganang suggests, such an encounter between ethics and aesthetics could also take the form of a “self-autopsy” upon one’s own intellectual bodies. To perform such auto-optics, eye-witnessing or seeing for oneself is to accept the burden of conversing outside of one’s own languages, beyond present zones of times or exiles of knowledge. It is writing or conversing as “exploratory surgery”, as Algerian writer

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395 Rev. Dr. Quinet Obed Niyikiza is a pastor ordained in the Anglican Church of Rwanda. He is Deputy Vice Chancellor of Academics and Research at the Christian University of Rwanda in Kigali, and is formally a senior lecturer at PIASS, the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences. He studied in Nyanza in Rwanda; in Yaoundé, Cameroon; and obtained his doctorate from Bamberg University in Germany in 2014. Niyikiza lives in Butare, with his wife and three children. He is the author of *Participative and Active Pedagogy in the Higher Education: A Contribution to the University Teaching and Learning in Rwanda* (Bamberg University, PhD Thesis, 2015).
Christiane Chaulet-Achour approaches Yambo Ouologuem’s *Bound to Violence*.\(^{396}\)

In this instance, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the still growing attraction to religion to this day, even if this falls outside the scope of this writing. British sociologist Benedict Anderson famously narrates that “the extraordinary survival over thousands of years of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in dozens of different social formations attests to their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human suffering”.

For Anderson, religion is able to give answer to “disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death”. It attempts to explain with clarity and continuity pressing questions such as “Why was I born blind? Why is my best friend paralysed? Why is my daughter [ill]?” In contrast, Anderson finds:

> The great weakness of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism, is that such questions are answered with impatient silence. At the same time, in different ways, religious thought also responds to obscure intimations of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.) In this way, it concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation. Who experiences their child’s conception and birth without dimly apprehending a combined connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of ‘continuity’? (Again, the disadvantage of evolutionary/

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396 Christiane Chaulet-Achour, “Writing as Exploratory Surgery: Yambo Ouologuem’s *Bound to Violence*, in *Yambo Ouologuem: Postcolonial Writer, Islamic Militant*, ed. Christopher Wise (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999). As I have previously narrated in “Ideal Syllabus”, an article I published in *frieze*, vol. 192, January-February 2018, the Malian novelist Ouologuem’s first book chronicles an imaginary West African empire called Nakem-Zuiko, that is loosely based on the Dogon region of Mali. It traverses seven and a half centuries until it arrives at the 1960s. On the way it describes the forced Islamization of Nakem-Zuiko, slavery at the hand of the French colonizers and their Christian missionaries, the impact of the First and Second World Wars, the academic life and adventures in Paris of the émigré Raymond Spartacus Kassoumi and his return to postcolonial Nakem-Zuiko. The characters vary throughout the book, but the actual protagonists are the “African masses”. *Le devoir de violence* was awarded the Prix Renaudot in 1968 and translated into English in 1971. It was extravagantly praised by critics for its authenticity but it transpired that Ouologuem—who passed away in October 2017—had plagiarized passages from books by Graham Greene, Guy de Maupassant and André Schwarz-Bart. The ensuing scandal was so riotous that the book was recalled; the English edition now includes the disclaimer: “The Publishers acknowledge the use of certain passages on pages 54-56 from It’s a Battlefield by Graham Greene”. In the introduction to *Yambo Ouologuem: Postcolonial Writer, Islamic Militant* (2000), Christopher Wise asks: “Does Ouologuem’s ‘undeclared’ quotations from Western books deliberately ‘deconstruct’ Western literature, or is he the hapless victim of an irresponsible publisher?” He goes on to declare that that “perhaps no other author of the twentieth century has generated as much deep critical disagreement as Yambo Ouologuem”. pg. 38–39.
progressive thought is an almost Heraclitean hostility to any idea of continuity). 397

These admonitions compel us to rethink rhythm, its religiosity, and its effects on subjecthood, community and governance. How was rhythm understood before Christianity? How is rhythm understood today?

Injyana: Rhythm Before and After Christianity

During the week in which I revised this paragraph I received an email from my colleague artist and curator Aziza Harmel, sent from Tunis where she lives and work. I met Harmel when I was a guest lecturer at the Dutch Art Institute in Arnhem in 2013. Harmel was one of the students following the Publishing Class III: How to Live Together module. She has contributed to my roaming radio project, and I have contributed with an essay to a publication she has edited.\(^{398}\) Harmel mentioned that she had read an essay that draws from this current chapter, published in \textit{e-flux journal} in April 2019.\(^{399}\) Harmel thought that the question of silent philosophers resonated with my previous email to her in which I apologised for my long silence in response to an invitation to contribute to an exhibition she was organising. Harmel mentioned that she was also thinking about the essay in relation to my film \textit{Sometimes It Was Beautiful},\(^{400}\) and perhaps also “in relation to friendship”.

Yes, silence is brutal sometimes. Maybe there is a link between our silence towards each other and the silence of certain generations of African philosophers. I am not comparing, simply saying that it is all entangled.\(^{401}\)

The purpose of this anecdote, this chorus, is to reflect on the question I posed earlier, in a way addressing it to Patrice Nganang: if the esteemed minds from whom we learn have failed in the face of the demands of their times such as the


\(^{399}\) Christian Nyampeta, “In the Black Color of the Night”: Philosophy, Theology and Exile, in \textit{e-flux Journal} #99, April 2019.

\(^{400}\) As a member of the curatorial team, Harmel had viewed my film \textit{Sometimes It Was Beautiful} in preparation for the 12th edition of Bamako Encounters—African Biennale of Photography 2019, to which this research contributes with an installation of that same film. The film was described by Auckland-based curator Balamohan Shingade following Dipesh Chakrabarty’s concept of a “time-knot”. See Chakrabarty, \textit{ Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference} (Oxford/Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 111. In the film, an unlikely group of friends gather to watch little-known films by Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist, which he made in the Congo in 1948–52, following the footsteps of his parents who were Swedish missionaries there. The film is included in the Appendix.

\(^{401}\) Aziza Harmel, “Re: Visiting Leipzig 1–8 June, 2019”, email, received on 5th August, 2019.
Rwandan genocide, how can I, who is merely their student, expect to succeed? This is the central question driving my film *Sometimes It Was Beautiful*. To reiterate my own words recorded in my conversation with curator Maria Lind who commissioned the film at Tensta konsthall in Stockholm in 2018, the film creates a structure in which historical figures are addressed as living today, so that I may see and hear them bearing witness to their own shortcomings and difficulties, which they might not have seen in their time as problems. In other words, the film is really asking: What are we failing to address now? If someone as gifted as Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist “failed” to render justice through his work during a “red hour” in his time, at least in the eyes of some protagonists in the film, what and who are we failing now—we who are quite possibly less gifted than Nykvist? Ultimately, this we is but myself, and the film is really about myself, as a human being alive at this historical moment. I am constantly asking myself what to do and how to intervene in the history of the present, so that, in the future, when I am gone, new, fellow artists will convoke me—not really to ask me difficult questions but to dance together! In her email, Harmel had attached a copy of “In the Presence of the Corpse”, an essay by Lebanese artist and writer Walid Sadek.

This worry encapsulates what Isaïe Nzeyimana describes as rhythm. Further, in my other film *Comment vivre ensemble*, Nzeyimana suggests that to exist is to be generous: existence is a rhythmic bond of *giving-receiving-giving*. He calls this rhythm *injyana*. *Kuïya* means “to go, to walk, to move, to put into motion” and *–na* means “with”. For Nzeyimana, *injyana* contributes to the structuring of religious, pedagogical, social, political and economic bodies. In *injyana*, freedom exists only if the same freedom is extended to the fellow

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abavandimwe: to live is to live with, and existence is the coordination of rhythms.

Politics is the rhythmic deliberation of time and space with the other. Injyana takes hold only if all members of the society have equal access to civic, cultural, economic, legal and legislative provisions. Its sociality presupposes an equality in the ritualisation of memory, in the recognition of differences, and in the redistribution of resources. These “provisions” should also anticipate the needs and arrival of future bavandimwe, who might well be situated beyond this sociality, outside this rhythm. Injyana suggests that generosity, giving-receiving-giving, is the practice of an anticipatory and reciprocal mutuality as the precondition of being.

Nzeyimana’s theoretical analysis echoes the writing of Canadian-Rwandan anthropologist Édouard Gasarabwe. In Le geste Rwanda (1972), Gasarabwe writes:

Rwandans regard the human body as a whole. They believe that every gesture is part of a complex system of expression that draws on the resources of language, memory, tradition, the senses and intuition. Gestures are always full of meaning, and if Rwandans often strike rather statuesque attitudes when they gesticulate, they know exactly what they are doing. They look on their environment as a landscape which is alive with forces and symbols. Against this eloquent backdrop, they repeat again and again gestures that have remained unchanged since the time of Gihanga the Inventor, the mythical figure who is said to have taught them the “correct gestures” they should use in daily life, in rituals and in the practice of trades and crafts. Gihanga is also thought to have shown them the “correct shape,” a combination of beauty and efficiency, for drums, tools and weapons.

From earliest childhood, the young Rwandan learns and gradually memorises “correct gestures,” taking traditional behaviour as a model. Anyone who wants to understand the meaning of these gestures must know about the axes and planes of reference that correspond to the architecture of the human body. Rwandans believe that the vital centre of the body, situated deep in the entrails, at the height of the navel, is the intersection point of three axes: the vertical axis, the left-right horizontal axis, and the front-back horizontal axis. The vertical axis coincides with

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405 Abavandimwe or bavandimwe is the plural of umuvandimwe.

the axis of the World. It plunges downwards beneath the ground, whence lethal forces rise, and reaches upwards towards Heaven, whence life-giving forces descend. This is the axis of life and death. People all over the world have noted that muscular strength and manual dexterity are much more highly developed on the right-hand side of the body than on the left, and modern anatomical and physiological studies have discovered and analysed the biological causes of this phenomenon. The right-left horizontal axis is that of strength and weakness. Observation of the gestures used by Rwandans shows that vision plays a decisive role in the conception of the front-back horizontal axis. A belief that evil creatures fear the human gaze and only attack from behind or under cover of darkness led to the custom whereby a symbolic “backward-looking eye” is opened by making a tonsure at the back of a baby’s head.

Gasarabwe details the movements of the subject and the community in the everyday, in the realm of agriculture, in aural, visual and martial arts. In highlighting how space and movement stem from the “vital centre”, Gasarabwe implies that such rhythms are the equivalent to mores codified in the written language. Finally, Gasarabwe contends:

The body is only alive insofar as it is quickened by biological rhythms and explores space and time by means of rhythmic gestures. For the duration of several moons, attached to its mother’s back, a baby remains in close physical contact with her and continues to feel the rhythms with which it became familiar during its gestation: the music of her respiration, her heartbeat and her speech, the swaying of her body as she walks and performs domestic tasks, the calming language of lullabies.

Later, and indeed at every age, rhythm will punctuate all the Rwandan’s activities, at work and at play. “Technical” rhythms transform raw materials into goods or tools, while the rhythms of song and dance and musical instruments have a power which is exclusively symbolic. This rhythmic aura envelops and transfigures everyday life in Rwanda.

Like all “rhythms”, injyana is also bound to the paradoxes of tradition, the toxic sediments of its social histories and the potentially divisive effects of imposed religiosity surrounding its emergence. In effect, the accuracy and the veracity of these “Rwandan rhythms” is also controversial, because they are recorded within linguistic systems; despite their goodwill, transmission exposes ideological privileges and methodical shortcomings.

For instance, the knowledge about such rhythms is found in the work of the earliest African “philosophical” traditions of Rwandan priest and writer Alexis
Kagame, in which, according to Jean-Paul Martinon, an attempt is made to explore knowledge in its linguistic aspects through the author’s focus on Kinyarwanda and a number of famous Rwandan myths.

This “ethnophilosophical” work of Kagame and his colleagues puts forward a specifically “Rwandan” philosophy, drawing from linguistic analysis of Kinyarwanda. In so doing, Kagame, as well as his compatriot Maniragaba Balibutsa, insist that the Bantu languages, to which Kinyarwanda belongs, “reveal ontological structures that defy Western paradigms”.

However, Kagame’s method has been heavily critiqued and dismissed. “For example, [...] it is not authentically Rwandan (Harries, Vidal), it is written for the other (Hountondji, Diaw), and it is simply intuitive and unsystematic (Towa, Eboussi-Boulaga)”. Indeed, Beninese philosopher and politician Paulin J. Hountondji finds that such “philosophy is written for the other”. For Hountondji, “the hypothesis of linguistic relativity is fruitful only within certain limits, and cannot, in any way, base the ideological thesis of an ‘African philosophy’”.

Because the conceptual pitfalls of ethnophilosophy have been fiercely and conclusively discussed, I am mentioning such sources of recording of these “Rwandan rhythms” only in order to avoid generalising my description of “idios” and “rhythm”. *Imico ya Kinyarwanda*, the Rwandan rhythms erased by Christianity are not the “Rwandan” variety of *idiorrhythmy*. Nzeyimana’s conception of rhythm as *injyana* is different from *imico ya Kinyarwanda*. However, *injyana* is not *idiorrhythmy* either; more about this point follows below.

Rather, *imico ya Kinyarwanda* are cultural practices, which were ways of answering the questions described by Benedict Anderson: these practices are partially hypothetical because they are idealised through education and oral

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407 Jean-Paul Martinon, *After “Rwanda”*, p. 27.


literatures. *Imico ya Kinyarwanda* are also partially anthropological, or once actual, because they were practised and maintained in society and because their erasure by Christianity was effectively felt as the “cultural death”. As Roland Barthes would say, it is the “rhythmic medium” of Christianity and modernity which erased these *imico ya Kinyarwanda*, which teach us about the Rwandan rhythms described by Gasarabwe. These were sets of knowledge “constructed from a collective and unconscious vision of the world, from an unformed wisdom that underlies our customs, from our social organisation, from our myths and legends, and even from the structures of our languages”.410

I am therefore not eulogising the “cultural death” of these rhythms in order to write a myth of a uniquely “Rwandan” philosophy of “rhythm” that “exhumes with veneration the thought of [my] ancestors, and the collective worldview of [my] peoples”, in such a way that I am “obsessed with defining Africa in relation to Europe, all the while, through this stubborn reference, linking it to the cultural model from which it claims, paradoxically, to liberate itself”.411

This does however lead me to the question, in what way does the rhythmic mediality of *imico ya Kinyarwanda* contrast to Nzeyimana’s description of rhythm as *injyana*? The ethnosophists insisted that any given language, in this case Kinyarwanda, can reveal ontological structures radically different to the Western ontological paradigms. As mentioned above, this claim formed the primary objection raised by the critics of ethnosophy.

For instance, again, Hountondji rightly exhorts us to question such hypothesis that linguistic “descriptions are able to constitute an ontology as such”. This would mean that “there is no ontology in general, but as many ontologies as there are languages or language families practiced in the world, which ‘coincide with the grammars of these languages’”. Therefore, the difference between *imico ya Kinyarwanda* and *injyana* as suggested by Nzeyimana is that such relativist claim in which *imico* are recorded differs from Nzeyimana’s


411 Ibid. My emphasis.
philosophical position. I will address the exact position of Nzeyimana in the next chapter.

In the meantime, I am compelled to conclude that *imico ya Kinyarwanda* is effectively also a rhythmic medium. If, according to Barthes, power derives its endurance and ubiquity from “language”, then *imico ya Kinyarwanda* is nurtured as “a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of [Rwandan] history”. However, the speculation of this analogy does not mean that the erasure of the extant *imico ya Kinyarwanda* by Christianity as the rhythm of enforced modernity was any less violent or any less genocidal.
The Speculative Position of Injyana in Philosophy

In Chapter One, I explored how in the histories of “Western” philosophy which engendered Christianity, such as the Greek ῥυθμός (ῥυσμός in Ionian), transliterated as *rhuthmós*, rhythm meant a “distinctive form, disposition and proportion”, a way, or a manner of flowing, of doing or unfolding, of becoming. Rhythm is the transitional disposition of something animated, such as the form of a movement, the form of an attitude, a form of life, but also someone’s character or nature.\(^4\)

I made a suggestion that there may be three traditions of rhythm. One tradition reads rhythm structurally in rendering reality in its totality. For this tradition, rhythm is an index of differences. This reading includes Aristotle, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Émile Benveniste, Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. This structuralist approach sees rhythm as a telescopic device with which to make inventories of reality from outside.

Another likely tradition considers rhythm as a means of describing experience and phenomena from within reality. Here, rhythm is an emancipatory, exteriorising and interventional force. This tradition includes Giorgio Agamben, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari and perhaps also Roland Barthes’s *idiorrhythm*. This viewpoint uses rhythm equally as an apparatus to study reality, but from within its interior.

A possible third tradition regards rhythm as a generative work of invention. Rhythm can support the emergence of a new subject and a new reality. This reading may include Luce Irigaray and Iris van der Tuin; by Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Souleymane Bachir Diagne; in the break of Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten; in the waywardness of Saidiya Hartman, etc. Perhaps *injyana* as genesis of being in common can be understood in these terms?

Even so, like all rhythms, *injyana* remains bound to the paradoxes of tradition; the toxic sediments of its social histories, and the potentially divisive effects of imposed religiosity surrounding its emergence. These paradoxes or limitations of *injyana* may help to “provincialize”, that is, decentralise the dominance of Christianity as the rhythm of modernity.\(^{413}\)

_Injyana_ is but one of the plural synonyms of rhythm, of a possible flow of life, which bespeaks “of the plurality which makes up any given history”.\(^{414}\) In this way, perhaps _injyana_ can offer meditations on the limits of forceful modernities, history and subjection. Inevitably, thinking through _injyana_ is first and foremost a self-criticising practice of learning about the limits of our own intellectual histories, and their roles in the formation of a supposedly universal subject and its institutions.

_Injyana_ is, in space and particularly perhaps in time, the bond of our intellectual formation and inheritance as formerly racialised, colonised, modernists, postmodernists, Christians, and so on. _Injyana_ seems to embody and, at the same time, contest the presence of historical and current realities such as Christianity and other destructive rhythms of “reason” or “progress” that amount in devastatingly standardising manifestations to be enforced upon the African subject. Furthermore, *injyana* itself is standardising and uniformising. To paraphrase the French philosopher Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux again, perhaps what is at stake in this cohabitation of both flawed and promising histories, knowledge and feelings, is the making of “indiscipline”, understood as a “transgression of disciplinary boundaries rather than a ‘disintegration of disciplines’”.\(^{415}\)


\(^{414}\) Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux, “Effets de miroir”.

Ethical Implications of *Injyana* in Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana

From the scholarship above, we learn that even priest-philosophers themselves—such as Bénézet Bujo—are compelled to conclude that the brutalities committed in the name of Christianity as the rhythm of modernity call for a complete rejection of Christianity in African societies, cultures and politics. The possible benefits of Christianity throughout the Great Lakes region pale in the face of the atrocities committed by the missionaries, and by Christian (and Muslim) African leaders and their willful or manipulated followers.

At the same time, in the wake of these terrible encounters with modernity’s devastating rhythm, those tasked with subject formation are still Christians. As exemplified in *Comment vivre ensemble*, two of the philosophers are priests, one is a pastor, and further conversations with nuns are forthcoming.

At the same time, we learn that the current and historical forceful realities have materialised new experiences: Islam and Christianity are now also African experiences, in the same way as Souleymane Bachir Diagne proposes English, French and Portuguese are also African. Perhaps then, provocative questions—such as, is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel also “African”?—constitute the intellectual ecology of forceful historical intertwinement, in which the life and work of philosophers such as Isaïe Nzeyimana are nurtured.

In the next chapter, we will see how Nzeyimana thinks of one’s own rhythm, within the polyrational ecologies of thought of intertwined Christianity and philosophy and post-genocide. We shall see how, for Nzeyimana, rhythm is generosity, a flux of giving-receiving-giving, as the practice of an anticipatory and reciprocal mutuality as the precondition of being. We shall then explore the ethical implications of Nzeyimana’s rhythm, in dialogue with Roland Barthes’s rhythmicisation of letting-being-letting.

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Chapter 3: Giving-Receiving-Giving: Memory, Economy and Education in the Writing of Isaïe Nzeyimana

In the previous chapter I tried to provide an overview of the intellectual ecology in which Isaïe Nzeyimana lives and works. I tried to describe this ecology of thought through distorting and expanding on the notion of polyrationality, and by supplementing this with Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux’s notions of the multiple, the encounter, the composition and the profusion. These notions designate conditions resulting from the effects of the current and historical forceful realities that have materialised new experiences, caused in part by the complexities of existence ushered in by the imposition of Western ways of seeing the world. However, these notions also designate methods and modes of crossing these impositions.

At the same time, as explored in the previous chapters, in the wake of the Rwandan genocide, Cameroonian writer Patrice Nganang implicates not only the West but, more importantly, what had gone under the name of African philosophy until that point. Specifically, I attempted to raise this question: why does the figure of the African and, in particular, the Rwandan philosopher think as s/he does? Although I have not explicitly stated this question as such, it is what has motivated me to chart the intellectual histories inherited by the figure of the Rwandan philosopher from the systems of knowledge and religiosity that emerged nearly two thousand years ago in the Egyptian deserts.

This long history accounts in a large part for the globalising imposition—although singular, it is plural, like a legion—that was mobilised through various forms of colonial subjugation and, to this day, the intellectual legacies are actual, not least through the effects of the Christianisation of most forms of Rwandan religiosity. According to Indian-Ugandan historian Mahmood

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Mamdani, the regime of colonial violence has always been genocidal. Mamdani outlines how, for instance, General Lothar von Trotha—a central figure in the German occupational forces who had gained a reputation “for his brutal involvement in the suppression of the Chinese Boxer Rebellion in 1900”\(^\text{420}\)—was also “a veteran of bloody suppression of African resistance to German occupation in Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania”.\(^\text{421}\) General Trotha described “his own methods of colonial warfare: ‘The exercise of violence with crass terrorism and even with gruesomeness was and is my policy. I destroy the African tribes with streams of blood and streams of money. Only following this cleansing can something new emerge, which will remain.’”\(^\text{422}\) Furthermore, for Mamdani, “The genocidal impulse to eliminate an enemy may indeed be as old as organized power”. This is already recorded in the Bible, where “God instructed his Old Testament disciples through Moses, saying”:\(^\text{423}\)

> Avenge the children of Israel of the Medianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people. And Moses spake unto the people saying, Arm ye men from among you for the war, that they may go against Median, to execute the LORD’s vengeance on Median.\(^\text{424}\)

Presently, the wider effects of this annihilation of life have morphed into global forces of economic, military and technocratic dominations, and these supremacies manifest themselves in forms of incredible localised violences such as those experienced in Rwanda and in the Congo in the past 25 years.

It is those violences that I have addressed as the limits of living together. In Nahum Dimitri Chandler’s thought, a limit \textit{can} point out a theoretical metaphor, which could propose a certain “hyperbolic re-narrativization” of the problem at


\(^{421}\) Ibid.


\(^{423}\) Ibid.

hand, “not only as pasts, but as futures”. In the case of Nzeyimana’s “thinking ecology”, the metaphor to which this limit points is the Rwandan genocide: it is “a metaphor for postcolonial violence”, as described by Mamdani. The experience of these limits co-exists with extant conditions of life: despite the forceful impositions with which new global experiences have manifested themselves in the local conditions, the register of what can be considered “African’s own” has expanded. For instance, English, French, Islam and Christianity are considered by Souleymane Bachir Diagne and by Kasereka Kavwahirehi as African experiences.

As suggested in the Introduction and in the previous chapter, this intertwining means that “thinking Rwanda” necessarily involves “thinking Congo”, and thinking Congo involves thinking Arusha, thinking Sahara, thinking The Hague and thinking the “West”.

If so, in what way can an ethics of one’s own exist within the worldly and globalising mutuality, or bond, proposed as the ethical imperative in Nzeyimana’s rhythm of giving-receiving-giving? How does Nzeyimana retain “his own” philosophical methods in mutuality with “Western” and “global” ones? Is Nzeyimana’s intellectual horizon desiring to retain a “Rwandan’s own” philosophical method? Does this separation even exist? If so, should it exist?

**Askēsis of Thought: Becoming Pregnant with Oneself**

Addressing the questions above invites another question: despite the impressive literature already existing in 2007 when Patrice Nganang wrote his *Manifeste*, why does Nganang insist on an absence of philosophical responses to the Rwandan genocide? To reflect on this, we must first briefly consider what

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“philosophy” really is or means, before looking at the pre-2007 literature on the genocide. This reflection is fortuitous as it also helps to address my interest in the work of Isaïe Nzeyimana.

The previous chapter made a brief mention of what Paulin J. Hountondji thinks philosophy “can do”. For Hountondji, “[p]hilosophy is first and foremost a school of lucidity, it is first and foremost a vow of poverty or an avowal of poverty”. I understand Hountondji’s poverty not in terms of lack of material possessions, but in the ascetic terms of the eremitic withdrawal, the desertion from the familial bonds addressed in the First Chapter. It is an anachôrēsis that seeks to cultivate one’s own mind for the benefit of the world: it is an articulation against a unanimity, regardless of its contours or emergence. For Hountondji, “[i]t is only to the degree that we cast off all forms of illusions that we will be able to finally see reality”.

In this sense, philosophy is an attempt to “prevent violence”, since violence is an injury to reality. This prevention of violence is exercised through the maintenance of a pre-emptive praxis which happens principally through mobilising the faculty of intellect and applying it to the work of reflection. In a renowned discussion of etymology recorded by Plato in Cratylus, Socrates and Hermogone are engaged in discussion when Socrates suggests that the Greek word for “man”—gendered and singular—is ἄνθρωπος anthrôpos, which derives from ἀναθρεῖ ὁπως “anathrôn ha opôpe: one who reflects on what he has seen”. This reflection implies insight, foresight and intelligence, and this awareness comes about through philosophy, that is through questioning.

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428 Paulin J. Hountondji, Interview with Abiola Irele, in Research in African Literatures; Winter 1997; 28, 4; Arts & Humanities Database. p. 201.

429 Paulin J. Hountondji, Interview with Abiola Irele, in Research in African Literatures; Winter 1997; 28, 4; Arts & Humanities Database p. 201.

As Chapter Two explored, the history of philosophy in Rwanda is intertwined with the histories of the seminaries, and even today only the Grand Séminaire Philosophicum de Kabgayi offers philosophical education. In the Séminaire's journal Areopage, Rwandan philosopher and priest Pierre-Célestin Ngoboka outlines how this attribute becomes “a questioning about one’s own being” because “the human experiences need to answer to the problem of her/his identification to the world”.

From this emerges a whole set of questions: the first is normally of genetic order (where do I come from?); the second is of eschatological order (where do I go?). This question never leaves behind the following, of ethical character (with what means? What to do in order to get there?). Then follows a question that is fundamentally metaphysical (why my being instead of my non-being?), which is followed by the most complex of all and of a type that is specifically anthropological (who is really this human that I am?).

I became absorbed in the last question in August 2013 when I met Nzeyimana for the first time. It was also the first time I had been to Rwanda since relocating to the Netherlands in 1999. The visit was made possible by a travel budget from Casco in Utrecht, in connection with the first exhibition of this research.

I had travelled from Amsterdam to Nairobi where I stayed with colleagues in order to reflect on the question of “return”, by attempting to learn more about the conditions in which Kenyan philosopher and novelist Ali A. Mazrui had written The Trial of Christopher Okigbo. The novel narrates a fictional trial of the late Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo who, upon his death, is put on trial in the “Hereafter”. There is confusion about how Okigbo should spend his eternal life in “After Africa”. According to the prosecution, Okigbo’s life in the “Herebefore” was a contradiction: the poet confused universal heroism with parochial martyrdom. For example, when thousands of artists, musicians, performers and


432 As explored in the Appendix, my activities related to my exhibition How to Live Together at Casco in Utrecht run from February until December 2013, and the exhibition itself opened in September 2013.

writers from across Africa and its diaspora had gathered in Dakar (Senegal) to take part in the inaugural World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, Okigbo had received the First Prize for Poetry, but had rejected it, declaring: “There is no such thing as Negro Art!” Art has no nation and no race, and yet Okigbo died on the battlefield the following year, fighting for Biafra, seeking cessation from the Nigerian state.

The book contorts time, moving across spectrums of infinity. In part, this results in an explanatory tone, but perhaps that is its quality. I am uncomfortable with how the novel is traditionally gendered, like many other novels of that era, but it is resourceful in thinking about the afterlife of nations in terms of geography, history and what is yet to come.

While in Nairobi I did not make much progress in terms of learning about Mazrui, but his novel remains referential to many of the works I have produced since, including my film Life After Life produced in Jerusalem in 2016, and Anachoresis, an audiovisual essay developed during this same first visit to Rwanda. The audiovisual narration of this essay was conceived as a one-time only screening at How to Live Together, my research exhibition at Casco in 2013 mentioned above.

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434 Life after Life is a film commissioned by Frontier Imaginaries and presented at the Jerusalem Show IIIIV. It is a short sequel to Ousmane Sembene’s film Guelwaar (1993), in which a man is buried in the wrong grave. My film commences as he wakes up in the wrong heaven, and must learn how to live together in these unforeseen circumstances.

435 Anachoresis is a one-time only audiovisual essay developed in the context of the research programme of How to Live Together at Casco’s Storefront in 2013. The audiovisual narration was composed as a visual assemblage punctuated by an essayistic recital. The narration resulted from a roaming period of social and artistic encounters that reflect on living and living together in the wake of a societal collapse, by focusing on the figures of the departure, the return and the reception. The film asks: How can we leave our beloved ones with such joy? Rwanda—the final destination of this journey—is experienced by the narrator as a menacing but nevertheless elementary satellite from which the narrator is exiled. This satellite is perceived as an entity that still exert a gravitational force towards the present of the narrator. Returning here is then a double-bind movement of entering and exiting possibly known but no longer familiar atmospheres. The image visits a number of places both regional and distant to the narrator, where burying sites are located in which collective graves are assembled. The recital takes the form of an incantation, narrated through a process of translation, adaptation and invocation of Sharing the World (2008) by Luce Irigary, Le départ (2005) by Nimrod Bena Djangrang, The Trial of Christopher Okigbo (1971) by Ali Mazrui and Season of Migration to the North (1966) by Tayeb Salih.
To return to my journey, from Kenya, I travelled by road to Kigali and Ruhengeri (Rwanda), via Kampala (Uganda). Once in Rwanda I visited my family and old friends. I then journeyed on from Kigali by Horizon, a privately-operated bus company, and met Nzeyimana at a bus stop outside Butare in a city now called Huye. Nzeyimana then drove me around in a white Toyota Landcruiser, characteristic of the fleets of the UN Missions the jeep was decommissioned from. Nzeyimana had bought the Landcruiser and imported it from Goma, the Congo. Butare is a historic town, famous for its National University, today called the University of Rwanda. Butare is also known for its proximity to Nyanza where the ancient Rwandan Kingdom was seated—a proximity which accounts for the settlement of the earliest churches and monasteries by the White Fathers, and for the still-existing historical buildings dating from the arrival of the Germans in 1901 until Rwandan independence from Belgian rule in 1959. Finally, Butare is famous for its national park and for neighbouring Burundi.

The day was coming to an end and we passed by the regional health centre to meet Emerance—Nzeyimana’s spouse and a medical officer. We continued the tour together with Emerance and settled for a meal. I was lodged at Ibis Hotel, a colonial-era establishment with memorable architecture resembling that of a monastery and a country post office. We sat in the garden of the hotel underneath a guava tree for the remainder of the evening and discussed the question of how to live together in its various guises.

During the nearly 15 years since I had moved away, my Kinyarwanda had severely deteriorated. Unlike the family members, the new and old friends and the colleagues I had met during my visit thus far, Nzeyimana was acutely accommodating by moving between languages.\footnote{During the lectures at the Collège de France in 2016 already mentioned earlier, Alain Mabanckou gave a historical overview of “African” literature, and this includes a novelistic treatment of the question of immigrations, understood in its plurality. Mabanckou pointed to the figure of the “African” who returns “home” after a period of living abroad for studies or other reasons. Upon this return, the figure is beset by qualms about her or his language and place in the world. I am aware of this literature and I am aware that I might be caricaturing myself by drawing attention to my own linguistic exhaustion. See: Alain Mabanckou, Lettres noires : des ténèbres à la lumière, “Les grandes thématicques de la littérature d’Afrique noire francophone”, Session of 05 April 2016. https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/alain-mabanckou/course-2016-04-05-14h00.htm. Accessed 14 July 2016.} My other interlocutors acted
like the security agents at the ports of entry, who were intent on matching my last name to their preconceived notion of what they thought my identity should be. These people insisted on correction and interpolation: “You do not remember this building? You do not know what this was before?”

The object of such interpolation, which even registered in their salutations and valedictions, was an inadvertent exercise of power. To invoke Roland Barthes, what is at play here is the maintenance of the self-enforcing powers in the plural, like a legion of demons. Chapter One discussed how the plurality of power extends in social space and is “symmetrically perpetual in historical time” and, within such encounters, I could see how this power derives its endurance and ubiquity from “language” which, again for Barthes, is “a parasite of a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of [human] history and not only to political, historical history”.

The aim was thus to bring back the unchanged conversant they had known or heard of and to enforce a familial cohesion. I was touched by this insistence and inclusion in a way, but my mode of comprehension and expression in Kinyarwanda had shifted from fluent speech to reverberation and echolocation: I was lingering on words in order to grasp their paleonymic meaning—as Jacques Derrida and Nahum Dimitri Chandler would say—to such an extent that I would lose the thread of the conversation. By focusing on a single word or phrase I relapsed into the realm of reflection and translation—a mode that proceeds by absence, instead of conversation, which demands presence. These are the points of contention or limits addressed in the Introduction: the narration or story, the medium or means by which to narrate the said story, and the presence or absence of the body that narrates such story. But most importantly, the linguistic fluency of such narration meant civility, historicity, association, acquiescence and the recognition of shared values. Instead, I was putting into question the obviousness of such bond by dint of my own incomprehension of Kinyarwanda.

In a way, I had become idiosyncratic: I was interested in understanding a vocabulary that I had never known while growing up. My distance from the ideospheres of Rwanda had engendered in me a new discursive enquiry
characterised by an intense, interior proximity with Kinyarwanda. It was intense because it was interior. During my visit, every encounter solicited a philological excursion. I would say: “I now notice that muramuke—good night—means may you survive!” This development was captured by Nzeyimana’s remark when he observed that I had been pregnant with myself. Being pregnant with oneself is anachôrêsis. It is an ascetic act of rebirth and reconstitution.

From this condition I became interested in a new syntax of living together: What is philosophy in Kinyarwanda? What is art in Kinyarwanda? What is rhythm in Kinyarwanda? This idiorrhythmic and translative dialogue became the very method of enquiry for this research: in the period 2013 to 2019, I have organised conferences about rhythm, about art and about philosophy from these initial questions. Some of these conferences were co-organised with Nzeyimana, and others have featured recorded conversations we have held since.

Therefore, this chapter studies Nzeyimana’s notion of ubuvandimwe (from the same womb) through the transcription, the translation and the annotation of the dialogues, conversations and conferences which I have convened in collaboration with Nzeyimana. Similar to the transcription and the translation of Barthes’s lectures at the Collège de France, this activity has allowed me to better study Nzeyimana’s work, and also to constitute a community of practice by setting up working groups for the purposes of the collective translation and annotation of Nzeyimana’s writing. In particular, this chapter draws from my transcript and translation of Nzeyimana’s audio recording of his lecture at Kabgayi Philosophicum on 24 July 2018, to which I contributed as a respondent. It also looks at the notes Nzeyimana took in preparation for that occasion.

Notably, I have convened these working groups in different formations at Grazer Kunstverein in Graz, in the context of my exhibition Words after the World (2018); at Slought Foundation in Philadelphia in the context of my exhibition Penser l’Afrique (2018); at the Museum of Contemporary Art GfZK in Leipzig, in the context of my exhibition A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow (2019); and at SculptureCenter in New York, in the context of my exhibition École du soir (2019).

437 Notably, I have convened these working groups in different formations at Grazer Kunstverein in Graz, in the context of my exhibition Words after the World (2018); at Slought Foundation in Philadelphia in the context of my exhibition Penser l’Afrique (2018); at the Museum of Contemporary Art GfZK in Leipzig, in the context of my exhibition A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow (2019); and at SculptureCenter in New York, in the context of my exhibition École du soir (2019).
This chapter also draws from “Éxister c’est être en dette: Des calculs du monde humain à la philosophie et à la poésie sociale”, a lecture that was delivered at Our Common Ghosts, a conference I convened as part of my contribution to Space Force Construction, the exhibition programme held in Venice in May 2017, curated by V-A-C Foundation in Venice, together with The Art Institute of Chicago. Space Force Construction examined “the role of art and its relationship to society”, in the face “of major social and historical transformation, as seen during the years of the [October] Revolution. Artists of that time directly participated in the construction of new institutions and in the reorganisation of public and private space, recognising art’s potential to bring about social change. While the impact of the work produced by artists during that historic moment is widely recognised, the exhibition considers how their ideas have been developed over the course of the twentieth century and what form they take today”.438 The respondent to the conference was artist and researcher Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa.

This chapter also draws from three works: a volume about memory, Histoire et pragmatisme: Le Rwanda, sur sa route (2017); a volume about economy, L’Afrique et son concept: Penser le développement de l’Afrique avec Hegel (2017); and Critique de l’école rendue publique: Recentrer l’école avec Hegel et dans les proximités du temple (2017) which engages with education.

Finally, this chapter draws from a forthcoming volume by Nzeyimana co-authored with myself about art and society. The book results from our collaborative work in which, through our postcard method, we drive in Nzeyimana’s white Toyota across Rwanda, visiting artists and philosophers, and staging recorded conversations with our hosts on themes of translation, memory and education. Our hosts included artist Epa Binamungu; philosopher and musician Fr. Fabien Hagenimana; cinematographer Georges Kamanayo; philosopher, linguist and historian Abbé Vedaste Kayisabe; mythologist Rose-Marie Mukarutabana; lyricist Sophie Nzayisenga; sculptor Jean Baptiste

Our hosts included: artist Epa Binamungu, philosopher and musician Fr Fabien Hagenimana, cinematographer Georges Kamanayo, philosopher and historian Abbé Vedaste Kayisabe, mythologist Rose Marie Mukarutabana, sculptor Jean Sebukangaga, artist Crista Uwase, and architect Marie Noelle Akingeneye Uwera.\(^{439}\)
Subjective Overview of Writing After “Rwanda”

How does *ubuvandimwe*—from-the-same-womb—address memory, economy and education in the wake of Patrice Nganang’s and Michael Syrotinski’s characterisations of the historical present as a political reality of the post-colonial and the post-genocide? Isaië Nzeyimana certainly contributes to the large amount of literature that emerged in the wake of the Rwandan genocide, but I believe that his work stands out from most of the other efforts in this area, the majority of which “are testimonies and monographs aiming at the factual description of the genocide and the post-genocide political climates”. In order to contextualise the singularity of Nzeyimana’s operation, a brief survey of the literature about the Rwandan genocide focusing on the time of the apparition of Nganang’s *Manifeste* would be helpful, as a way to differentiate this literature from Nzeyimana’s project and, by extension, my own.

In one of the earliest studies about the Rwandan genocide, British literary theorist Nicki Hitchcott starts off by pointing out how the horrors of the genocide “are often described as being beyond our imagination”. Hitchcott quotes Rwandan novelist Gilbert Gatore, whose “narrator warns us in a fictionalized description of genocidal killing [that] what happened in Rwanda ‘surpasses any horror or cruelty that even the most depraved mind might picture’”. For Hitchcott, this makes such writing “a paradoxical genre insofar as it attempts to imagine that which it is impossible to imagine”. Hitchcott is addressing “genocide fiction” in particular here, but her argument also relates to other literary genres. For Hitchcott writing in 2014, “[d]espite what is generally acknowledged as the unimaginable nature of the Rwanda Genocide, a growing

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443 Ibid.

444 Hitchcott, “Memorial Stories”, p.54.
number of creative writers have attempted to construct their own, imagined versions of what happened in 1994 through commemorative works of fiction”. I should add testimonies here.

The earliest but still-dominant historical accounts of the Rwandan genocide have tended to emphasise the enormity of the violence and to implicate the Western abandonment of the victims, while also sketching a historical background that includes the social distortions exacerbated by the religious and administrative subjugation of the colonial rules.\textsuperscript{445} In effect, the seminal text by Gérard Prunier was allegedly first published in English because of the enduring censorship of the role of the French government in the genocide.\textsuperscript{446} The earliest journalistic accounts by foreign correspondents attempted to give voice to the survivors, to the victims and subsequently to the children of the survivors and sometimes also to the perpetrators.\textsuperscript{447} Volumes detailing the role of Christianity in the Rwandan genocide also emerged around that time.\textsuperscript{448} There is a small amount of controversial writing that questions the dominant and official discourse on the Rwandan genocide and puts it in a wider context that

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\textsuperscript{446} According to Nicky Hitchcott, “Gerard Prunier’s important study, \textit{Rwanda: le génocide}, was originally published only in English because he was unable to find a publisher in France”. See: Hitchcott, “A Global African Commemoration”, p.155.


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implicates the current Rwandan government and its roles in the regional wars in the Congo and further afield.\textsuperscript{449}

Most of the first novels about the genocide were written in French. Early works emerged in 1998 when the writing workshop “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire” [Rwanda: Writing by Duty of Memory] was conceived by FestAfrica, an annual “Lille-based festival of African literature and culture” ran by Chadian poet Nocky Djedanoum.\textsuperscript{450} The workshop strived to write the genocide into memory and to archive its effects in the collective African and world literature. It was a time in which the genocide against the Tutsi was still largely unacknowledged on a global stage, and one of the goals was to insist on the scale of the atrocities in order to gain recognition for them as a genocide. FestAfrica thus invited ten writers to visit Rwanda for a writing residency in July and August 1998. In the following years, the writers published their impressions in their respective novels, travel accounts and collections of poems.\textsuperscript{451} The literature that emerged from the “Écrire” workshop aimed at putting “an


emphasis on encouraging the continuing processes of memory rather than on recording and fixing memories in the past”.\textsuperscript{452}

At the same time, literary theorists Odile Cazenave and Patricia Céléri note the present historical epoch of “memory” in contemporary Francophone literature where, “[m]emory epitomises francophone African literature at the turn of the twenty-first century just as ‘denunciation’ epitomised that of earlier generations”.\textsuperscript{453} Further, “what matters is not so much the preeminence of the theme of memory but the ways in which memory has been represented by the writers and in turn framed by critics”.\textsuperscript{454} In this regard, “[o]ne could consider that the current prevalence of the theme of memory is a new stage in the redefinition of the role of the African writer as the historian of her/his continent. Denunciation, myth, and memory thus come to manifest three different relationships to the writer’s historical context”.\textsuperscript{455}

For French cultural critic Éloïse Brezault, “Fest’Africa texts can be read as a deterritorialized act of memorialisation with an emphasis on the agency of the reader, able to question and comment on what is described to him/her”.\textsuperscript{456} In some ways, this emphasis on the active memorisation of the Rwandan genocide defines most works on the subject by journalists, Rwandans and foreigners. Furthermore, the initial wave was aimed at a “readership […] located outside of Rwanda”\textsuperscript{457} and evidence of this intention remains in most of the literature, as “the ‘memory-traces’ that exist between Africa and Europe” initially evoked through “the Fest’Africa project also [reflect] on memory as a more global and transnational phenomenon and [allow] us to question the positionality of those who want to remember”.\textsuperscript{458} This aspect therefore tends to

\textsuperscript{452} Hitchcott, “Memorial Stories”, p. 59.


\textsuperscript{454} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid., p. 59.


\textsuperscript{457} Hitchcott, “Memorial Stories”, p. 61.

characterise the works of fiction written outside Rwanda, and the overall issues they raise about memory, the role of fiction in commemoration and the merits of literature are discussed in the corpus that engages with the subject of literature and testimony. 


The earliest testimonials by Rwandans besides the two authors included in the “Écrire” workshop were published by women authors, while the novels were published by men, some of whom were still living in exile at that point. These novels also engage with the role of the Catholic Church in the genocide. According to Hitchcott, “whereas most of the early testimonies were written in French, the first two novels published after the genocide both appeared in English”. Hitchcott mentions *Manifold Annihilation*, a prescient and actually preemptive novel by Rwandan-American academic Aimable Twagilimana, written in 1993 and published in 1996. This is, according to Hitchcott “the first published work of post-genocide fiction”.

Who will we blame thirty years from now if we don’t carry out the democratisation process in progress? If it fails, like decolonisation failed thirty years ago, we’ll see new wars, burnings, killings, accusations and

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arrests, and the return of stories with their patterns unfolding, their spirals of violence.\(^{463}\)


In addition, there have been a number of anthologies, most notably *Anthologie de la littérature rwandaise moderne* and *Emergence: Renaître ensemble*, published as an initiative of the Rwandan Writers Association and the African Great Lakes Writers Association,\(^{465}\) which are edited volumes that attempt to grasp the social ramifications of the genocide in terms of gender inequalities.\(^{466}\)

Finally, in film and cinema, the major themes emphasise the maintenance of the memory of the victim and of the liberation struggles exerted by the current government, and their achievements in the reconstruction of the country. This demonstrates an attempt and a desire for memorialisation, heroisation and celebration, and is negotiated through the recording of testimonials, the documentation of policy-driven or intersubjective reconciliation efforts, the recording of the proceedings of juridical events, the dramatisation and fictionalisation of historical events, and the explanation of the external


culpabilities. There are also a number of works and articles about photography, but there is only one comprehensive manuscript I know of that examines visual art and one volume that focuses on photography and

467 In chronological order, see: Les collines de l’effort, Callixte Kalisa, Rwanda/Canada, 1987; Riverdance for Rwanda, Michael Flatley, Ireland, 1994; Les champs de la mort, Bernard Debord, France, 1995; Rwanda L’histoire qui mène au génocide, Robert Genoud, France, 1995; The Bloody Tricolor, Stephen Bradshaw and Elisabeth Jobes, Panorama, UK, 1995; The Dead Are Alive: Eyewitness in Rwanda, Anne van der Wee, Belgium, 1996; Revivre, Violaine de Villers, Belgium, 1996; Une république devenue folle, Luc De Heusch, Belgium, 1996; Rwanda Paroles contre l’oubli, Violaine de Villers, Belgium, 1996; Isembatsemba: Rwanda One Genocide Later, Alexis Cordesse, France, 1997; L’Afrique en morceaux, La tragédie des Grands Lacs, Peter Chapell, France, 1997; Itsembatsemba: Rwanda un genocide plus tard, Eyal Sivan, France, 1997; La France au Rwanda, Robert Genoud, France, 1999; Nous ne sommes plus mort, Francois Woukoache, Belgium, 2000; 100 Days, Nick Hughes, Kenya, 2001; Kongomani, Marc Hoosteyns, Belgium, 2001; La Justice des hommes, Jean-Xavier et Thierry de Lestrade, France, 2001; Rwanda: récit d’un survivant, Robert Genoud, France/Rwanda, 2001; Comic Relief Dead Serious: Rwanda - A Hope in Hell, Kate Broome, UK, 2001; Roméo Dallaire, le dernier des justes, Steven Silver, Canada, 2002; Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?, Anne Aghion, France, 2002; Rwanda, Un cri d’un silence inouï, Anne Laine, France, 2003; After Years of Walking, Sarah Vanagt, Belgium, 2003; Rwanda Living Forgiveness, Ralf Springhorn, USA, 2003; Time Machine: Rwanda—Do Scars Ever Fade?, Paul Freedman, USA, 2004; Tuez-les tous!, Raphaël Glücksmann, France, 2004; Hotel Rwanda, Terry George, USA, 2004; In Rwanda We Say... The Family That Does Not Speak Dies, Anne Aghion, France, 2004; Ghosts of Rwanda, Greg Barker, Darren Kemp, UK, 2004; The Night of Truth, Fanta Régina Nacro, Senegal, 2004; Après—Un voyage dans le Rwanda, Denis Gheerbrant, France, 2005; Message for Peace: Making ‘Hotel Rwanda,’ Terry George, USA, 2005; Sometimes in April, Raoul Peck, France/USA, 2005; God Sleeps in Rwanda, Kimberlee Acquaro, Stacy Sherman, USA, 2005; Mothers Courage, Léo Kalinda, Rwanda/USA, 2005; Return to Rwanda, John Baptist, USA, 2005; Rwanda, les collines parlent, Bernard Bellefroid, Belgium, 2005; Homeland, Jacqueline Kalimunda, France, 2006; Kigali des images contre un massacre, Jean-Christophe Klotz, France, 2006; Rwanda, A travers nous l’humanité, Marie-France Collard, Belgium, 2006; Hunting My Husband’s Killer, Lesley Bilinda, UK, 2006; The Diary of Immaculée, Peter LeDonne, USA, 2006; Un Dimanche à Kigali, Robert Favrau, Canada, 2006; Evil.13 (The Triumph of Evil), Tony Cokes, USA, 2006; Operation Turquoise, Alain Tasma, France, 2005; Shake Hands with the Devil, Roger Spottiswoode, Canada, 2007; Rwanda Rising, Andrew Young, USA, 2007; Munyurangabo, Lee Isaac Chung, USA/Rwanda, 2008; Iseta: Behind the Roadblock, Juan Reina and Eric Kabera, Kenya, 2008; My Globe is Broken in Rwanda, Katharina Von Schroeder, Germany, 2010; Africa United, Deborah Gardner-Paterson, UK, 2010; Grey Matter, Kivu Ruhorahoza, Rwanda, 2011; Intore, Eric Kabera, Rwanda, 2014; Thing of the Aimless Wanderer, Kivu Ruhorahoza, 2014; The Liberators, Philbert Aimé Mbabazi Sharanagabo, Switzerland, 2017; A Place for Myself, Marie Clementine Dusabejambo, Rwanda, 2016; Amelia Umuhire, Mugabo, Germany, 2016; Keza Lyn, Philbert Aimé Mbabazi, Switzerland, Rwanda, 2017; Ifmura, Samuel Ishimwe, Switzerland, 2018; Black Earth Rising, Hugo Blick, Netflix, UK, 2018; Urumuli, Abdoul Mujyambere, Rwanda, 2018; The Mercy of the Jungle, Jöel Karekezi, Congo, 2018; Petit Pays, Amelia Umuhire Germany/Rwanda, forthcoming.

documentary film. However, photographic exhibitions have emerged, as well as theatre productions, and radio and musical creations, all of which negotiate memory through narration, documentation, testimony, the re-enactment of events and commemorative performances. The Garden of Memory, for instance, is an artwork by South African artist Bruce Clarke that has been in production for over a decade. This brings me to the point made by American literary theorist Meredith Shepard in her current manuscript The Art of Reconciliation in Rwanda (2019):

Existing debates about reconciliation within Rwanda have furthermore been dominated by social science and ethnographic research that wrongly reduce reconciliation to ethnic identity, thereby presuming that survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators only possess conflicting views over the national project to unify.

In her thesis, Shepard argues that within the artworks she has encountered in her studies, “Rwandan reconciliation has exceeded such formulaic categories to manifest in overlapping genres and vectors of identification that transcend

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470 Rwanda in Photographs: Death Then, Life Now, curated by Zoe Norridge and Mark Sealy, 21 March - 30 April 2014, the Cultural Institute at King’s College London, at the Inigo Rooms, Somerset House East Wing, London WC2R 2LS. I have contributed to this exhibition with an installation discussed in the Appendix and I was invited, but was unable to travel, to lead a workshop with photographers in Kigali in preparation for the exhibition. Instead, “The photographs are the fruits of a workshop led by award-winning international photographers Andrew Esiebo (Nigeria) and Brendon Brannon (US and Kenya) in which photographers from Rwanda questioned the ways in which their country is portrayed internationally. Too often the country is reduced to images of violence and death, as seen through the eyes of outsiders. For this exhibition, Rwandans have challenged this gaze and now show us their country through their own eyes”. See: https://ahrc.ukri.org/newsevents/news/deaththenlifenow/; and http://news.trust.org/item/20140401171431-b6dkc/. Accessed 25 May 2015.

471 Kaneza Schaal, Go Forth, 2016. The theatre play premiered at Performance Space 122’s 2016 COIL Festival in 2016, and toured to Ubumbuntu Arts Festival, Kigali, Rwanda (2016); LMCC’s River-to-River Festival, New York, NY (2016); Wesleyan University, Middletown CT (2016); International Contemporary Theater Festival, Cairo, Egypt (2017); Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA (2017); and Stanford Live Arts April 2019.

472 Hate Radio, Milo Rau, Germany, 2012; Christian Nyampeta, Radius, Netherlands, 2014–Ongoing.

473 For example, Hope Azeda, Amashiyiga Sehutsitwa, 1998. Hope Azeda’s further projects are organised through Mashirika Theatre Company, whose plays and performances include A Bridge of Roses (2014).

ethnic divides. This is perhaps a new development to which I am hoping that my thesis and its biography of research have contributed and are still actively contributing”. For now, in summary, the tensions, difficulties and contradictions of the dominant writing, witnessing and memorisation of the Rwandan genocide can be evoked through the sentiment of survivor Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa:


It remains extremely difficult to summarise the literary corpus about the Rwandan genocide. The volumes I have listed are those I have personally read or consulted, in various libraries between the inception of this thesis in 2012 and this present moment in 2019, at Goldsmiths in London, at Columbia in New York, at the University of Rwanda in former Butare and current Huye, in Lubumbashi (the Congo), at Netwerk Aalst (Belgium), in Gwangju (South Korea), in Sao Paolo, and at other locations that I have visited as an artist and researcher in the context of the practice component of this research. More volumes can be added to my list, further comments can be made in terms of what the inclusion or exclusion tends to say about the political project of the writer or reader, as it manifests itself through the choice of French or English, their preferences of the historical narrative and the understanding of what constitutes justice. For now, I would once again like to point to Alain Mabanckou’s seminars at the Collège de France, which offer a useful overview of the histories of writing described in this section.

After “Rwanda”: In Search of a New Ethics, Again

My attempt at offering this overview only serves the purpose of differentiating Nzeyimana’s project from the dominant literature. The reader will have noticed

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475 Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa, Le génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger (Bamako: & Lille, 2000), pp. 77–78.

476 Alain Mabanckou, Lettres noires : des ténèbres à la lumière.
the absence of distinctly philosophical volumes in the above survey. This is because I only know of After “Rwanda”: In Search of a New Ethics (2013), the volume by Jean-Paul Martinon I mentioned earlier which obviously informs aspects of this thesis. For example, the reader will have been aware of how the title alone alludes to the condition of the “after”. Furthermore, as I have already noted, Martinon was my first supervisor at the inception of this thesis in 2011 and as I am preparing this thesis for submission, Kodwo Eshun has become my first supervisor and Martinon is my second. All of this is to say Martinon’s volume is fundamental to my own thesis.

However, in tracing Nganang’s and Nzeyimana’s formulations, my use of the “afterlife” as the marker of the history of the present follows a different trajectory than what Martinon intends with his volume. The main difference here is that I focus on the intrasubjective condition of the afterlife, considered from within the circle and not in-between. In other words, I am not tracing an intersubjective dialogue between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana; rather, I am staging an intrasubjective chorus thereof, proceeding through a paleonymic approach in the sense of Nahum Dimitri Chandler and Jacques Derrida before him. The paleonyms idios/rhythm and ubuvandimwe are explored from within the intramurality of the history of the present, in which the theological and the political are already mutually constitutive and yet—or in fact therefore—also conflictual. This differentiation, the volume’s own contexts and relevance to this thesis warrant summarising Martinon’s volume at length as I intend to do in this current section.

After “Rwanda” is as beautifully composed as it is carefully conceived. It is resourceful in references and experimental in arrangement. With this volume, Martinon “attempts to transform two personal moments in [his] life into a response towards those who, in 1994, suffered the worst kinds of pain imaginable”

477 Jean-Paul Martinon, After “Rwanda”: In Search of a New Ethics (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2013).

478 Ibid. See the section “Title” in the “Introduction”, p. 11.

479 Ibid., p. 19, emphasis original.
The moment of reference is Martinon’s encounter with Emilianne Kwibanda, a Tutsi survivor. This encounter took place in September 2006 at the Rwanda Genocide Memorial located at Gisozi, one of the hills in Kigali, Rwanda. The second moment relates Martinon’s description of how he “failed to hear what someone told [him]”. Martinon reveals that “someone” is none other than Martinon’s own aunt, France Audoul-Martinon. Martinon narrates how his “aunt was a member of the French resistance”, and how she was captured by the Germans Nazis in Compiègne in France and how she was deported to the concentration camp of Ravensbrück on January 1944.80

There she “suffered humiliation, torture, starvation, and deprivation alongside the 150,000 other women who experienced the horrors of one of the few women-only Nazi camps”. Martinon recounts how her aunt Audoul-Martinon

“was even placed in a gas chamber, but was miraculously rescued because of a technical fault. On the 9 April 1945, she escaped by covertly jumping on a Red Cross convoy as it was leaving the camp. She was prisoner No. 27,933, a number that remains engraved in my memory because it was tattooed on her arm, a tattoo that opened my eyes for the first time to what humans are capable of doing to others. It opened my eyes, but I did not hear what she was telling me, which was, that this “cannot happen again”.81

From these two “confessions”, Martinon formulates his response by “following the spirit of the work Valentin Mudimbe”,82 who is “asking us to be sensitive firstly to ourselves and to our own place in society and in the academy, and also be sensitive to the place and the voices of those whose histories and cultures we study.”83 In following the spirit of Mudimbe’s work, Martinon is “being first sensitive to [his] own intellectual horizon which happens to be dominated by two

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80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., emphasis original.

83 Ibid., p. 23.

major authors.” For Martinon, these are Jacques Derrida,—the French-Algeria-Jewish philosopher already encountered above in this thesis—and French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. These two philosophers and the traditions they represent are brought into dialogue by Martinon with two Rwandan philosophers, both of whom the reader has already equally encountered on the pages of this thesis: Abbé Alexis Kagame and his compatriot Maniragaba Balibutsa.

For Martinon, contrary to what he intends, the title of his book *After “Rwanda”* may evoke four conditions. Firstly “in most people’s minds outside of Rwanda”, the words will bring up “the mediatised accounts of the incomprehensible human tragedy that afflicted this little African country in 1994”. For Martinon, such mediatised accounts are “scenes of slaughter,” images of decaying remains of the victims, “pictures of orphaned children and widows, and recordings of survivors’ testimonies”. This leads Martinon to conclude that in the first instance, the words *after “Rwanda”*, arranged in such phrase, “evoke the historical event of the genocide against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu and its recording”

Secondly, “[o]n a different register”, Martinon continues, “these words evoke the chronological aftermath of the events of 1994”. This is because, for Martinon, this phrase “evoke[s] the historical period that immediately followed the

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485 Ibid., p. 23.

486 Ibid., p. 19. emphasis original.

487 Ibid, p. 11, emphasis original. In fn 1, Martinon points to “a documentary on the only few minutes of footage recorded of the genocide”: Juan Reina and Eric Kabera, Iseta: Behind the Roadblock, Vivid Pictures, 2008, a film included in the overview above.

488 Ibid., emphasis original. In fn. 2, Martinon references Jonathan Torgovnik, *Intended Consequences: Rwandan Children Born of Rape* (New York: Aperture, 2009), also included in the overview about writing after the Rwandan genocide above.

489 Ibid., emphasis original. Martinon suggests that “The most comprehensive archive of testimonies is at Gisozi”, some of which is available online at [www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw](http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw), which Martinon accessed on 7 November 2012.

490 Ibid.

491 Ibid., p. 11 and 12.
genocide”. By this Martinon means “the times after its occurrence: overcrowded refugee camps in Zaire, the outbreak of cholera, overpopulated prisons, the return exiled Rwandese, and the rebuilding a nation ever since.

Thirdly, for Martinon, “the words After ‘Rwanda’ also evoke the guilt of not acting on time and the need to pay some kind of moral debt. But “how to pay this debt?” is no longer quite so evident according to Martinon, because the moral debt is amalgamated with other words such as “reconciliation”, “justice”, “development” and “progress”.

For Martinon, in the fourth degree, After “Rwanda” also recalls “After Auschwitz”. Here, Martinon draws attention to “[y]et another familiar set of words with their distinctive set of mental images and discourses”, and points to the dilemma he has faced: “How are we also to think these words within the specific discourse inaugurated by the first author who started such a reflection: Theodor Adorno in his book, Negative Dialectics?” Martinon continues, asking: “How are we to think the words After ‘Rwanda’ with ‘Auschwitz’ as a ‘first’ painful referent?” To this, Martinon responds:

notwithstanding the distant memories, the fraught games of comparison, and the theoretical attempts to explain the impossible, there is still and will always be “Rwanda” here, in this world. “Rwanda” took place before a startled world and anyone who today makes the effort to make sense of “it,” still bears witness to its “having taken place”. Time changes nothing. So the questions that immediately come to mind when thinking this upsetting recurrence are these: How are we to think of “it” not as a long-forgotten historical event, but as “something” as important as the latest urgency? How can we understand these two words, After “Rwanda,” in a way that gives justice to the events of 1994 and, at the

492 Ibid.

493 Ibid., pp. 11-12, emphasis original.

494 Ibid.


496 Ibid. In fn. 6, Martinon points the lack of space enough “to explore the very large bibliography” on the theme of Auschwitz. As an indication of this important theme, Martinon references Dominick LaCapra, History and memory after Auschwitz (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998).
same time, respects other historical events that also desperately call for attention? And finally, but most importantly, how are we to keep “Rwanda,” its survivors and their plight on our minds, without reducing them to cold data and a neat theoretical analysis?497

This response and the outline of the four possible evocations outlined above help Martinon to distinguish his use of the words, phrase and title After “Rwanda”. I would like to cite these passages at length because I believe what is at stake here is meaningful and helpful in formulating my own arguments in the next sections:

Firstly, however odd this may sound, the preposition “After” does not refer here to a periodization; it does not imply a chronological origin or the repetition of another origin, for example, “Auschwitz”. There isn’t “Auschwitz” and then “Rwanda”. There is “Rwanda” and that is all. The preposition “after” therefore shows that there is, here, not an aporetic despondency after a tragedy or a number of tragedies (“what am I to do after Auschwitz or Rwanda,” for example), but an order of priority that knows no contestation. We are here in an unquestionable asymmetry: however horrific the thought, “Rwanda” effectively is first and we are after “it,” not in an attempt to understand it and therefore objectify it in its aftermath, but in the recognition of the fact that “it” is always before us as an event that always already remains to be addressed. There is no escaping this asymmetry or priority even though it has lost all of its urgency. This unshakable asymmetry is what the preposition “after” means here.498

In what regards “Rwanda”, for Martinon,

“Rwanda,” written here clearly with quotation marks, stands obviously not for the country as a geo-political entity known as Rwanda without quotation marks, but for the events of 1994. As such, it is a word that, with quotation marks, signals an event that does not have a proper referent: the death of one, two, three, four... nearly a million people.499

From this, Martinon proposes

...to put forward the idea that “Rwanda,” i.e. this uniqueness, points instead to a “fracture” that is simply incomprehensible: the incomprehensible “fracture” between the interahamwe and their victims,

497 Ibid., p. 13.
498 Ibid., pp. 13–14, emphasis original.
499 Ibid., p. 14, emphasis original.
a “fracture” that does not even stand for “tragedy,” therefore for something already culturally defined, for example, with adjectives such as “serious” or “dramatic”. This “fracture” has to be absolute because it points to the occurrence of death or of a pain that is beyond words.500

Consequently, for Martinon, “‘Rwanda’ is neither a concept nor a model as Adorno intimated with regards to ‘Auschwitz’”.501 Rather, for Martinon,

“Rwanda” is, following Jean-François Lyotard’s analysis of other words without proper referent, an indetermination of meaning left in abeyance, a sign that always already remains to be phrased. This does not mean that it is impossible to talk about “Rwanda”. On the contrary, “Rwanda” constitutes, like for anyone else’s death, a prescription to start a “linking of phrases,” a command to start thinking, speaking, or writing”.502

Martinon’s analysis is cogent and indeed a genre of its own within what my indisciplinary and therefore limited knowledge allows me to know of the literature after the Rwandan genocide. But how does Martinon’s argument withstand a submission to the scrutiny of Nganang accusation and Syrotinski cautions of these same accusations?

In other words, how “pre-emptive” are Martinon’s claims? I have to recall the phrase Martinon addressed to me during the seminars and supervision meetings and recounted in the Acknowledgements section of this thesis: “What can I do with this?” Clearly, I have already done a lot with Martinon’s volume in this thesis. Furthermore, I have drawn from in making artworks, in staging exhibitions, and during my own seminars. Most notably, my exhibition The Birth of the Universe held at Somerset House in London in April 2014503 drew in part from this volume.

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500 Ibid., emphasis original. In fn 14, Martinon explains: “The Interahamwe were a paramilitary organization backed by the Hutu-led government. Their name means “those who work together.” They were responsible for the majority of crimes committed before and during the Tutsi Genocide.”

501 Ibid., p. 15.


503 See Appendix “The Birth of the Universe” included in this thesis. This exhibition contributed to the wider exhibition Death in Photographs: Death Then Life Now, curated by Mark Sealy MBE and Zoe Norridge.
However, predictably, it is useful to note the fundamental differences between Martinon’s approaches and the formulations given by Barthes’s, Nganang’s, Nzeyimana’s. This means that, therefore, there are crucial differentiations to be made between Martinon’s uses of After and my own approaches that follow Nganang’s afterlife. But I will only be able to return to these differences in the last chapter of this thesis as I explore the theoretical limits of ubuntu, generosity and rest in the history by drawing from my own practices. For now, after having indisciplinarily and therefore partially explored the literature of writing after “Rwanda”, I would like to move on to an analysis of Nzeyimana’s own thought.

Thinking With, Within and Against Contradictions

The absence of works of philosophical reflection about the Rwandan genocide is important and something already addressed through the questions raised by Nganang in the previous chapters. However, this philosophical lacuna is not the single most defining aspect of the differentiation to be made between the dominant literature and the orientation in which the work of Nzeyimana is mobilised.

A part of Nzeyimana considers the works alluded to in this survey with appreciation in so far as they bring to light the construction of the histories of the ideologies that led to the genocide, its mechanisms, its conditionings, its mobilisation and its execution. For Nzeyimana, “[t]his model of testimony and of ideological analysis of the genocide is certainly correct, particularly if what is aimed at is to reach contemporary and posterior readerships and to impart them with historical knowledge of the genocide”.504

However, at the same time, for Nzeyimana:

A witness is someone who has lived through an event, in the sense of that which is happening. At the limit of focusing only on what is happening, a task of an analysis follows: performing a rational division. And yet, adequate division applies only to that which has no life and no

504 Nzeyimana, Histoire et pragmatisme, p 4.
spirit, to the universe of purely external matter, whereby each part of a
homogeneous whole retains the same properties of that whole. But, even
then, the division is not total, since it must stops at a certain proportion of
the matter, so that it does not destroy the integrity of its substance. In the
universe of the human being, that of the spirit, and that of the interior
states of the spirit, division is merely a potential, it is never real, because
life itself is an indivisible whole; it is always marked by its irreducible and
impenetrable character. 505

For literary theorists Nicki Hitchcott, Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier, the
Rwandan genocide is written within the cultural epoch of “memory”, in a way
that renders the writer a witness and the text a testimony. Alain Mabanckou has
also testified to this development. 506 Nganang goes much further in a way that
perhaps also implicitly critiques this testimonial epoch, suggesting that the new
literary form produced by the Rwandan genocide makes the writer the survivor.
To return to the question addressed above: despite the impressive literature
already existing when Manifeste was published, why does Nganang insist on
the absence of philosophical responses to the Rwandan genocide? 507

Perhaps Nzeyimana answers this question when he says the model of “the
testimony and the historical analysis remains exposed to the risk of fighting
against the ideology of the genocide without fundamentally overcoming it. How
to understand life in its unity, in its essential indivisible propriety? How to build a
Rwandan memory of the genocide, one and indivisible? How to reconcile or
rather conciliate individual memories that are sometimes contradictory, even
though they are all true? How to conciliate the national memory and the official
Rwandan memory with the individual and collective memories?” 508 Nzeyimana’s

505 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

506 Recent volumes analysing the genealogies of fiction writing of and about Rwanda include
Olivier Nyirubugara, Novels of Genocide: Remembering and Forgetting the Ethnic Other in
Fictional Rwanda (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2017); and Alain Mabanckou, “Les grandes
thétamiques de la littérature d’Afrique noire francophone”, in Lettres noires: des ténèbres à la
lumière, Lecture Course at the Collège de France, 05 April 2016. https://www.college-de-
france.fr/site/alain-mabanckou/course-2016-04-05-14h00.htm. Accessed 14 May 2017. Also,
see Mabanckou, Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui (Seuil, 2016), a volume published as a
collection of essays delivered at a colloquium convened by Mabanckou at the Collège de
France in 2016.

507 As I will explore momentarily, this is perhaps why Nganang is dismissive of “Écrire pour
devoir de mémoire”: the work insisted on memory, but in what way is memory pre-emptive?

508 Ibid., p. 8.
project is a philosophy of the crossing, of overcoming the limit of living together, through thinking the rhythm of memory, economy and education.

Nzeyimana’s project is to overcome the conditions that exert the need for the limit of the testimonial singularity of memory—urgent and compelling—but necessarily require the muting of another memorial singularity in order to emerge, to be heard and to be recognised. In this sense, Nzeyimana’s co-emergence—ubuvandimwe—is the construction of the moral and ethical grounds of Nzeyimana’s rhythmic formulation of giving-receiving-giving, understood as an ethics of addressing the limit of living together.

In Search of an Interior Outside: Isaïe Nzeyimana’s Philosophy

It is from this problematic that Isaïe Nzeyimana draws from fragments attributed to philosophical figures from the “Greek” antiquity, in order to reflect on the limits of living together. For Nzeyimana, addressing memory is a way of studying the cohabitation of contradicting memories in the writing of history. Economy is a way of attending to hospitality, and education is a manner of constructing the future, by anticipating, forming, practising and transmitting ethics.

Nzeyimana’s overarching argument is in the post-genocide afterlife, how to be in the world humanely, again. Memory, history, economy and miseducation have derailed humanity far from itself, and the urgent task at hand is to rekindle the bond humanity has to itself. This return to humanity can be facilitated by the bond or debt of the rhythm of giving-receiving-giving.

Towards this end, Nzeyimana applies Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s dialectics and, in so doing, takes part in the “philosophical tradition stretching back to Plato”. Like Hegel who considers rationality not as “constant, static or unchanging, but as containing contradictions and change”, Nzeyimana


understands history not as at a standstill, but as a rhythm in motion. Nzeyimana understands education as injyana: a movement and a motion towards progress but also towards a return. In his study of the economy considered from the point of view of “Africa”, Nzeyimana proceeds through staging a dialogue between Africa and itself: this is a dialogue of Africa with and against itself in view of producing a synthesis of an economy as a receptacle, whereby hospitality is the basis of a receptive economy.
Although education and economy do concern this thesis, this overview focuses on Isaie Nzeyimana’s notion of *ubuvandimwe*, as is fully developed in *Histoire et pragmatisme: Le Rwanda, sur sa route* (2017). Nzeyimana describes his book as “a dialogue between history and politics, between politics that uses history, and history that comes to judge politics”. What motivates Nzeyimana in this volume is a search for the cohabitation of multiple memories, and how such memories can write a collective history with sincerity.

Nzeyimana characterises addressing the writing of history as a risk. Firstly, he wonders if Rwanda has its own course of history, and observes that if all peoples have their own ways of experiencing and recording reality, so does Rwanda. However, such possession of one’s own way does not mean that Rwanda is enclosed upon itself, nor that reality is relative. Rather, one’s own way means that Rwanda is always in search of itself, like any other nation. It is a nation state that has its own trajectory, and this course is sometimes maintained, sometimes abandoned and sometimes returned to.

For Nzeyimana, the conceptual risk of addressing the sincerity of history remains, particularly so in Rwanda. Nzeyimana aims to address the prevalent concerns associated with the writing of history, chief among them being the partiality of history. This partiality is exemplified by how in public spaces such as squares, parks and museums, monuments alternate from veneration to condemnation, coinciding with the change of political regimes.

Historical figures oscillate between triumphant heroism celebrated or commemorated, to sanctioning and demolishing oblivion. This historical trait is also apparent in the associated bank holidays that change depending on the political windfall. As a result, from one day to another an acquired interpretation of a historical event may no longer be accepted as satisfactory. For Nzeyimana, all of this attests to the partiality at play in the writing of history, whereby each government writes history to promote its own political understanding,

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511 Nzeyimana, *Histoire et pragmatisme*, p. 11.

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emphasised in order to legitimise its own existence. Therefore, this urge to rewrite history attests to the subjectivity motivated by such rewriting, and this makes history become riddled with controversies.

Yet for Nzeyimana, despite this contradiction, history is what gives a people, a nation “rest to the soul and the spirit”. How then can history be read and written with sincerity? How to write history for serenity?

**Beyond (Im)partiality, or from Historical Truth to Ethical Project**

Moving away from what he describes as the antecedent linear causality of type A produces B, or A possesses B, Isaïe Nzeyimana focuses instead on the finality of the historical narration itself. Towards what end, for what project, for what purpose is one historical event or phenomenon recorded instead of another? Why is a historical moment chosen instead of another? In other words, Nzeyimana asks: for what purpose, for which project, for which use, do I write history?

Instead of qualifying history based on its partiality or impartiality, Nzeyimana suggests it makes more sense to examine the partiality or the impartiality of the *project* of history. For Nzeyimana, it is precisely along these lines of pragmatism that the history of Rwanda is written, across its separate moments, each moment insisting on a specific project rather than on another. Therefore, the question is not whether history is true or false. Rather, historical truth is defined by its ethical project. According to Nzeyimana, controversies revolve less on events and historical facts, and more on the criteria of the choice of facts and on the meanings that the historian or the witness of history creates in narrating them.

In this sense, pragmatism is a reading of history through final causality. It is an ethical questioning of whether the historical *project* is liberating humans or

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512 Nzeyimana at Kabgayi, my own transcript and translation of Nzeyimana’s oral delivery.

enslaving them, whether the project is just or unjust. Thus, the question of
historical truth becomes that of the ethics of political programmes that history
has come to bear and justify.

This explains how the dynastic history of the Rwandan royal court was
cultivated to facilitate the duty to create national and official memory, for the
legitimation of its political system, for the making of and consolidating of the
spirit of its people, for the durability of the kingdom and of the dynastic lineage.
The colonial history in Rwanda was written for the project of occupation, ruling
and introduction of external models of development, all of which justified the
colonisation.

The history of the First and Second Republic was written for the duty or project
of the Revolutions of 1959 and 1973 and of Independence, in order to explain,
to reinforce and to legitimise this project.

Similarly, the current post-genocide history is being written for the duty of
memory of the genocide and the duty of liberation from the genocidal
governance inherited from the First and the Second Republics.

Therefore, in order to read each of these historical moments with sincerity, the
readers must put themselves on the side of the examination of each of these
projects. The choices of the authors, the witnesses, the facts outlined, the
periods recorded, the methods and interpretations adopted, and the conclusions
reached depend on the project of the writing of such history.\textsuperscript{514}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{514} Ibid., p. 20.
\end{footnote}
Vigilant Compromise of the Historical Project

Isaïe Nzeyimana explains that readers who, in good conscience, are confident in their methods, know that their findings and evidences are in no way guided by the idea of a project, but that they are true in themselves. Therefore, how can one defend the thesis of pragmatic or project-orientated history without attracting reproaches from those who, under the imperatives of rationalism, scientificity and objectivity, know that all scholarly production must meet the sole criterion of objectivity? What then is objectivity, and what is subjectivity, its other side?

This compromise of reading the project of history prescribes vigilance. To cultivate such critical vigilance, Nzeyimana draws from the philosophical schools of idealism, rationalism and pragmatism. For Nzeyimana, idealism is concerned with the authenticity and the integrity of facts, independently of what the collective readers might decide are the meanings of these facts.

Rationalism forbids imagination to return and to distort facts under the pretext of matching them with immediate interests. Rationalism also sets the observation with a precise method to reproduce or preserve the facts faithfully.

In contrast, pragmatism imposes the idea of a project, which in itself is not a given, but is to be negotiated and invented. It is only when faced with the demand of a specific project that a choice can be made from multiple facts. The same project is the guiding principle in the work of interpretation, in the research of meaning and thus also in conducting the construction of historical knowledge.

If any historical fact must be considered as that which is simply present and potentially capable of multiple providential usage by differential users, then what they are being asked to do is to leave out facts that do not fit in with a given project. Necessarily, other theoretical or practical projects will emerge and the same or other historians or politicians will want to use these facts. As a result, history and politics have complex relationships that only the practice of an ethics knowledge can moderate. In these relationships, history provides material for politics, by which politics uses history, while politics also makes
history. Although politics is able to brutally condemn history, afterwards, history will judge the same politics in return.

**Changing the Historical Paradigm in the Post-Genocide Society**

Isaïe Nzyimana reaches this pragmatism by what he perceives as the duty or project of the management of the post-genocide society which imposes a change of historical paradigms. Nzyimana defines these paradigms as an ensemble of concepts and methods through which to interpret and make sense of history.

With this question, Nzyimana expresses his hesitations: Can history be changed? Where does the history of Rwanda begin? Is it good to entertain the question of origins? Intellectually and scientifically, it could be possible to trace the origins of Rwandans all the way to the metaphorical Adam and Eve; in other words, to the archetypes of humanity. Yet on this question, the Rwandan myths have been cautious.

According to these Rwandan mythologies, the history of Rwanda commences only when all Rwandans are there. However, sciences have prospected evolutionist theses and migratory movements, at the risk of resulting in unstable conclusions that give way to choices that have been fatally exploited by politics, as has been the case in Rwanda, namely that Rwandans come from elsewhere and that, as such, Rwanda is not their real home.

This historical fatality compels Nzyimana to reflect on the thesis of evolution, remarking that in itself the evolutionary thesis is best understood as a hypothesis that is still in the process of attestation. Therefore, Nzyimana questions the soundness of founding a politics upon evolutionary theses and a hypothesis of migratory movements as the origins of a people.

For Nzyimana, for those who are born today and must make a living together in the present, the emphasis on the geographically-distant origin and evolution of ancestors has no use. Furthermore, Nzyimana adopts an epistemological
principle by which to avoid opting for the most difficult theses, when the simplest ones are at hand. For Nzeyimana, it seems particularly difficult to found a politics through tracing the singular origins of each of the Rwandan clans and ethnicities. Rather, historical pragmatism suggests that the easiest solution is to consider all Rwandans already at home.

**Giving-Receive-Giving: A Dialogue between History and Politics**

Isaïe Nzeyimana thinks of *ubuvandimwe* from within the most recent horrifying historical and political moment the notion has had to endure. For Nzeyimana, “the brutality of the genocide does not mean that this genocide is everything or the beginning of the history of Rwanda, but simply a moment”.\(^{515}\) As outlined earlier, Nzeyimana explains the etymology of *ubuvandimwe* (from the same womb); as such, it designates fraternity/sorority. *Ubuvandimwe* emerges within the family, and extends and fortifies itself in all scales of parenthood, culminating in the “greater” family of the kingdom.\(^{516}\) According to Nzeyimana, this means that *ubuvandimwe* is a spiral linearity that is always coupled with royalty/loyalty. *Ubuvandimwe*/loyalty then is found at the highest point of power, but is also a far-reaching bond: it is without borders, to such an extent that every person is worth this title of *ubuvandimwe*—brother/sister. It is, in this sense, a universal humanism of fraternity/sorority.\(^{517}\)

As such, from the etymology of *ubuvandimwe*—“of the same birth”, “those born of the same family”—its social, cultural and conceptual reach extends over all of “Rwanda”, such that each and every Rwandan can call each other *muvamandimwe*. Because this co-emergence precedes and exceeds the event of the genocide, the genocide is not and should not be the origin of Rwanda.

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\(^{516}\) Nzeyimana, *Histoire et pragmatisme*, p. 25.

\(^{517}\) Ibid.
*Ubuvandimwe* is a paleonym or, as Jacques Derrida and Nahum Dimitri Chandler call it, an old name. Nzeyimana is compelled to handle this paleonym as a lever of intervention because “if the genocide turns humanity in a nothingness, and if language is what names all things, then every effort of language after the genocide is to make sense of life”\(^\text{518}\). This implies that to find a paleonym and to apply it in naming the unsayable, “the inhospitable”,\(^\text{519}\) is to fight against the annihilation of life. As Chapters One and Two explored, Christian theology equates “the Word” with the synecdoche of God and its demiurgic powers. Not only is “the Word” the Bible, but it is also the instrument of creation and, as I explore below, of annihilation. It is the Word that commands the creation of all that exists in the universe: “And God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light”.\(^\text{520}\)

To understand *ubuvandimwe* in the context of its antecedents, Nzeyimana lists the “categories of self-consciousness of the Rwandan people”\(^\text{521}\) before contact with external forces from 1900 onwards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material or Space for the Structuring of the People’s Spirit</th>
<th>Categories of Self-Consciousness of the Rwandan People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Household “Inzu” to Clan “Ubwoko” to Country “Igihugu”</td>
<td><em>Ubuvandimwe/Familial and National Fraternity and Sorority</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ku karubanda, Ijabiro” Royal Public Space</td>
<td>The King as the Righter of Wrongs Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern, North-Western, Southern, Central and Eastern Kingdoms</td>
<td>Territoriality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Rites (Paths/<em>Inzira z’ubwiru</em>)</td>
<td>Spiritualism and Territoriality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Institution of the King, Queen and Queen Mother, and their Retainers issued from Itorero</td>
<td>Royalty and Loyalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{518}\) Ibid, p. 171. “Le génocide étant un vide de l’humanité, le langage, étant ce qui nomme les choses, tout effort de langage après le génocide est à nouveau donation du sens”.

\(^{519}\) Ibid. p. 27. “L’inhospitalier”.

\(^{520}\) See: Genesis 2:4; Psalm 33:6; 2 Corinthians 4:6.

When Nzeyimana reasons that the genocide was a break in *ubuvandimwe*, he is saying both too much and too little.\(^{522}\) This is because *ubuvandimwe* is an invitation in the fraternity/sorority from which Nzeyimana undertakes a meditation on the post-genocide, and an invitation is a risk, precisely of staying too long or not long enough, of saying too much or too little. As such, the rupture in *ubuvandimwe* is more than just a break, and the challenges are enormous on all conceivable terrains of existence. Its break challenges language, memory, nature, culture and every form of bodily manifestation.

It is reasonable to contest the method of Nzeyimana’s paleonymic intervention on two counts. Firstly, Nzeyimana brings back into the present a paleonym that names a structure of dynastic power. The same American anthropologist and historian David Graeber insists on how more or less every form of historical kingdom has engaged in the specific violence of some form of slavery. Effectively, the origins of debt, money and credit are located in slavery, understood as an abstraction of life through the separation of a subject from its

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522 Ibid., p. 154.
social, cultural and spiritual relations, including land. If so, how can ubuvandimwe as a bond between royalty and loyalty become meaningful in the management of the post-genocide society? Secondly, the formulation of a phrase such as “categories of self-consciousness of the Rwandan people” seems to exhume the ghosts of a unanimity critiqued by Paulin J. Hountondji and Patrice Nganang, as such line of thought is characteristic of ethnophilsophy.

Indeed, ubuvandimwe understood through the diagram given by Nzeyimana above poses a set of conceptual challenges. Just like any kingdom at any given geographical locality taken at any historical moment, dynastic Rwanda had members and moments that were most probably corrupt, full of intrigues, prone to betrayals, drenched in jealousies and committing unspeakable injustices. Indeed, the kingdom might and surely must have been structurally unjust in its subjugating demands towards the populations over which it claimed sovereignty. A brief glance at the enduring scholarly controversies about the scientific knowledge of pre-colonial Rwanda reveals this confusion. The asserted positions result mostly from an ideological position of the writer.

To his own admission, Nzeyimana’s historical pragmatism seems to play down the rigour of the scholarship of the likes of British anthropologist Catherine Newbury who, already in 1988, published a prescient work that analysed the complex migration and exile patterns which the wind of history later solidified into what is now contemporary Rwanda: Newbury charts the associated land deprivation, the emergencies of successive droughts causing extreme famines, and structural poverty caused by the increasing diminution of regional

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523 I am aware of the diagrammatic reduction of complexity and the generalisation of history I am making here. However, extending David Graeber’s argument would derail the scope of this thesis. What I would like to emphasise is how the paleonymic contexts of ubuvandimwe are inscribed in a history that extend well beyond the geographic localities of Rwanda and well before the temporal zones of its histories.

independence from the central kingdom. In his searing critique of the absence of attentiveness to a certain kind of historical materialism in the dominant literature about the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, British scholar Johan Pottier, drawing from Newbury and her colleagues, asks:

What then have we learned about this past? For the period up to 1860, it is correct to say that historians know next to nothing about how the terms ‘Twa’, ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ were used in social discourse; whether these terms denoted social or physical classifications, for instance, is simply unclear. From about 1860, however, when [King] Rwabugiri expanded the sphere of domination and influence of the Tutsi royal court, the situation becomes clearer. As research has revealed, Rwabugiri began, or consolidated, a process of ethnic polarisation.

In my humble experience, these historical accounts narrated in the idiom of such polemics are very useful for me to read about at Columbia Library where, as a doctoral student, I occasionally get a guest membership, as well as in more intimate contexts with colleagues in London, in Sao Paulo, etc. However, the polemic formality of these histories is quite polarising when discussed in a classroom or a pub in Rwanda, or on a public bus from Huye to Kigali. 25 years after the genocide, this polarisation is still very sensitive to the point of stifling any meaningful dialogue. Another language to narrate the findings of these histories is required. Perhaps the reality of this experience could be narrated in an anecdotal chorus.

To this effect, during my above-mentioned tour with Nzeyimana in Butare, I noticed a diminutive and yet distinctive building standing near the National Museum, the bus station and the stadium on the main road to Kigali where, oddly enough, it looked somewhat isolated. Over the years, when I returned, I

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would notice that the house remained vacant and that it became increasingly derelict. This surprised me because the architecture was relatively peculiar: its shape, location, materiality and colour stood out from the rest of the surrounding buildings. In museological terms alone it testified to an era I could not entirely identify. I started enquiring about the house as I was exploring the possibility of setting up a temporary art institution for the maintenance of a modest public library. This idea came out of the Another Roadmap School, the collaborative research on the histories of art education mentioned in the previous chapter.

The location seemed fitting for the prospective purpose, especially because the surrounding plot of land would allow the growth of medicinal herbs and plants, while also possibly playing host to outdoor activities. However, I had the impression that I was being discouraged from making solicitations. I only learnt about the sorrowful history of the house in 2018 when I was preparing for the international meeting of the Another Roadmap School, which I hosted in Nyanza at the buildings of the former Nile Source Polytechnic of Applied Arts (NSPA) together with Nzeyimana. I was informed at that time that the house had belonged to Rosalie Gicanda, that is Queen Dowager Rosalie Gicanda, the wife of King Mutara III of Rwanda, the last monarch of Rwanda, who passed away under suspicious circumstances in 1959, right before the Kingdom of Rwanda became a Republic. The simultaneous transformation from colonial independence and monarchy to a republic in 1959 could have inaugurated a moment of hope, but is recorded as a painful chapter in the official history of Rwanda. Nzeyimana describes some of its moments as a “missed revolution”, in the sense that it mistakenly and divisively articulated itself as a revolution of Rwandans against Rwandans. Therefore, it reads as a chapter of missed appointments with history.\textsuperscript{527} For Nzeyimana, “universal history is like this wind that is sometimes soft and sometimes violent”, that is hard to predict and to read.\textsuperscript{528} The metaphorical wind of history of 1959 triggered what is described as

\textsuperscript{527} Nzeyimana, \textit{Histoire et pragmatisme}, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid.
the Social Revolution which, in turn, triggered the mass exile following the

Unfortunately, the wind of history in 1994 was even stronger: in 2012, the
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the BBC World Service reported
that “according to a 1999 report by US-based Human Rights Watch, Hutu
soldiers took [Queen Gicanda] from her home in the south-eastern town of
Butare and shot her behind the National Museum. They also murdered several
women who looked after the queen, who was about 80 years old when she
died”. Queen Gicanda’s death shocked many and signified the earnest
commencement of the genocide in Butare on 20 April 1994.

In May 2018, as I was preparing to host 27 colleagues arriving in Huye to attend
the international meeting of the Another Roadmap School, my enquiries about
Queen Gicanda’s house and the possibility of maybe using some modest
means available to Another Roadmap to study its architectural and aesthetic
histories were being considered less and less clumsy. However, as my interest
was given more merit by the local authorities, my anxiety about actually
engaging with the enormity of this history started to rise, exponentially so in fact.
Nevertheless, the die was cast, and soon enough I drove Nzeyimana in his jeep
—as had become our habit—to an audience, still in Butare, at the home of a
family whose name I am not allowed to divulge. I parked on the sloping mound
of grass and red earth and we were courteously received. We were offered
some Fanta and we had a conversation with a middle-aged man, mostly in
Kinyarwanda, and sadly this locution limited the scope of what I could
comprehend.

To continue this story demands a brief excursus to the insights gained during
another visit Nzeyimana and I made to the home of mythologist, translator and
philosopher Rose-Marie Mukarutabana in Kigali in July 2018. As recorded in my
film A Flower Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow, Mukarutabana
speaks of the symbolism of the mythological four women of the King, who in
reality symbolise the geographical realms of the kingdom: north, south, east and
west. At the same time, when the sitting king journeyed across his dominion at the occasion of the ritual practices described in the diagram of *ubuvandimwe* outlined by Nzeyimana above, he tended to procreate and to leave behind an unknown number of offspring.

To conclude this long anecdote: our host in Butare turned out to be a descendant of the royal family and, like his fellow *muvandimwes*—fellows from the same royal womb—he is engaged in a feud to claim the heritage of the crumbling house of Queen Gicanda. Allegedly, and I am aware this may sound like cheap gossip, the current president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, is actually the nephew of Queen Gicanda. To cut the long story short, the house of the Queen Mother—whose innocent death at the hands of what Nzeyimana describes as a “mob” symbolised the annihilation of the Tutsi—was as of 26 January 2019 when I last saw it still abandoned. I found this dereliction symbolically troubling, as it seemed to me that the victim was still suffering a plural death, akin to Aimable Twagilimana’s equally prescient novelistic characterisation of the *Manifold Annihilation*.

There are two points I want to make with my lyrical anecdote. The first is that the exemplary modesty, purity, divinity and righteousness attributed to the kingdom within *ubuvandimwe*—as a bond or rhythm of giving-receiving-giving between the royalty of the dynastic court and the loyalty of its people—is or was actual, but far from absolute. Nzeyimana is evidently well aware of the problem that this reality poses to his own thought, but what is really at stake in Nzeyimana’s paleonymic intervention with *ubuvandimwe* is not a nostalgic

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530 To avoid taking part in the enduring memorial and judicial controversies about the exact nature of the organisation of the genocide against the Tutsi, and for the sake of the politics of reconciliation in Rwanda, it is forbidden to use terms such as “mob” instead of naming the exact culprits and their superiors. It is considered gesture that makes the perpetrators an abstract, faceless and therefore unaccountable rabble. In turn, this abstraction can be read as the banalisation of the deliberation, preparation and execution of the large-scale and systematic killing of the Tutsi that amounted to the genocide. Therefore, to describe murderers in terms of “mobs” or “thugs” can be recorded as an act of genocide denial—a crime that is severely punished to the point that it leads to paranoia and self-censorship. Nevertheless, for Nzeyimana, these were thugs, because attacking the Queen Mother of a kingdom abolished nearly 50 years prior is no different to attacking a statue or a symbol. This, for Nzeyimana, testifies to the complete misguidance of the perpetrators. However, this is not something I would repeat in public, nor is it something that Nzeyimana would write and publish. The convicted perpetrator of the killing is Ildephonse Nizeyimana (no relative of Isaïe Nzeyimana), who was a high-ranking military officer. Ildephonse Nizeyimana was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha in 2012.
return to the dynastic system of governance and culture, nor an ethnophilosophical generalisation of the diversity of the “Rwandan” lifelines. Rather, Nzeyimana’s object is to learn about a notion and a concept that predates the dynasty itself. This is no different to how I am trying to mobilise *idios-rhythm* outside theology and import it into the field of visual culture.

The other point I would like to make is to reflect once again on *ubuvandimwe*, through Nzeyimana’s philosophical mastery of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s dialectics. Nzeyimana writes that “in its radicality, the dialectics is a movement of opposition. This is how the victim and the perpetrator are perceived; they are mutually exclusive and they repel each other”.531 For Nzeyimana, this conflict is only possible because only those that have something in common can become opposite. It is this commonality or communion that allows the mediation of the conflict. Therefore, as a dialectic, *ubuvandimwe* is not only an opposition but the overcoming of that opposition. This explains, for example, how it is possible that an intramural feud threatens to annihilate the house of Queen Gicanda. The intramural feud *procreates* the *xenos*, the form-of-non-life encountered in the deserts as recounted in the First Chapter of this thesis: for each of the feuding parties it is preferable that the house of late Queen Gicanda crumbles rather than that it becomes inhabited by the form-of-life of a fellow *muvandimwe*. The fact of being-from-the-same-womb already contains a rhythm described by Wagner as “complementary and accenting motions” that may constitute the “law of reckoning”.532

In any case, the feud should not be mistaken for the house itself nor for the history of the kingdom and its descendants: the house precedes the conflict, just as “the genocide is not the totality of the history of Rwanda but simply a moment”.533 This is why, for Nzeyimana, the genocide is the break of the

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533 Ibid.
harmony located in “the cultural origin of Rwanda as a social experience of ubuvandimwe/familial, national and open parentage of fraternity and sorority”.

With this in mind, Nzeyimana asks, “what is it that the victim and the perpetrator have in common?” In an attempt to illustrate this, Nzeyimana has produced the following diagram:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existential Situation of the Survivor</th>
<th>Existential Situation of the Perpetrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Shame and secret borne of having been subjected to evil</td>
<td>- Shame and secret for having dared to commit evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gift of forgiveness</td>
<td>- Remorse, request for and reception of forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficulty to look at the face of the culprit</td>
<td>- Difficulty to look at the face of the survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Difficulty to be at memorial places for the missing victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Worse: revenge</td>
<td>- Worse: denial and extermination of the survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Post-traumatic stress</td>
<td>- Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trans-generational trauma</td>
<td>- Trans-generational identity crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acceptance or refusal of the identity of a survivor</td>
<td>- Acceptance or refusal of the identity of an eternal perpetrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acceptance or rejection of the morality of pity</td>
<td>- Acceptance or rejection of the morality of pity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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534 Ibid.

535 Ibid.

536 Ibid., p. 164.
To this diagram I would add that part of what the victim/survivor and the perpetrator have in common is that they already share the same historical time, as Archbishop Smaragde Mbonyintege suggested at the conference at Kabgayi in January 2019. Yet as observed by Nzeyimana, the usual views consider the victim and the perpetrator of the genocide in a relation of exclusivity, although this *ubuvandimwe* is what also allows their conciliation. “It is a bond at once of an antique communion and of the actual rupture which means that the victims, even in the shadow of the genocide, are awaiting a possible reconciliation”.  

To return to the question of memory and therefore heritage in the wake of the break of *ubuvandimwe*, this fracture demands responding to the challenges of reconciling different layers of memories: individual, collective, national and official—hence the need to work out how to co-habit with memories which, while sometimes contradictory, are all lived and therefore actual. How to conciliate the memory of the state which, in acting by “mandate”, might appear as though it has no “soul”? How to conciliate an individual memory that is driven by sociographic phenomena, with a social memory driven by national passion? How to conciliate progressivist changes with the permanence of being? At the same time, the mutuality between history and politics compels us to question the very status of the state in relation to the individual.

This consideration leads Nzeyimana to analyse how the pragmatism of *ubuvandimwe* assisted the mediation of justice in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. The conditions of this afterlife demanded a consideration of living together “here” and “now”. This cohabitation is a composite, a complexity that compresses time:

> Even though the issues historical [injustices] should be studied, they should not have to legitimise the unsettling of the current generations. These are from here. Here and in the present, Rwandans are all present, together. Does the here not also encompass the elsewhere and make it also into “here”? The present, does it not shelter the past and even the future, and therefore make them present? What is needed are questions

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537 Ibid.
of future horizons of a people who are together through a happy destiny.\textsuperscript{538}

Nzeyimana’s post-genocide thought is issued from the pragmatism that the conditions of the afterlife demand: “to avoid the most difficult solutions when there are more simple ones”.\textsuperscript{539} The mediation of justice is a mediation of memories. In particular, through the Gacaca court, *ubuvandimwe* appears to mediate in the relationship and the reconciliation of formal law and political consideration. Nzeyimana diagrams the “arguments between the law and politics in relation to justice” thus:\textsuperscript{540}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argument 1:</td>
<td>Any person convicted of genocide is to be sentenced to life in prison (capital punishment has been banned in Rwanda since 1998)</td>
<td>Politics finds good “state reasons” which change the law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Proposition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument 2:</td>
<td>This or that person is guilty of genocide according to the testimony of the facts</td>
<td>Politics always finds good reasons which attenuate culpability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Proposition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Therefore this person deserves the maximum sentence</td>
<td>From the minor argument, politics draws a conclusion from the attenuating circumstances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{538} Nzeyimana, *Histoire et pragmatisme*, pp. 113–114.

\textsuperscript{539} Ibid., p. 113.

\textsuperscript{540} Ibid., pp. 195–196.
Giving-Receiving-Giving Between the State and the Nation

How to manage the arguments of the co-habitation of conflicting and opposing memories? Predictably, difficulties arise or rather remain in this negotiation and dialogue between the layers of memory in the writing of history. Who or what social apparatus can be tasked with its emergence? In addressing this problem of determining the agency responsible for the management of memories, Isaïe Nzeyimana follows Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and differentiates the state—as law and constancy in order for all citizens and the entire territory—from the nation, itself described as the soul. For Nzeyimana, these two complementary entities can become mutually weakening. The presence of too much soul (understood as nation) within the affairs of order (understood as state) would be ruinous. Conversely, too much order without soul results in the same political degradation.

This task commands the definition of the “dose” or scale of such presence; in other words, of the rhythm of the state. The state must be present, but in what measure? For Nzeyimana, there are areas unequivocally reserved for the state, such as defence, security, diplomacy or international relations. There are also other areas where the collective, group, union or association constitute the identity of each group, community, association or institution, and the wealth of the whole. However, when the state is everywhere present, for example in education, in religion, in family, in economics, in food production and everywhere else where initiative, ingenuity and originality make up the harmony of diversity, then the level or amount of state is imbalanced. Even though such societal areas are not without regulation, guardianship is the primary role of the state. This is the question of the balance between the state and the liberal state.

However, the improvisational character of the afterlife of the genocide has meant that these strict divisions do not always apply. An example is the Gacaca. The reader would recall that in the Introduction, Jean-Godefroy Bidima described the Gacaca as “the traditional palabre of the Rwandan people, with its defects and its false steps”. Bidima explains that “where justice is concerned, the important thing once condemnation or pardon have been given is what
comes next [l’après]”. In Nzeyimana, this *becoming* proceeds through a paleonymic *return*, and the old name of *ubuvandimwe* intervenes not only as a pragmatic lever but also as a philosophical device that mediates between the forces of the state, the passions of the nation and the sorrows of its individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Formal Law</strong></th>
<th><strong>Jurisdictions of Gacaca</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tribunal that can be located outside the location of the genocide</td>
<td>Place/site where the genocide took place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of distance between the survivor victim and the guilty victim</td>
<td>Relationship of proximity between the survivor victim and the guilty victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of a language other than the language spoken where the genocide was committed</td>
<td>Uses the language of the genocide: Kinyarwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and discourse of simulation, and signifiers form linguistic elegance; eloquence undertaken in an analytical reference</td>
<td>Kinyarwanda, the language of the genocide, causes a living referential emotion: screaming, crying, silence; everything has a message</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is another of Nzeyimana’s diagrams, this time on the process of gacaca. Bidima’s remarks where he expresses his concerns about the shortcomings of gacaca are somewhat modest in comparison to the more pronounced criticisms of the phenomenon. Rwandan theorist Olivier Nyirubugara, who previously worked at Erasmus University in Rotterdam—where, as the reader might recall, I visited him for the purposes of staging an videographic conversation for my film *Comment vivre ensemble*,—has studied the mechanics of gacaca and recorded his analysis thus:

The concept of Gacaca is very old and has long served as a way to settle disputes at the community level. The name itself comes from the fact that the community gathering usually took place with people sitting in a *gacaca*, that is, in the grass. In everyday life, Gacaca has come to mean settling the dispute among peers, *inter nos*, without taking it to higher authorities—parents, teachers, headmasters, etc. As this short

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explanation shows, the use of the concept to speed up genocide trials was the other way around, as it was a top-down exercise, with the highest authorities—whom the initial, traditional Gacaca avoided to involve—defining not only which disputes must be looked into but also which ones must be skipped.\textsuperscript{542}

For Nyirubugara, gacaca is no different to “the court, or any justice system” that amounts to a structure through which to exercise governance by imposing a selective memory. Gacaca, like any court, “looks into the past and interprets it in order to ultimately ‘sort out what happened’”.\textsuperscript{543} For Nicki Hitchcott, the issue hampering reconciliation is “ethnopolitics”.\textsuperscript{544}

In conclusion, Nzeyimana’s response to Nyirubugara’s critique would be to recall that the writing of history in the afterlife of the genocide is defined by the project rather than the partiality of history. For Nzeyimana:

Gacaca, Labour for the General Interest (Travaux d’intérêt général or TIG) and prisons are moments which, because of the destiny of the present, draw their sources from the bottom of the negative. But at their horizons awaits an impulse that will draw Rwandans toward the definitive fraternity and sorority. For the purposes of a durability that excludes the cycle [or rhythm] an eternal guilty or an eternal victim, forgiveness is a kind of release that transforms the culprit into a forgiven human and the victim survivor in the forgiver. At the horizon lays a Rwandan society of a people without guilt, nor secrets. In order to reach this, even if Gacaca and TIG emerge in the aftermath for the resolution of the conflicts, and even if they are negative structures (in the sense of having to resolve the negative), at their horizon there resides an affirmative ideal of peace.\textsuperscript{545}


\textsuperscript{544} Hitchcott, \textit{Rwandan Genocide Stories}, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{545} Nzeyimana, \textit{Histoire et pragmatisme}, pp. 160-161. “Gacaca, TIG et Prisons sont des moments qui, par le destin de l’actualité, tirent leurs sources dans un fond du négatif. Mais à leurs horizons se trouve l’élan qui tire les Rwandais vers la fraternité « Ubuwandimwe » définitive. Pour une durabilité qui exclut le cycle du coupable éternel ou de la victime éternelle, le pardon est une sorte de rupture qui convertit le coupable en homme pardonné et la victime rescapée en homme de pardon. A l’horizon se trouve une société rwandaise des hommes sans honte, ni secret. Pour cela, alors que Gacaca et TIG viennent après, pour gérer les conflits, et qu’ils sont des structures négatives (dans le sens de venir gérer le négatif), à l’horizon, se trouve l’idéal positive de la paix”.

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Education: A Rhythm of Returning the Future to the Present

It is from this perspective that Isaïe Nzeyimana also understands education. In *Critique de l’école rendue publique: Recentrer l’école avec Hegel et dans les proximités du temple* (2017), Nzeyimana engages in the dialectics of the potential of and the duty for education. Is it possible to educate and, if so, is it necessary? For Nzeyimana, education is both what is possible and what is necessary.

Nzeyimana believes that the immediacy of the present immerses existence in conditions that prevent humanity from being identical to itself. As such, for Nzeyimana, the object of education is to make the present relate to the future and, conversely, to return the future to the present. This means progress but, at the same time, it is a return to the foundation. To educate is therefore to accompany humanity on this road towards the unknown, to the discovery of its own potential-being. For Nzeyimana, this means that education does not produce another type of humanity for humanity is already celestial, that is from outside present time and space, and education is there to simply accompany the subjects along their own way. The possibility and the duty of education is to mobilise each subject on its own path, towards its own future.\(^{546}\)

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\(^{546}\) For another recent analysis is of educational policies and programmes, see Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo, *Citizenship and values education in post-genocide Rwanda: an analysis of the Itorero training scheme for high school leavers*, PhD Thesis (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 2016). In this volume, Nzahabwanayo offers a critical analysis, and recommendations of the paleonymic use of *itorero*—a dynastic system of education listed in above in Nzeyimana’s “Categories of Self-Consciousness of the Rwandan People”. Since 1994, *itorero* is the name of a compulsory nationwide pre-university educational programme that offers military, civic and social education.
Chapter 4: Generosity and the Rest, a Speculative Dialogue Between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana

The previous chapter outlined how Isaïe Nzeyimana understands the question of how to live together in the political reality of the post-colonial and the post-genocide—a condition that is connected to the global epoch where, as described by Patrick Nganang, intense levels of crisis are the norm rather than the exception. For Nzeyimana, this “political reality” compels one to search for a philosophical reflection on how to organise the managing of the history, memory and education of all those who live in a particular region or nation, starting with Rwanda.

On this point, Nzeyimana asks: “How to understand life in its unity, in its essential indivisible propriety? How to build a Rwandan memory of the genocide, one and indivisible? How to conciliate the layers of memories that are sometimes contradictory, even though they are all true? How to conciliate the national memory and the official Rwandan memory with the individual and collective memories?”

The previous chapter outlined Nzeyimana’s project, hypothesising that, despite the contradictions and the objections that can be raised against Nzeyimana’s paleonymic formulation of ubuvandimwe, his thought is a philosophy of crossing, of overcoming the limit of living together, through thinking the rhythm of memory, economy and education in the movement of living together.

What, Where and When is a Conversation, a Dialogue?

Over the past few years, when someone has asked me “What is your PhD about?” I have responded that it is a dialogue between the French literary theorist Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana, a contemporary philosopher working in Rwanda today, on the subject of how to live together. Indeed, in the

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547 Ibid., p. 8.
previous chapters, I have described this thesis in those terms: as a dialogue. But what is a dialogue exactly and what makes it a practice-based thesis?

Effectively, what is happening right now is a dialogue: through the biography of research, the practice that mobilises it and through the current writing submitted for the examination of the reader. The writing makes this dialogue look sequential, as if one thing happens after another, but the “research” and the “writing” actually happen at the same time. This is why, if I am allowed to confess, a practice-based thesis is a demanding task: the writing is generated at the same time as you are researching and at the same time as you are practising. In other words, it is not as though I spent five years organising conferences and filming sessions, for instance, and then two years writing about the insights I gained from them. The practice and the research and the writing all take place simultaneously and inform one another. This is perhaps the distinctiveness of the practice-thesis.

A practice-based dialogue is a process of generating new research, which is neither in the archives, nor on the shelves: it is all new. This is why it requires some effort: in this case, effort to take a video camera and a recording device to a particular location in Rwanda to interview and film a philosopher there, effort to travel to several locations and repeat this process, and then effort to take all the material back to base, edit it and present it. This is very different to going to an archive, or to consulting the books on the shelves of a library, although I have tried to connect the process to the existing archives and the existing books on library shelves, as examined in the previous chapter. A dialogue then is not instead of archives and books, but rather as well as or in addition to.

Nevertheless, now that key points of both Barthes’s *How to Live Together* and Nzeyimana’s recent writing have been outlined, this current chapter undertakes a speculative dialogue between the two philosophers. This dialogue centres on the role of “rhythm” in the overcoming of the limit of living together. The aim is to create a dialogue between the moral and ethical grounding of Nzeyimana’s rhythmic formulation of *giving-receiving-giving* and Barthes’s understanding of rhythm as *letting-being-letting*. Through the encounter between these two rhythms, I wish to draw conclusions about the questions of how to overcome the
burden of heritage understood as negative generosity and manifested as either rest (Barthes) or generosity/movement—debt, bond or duty (Nzeyimana).

This dialogue engenders a new resource, which is neither an archive nor a book, but which does relate to the existing books and the existing archives. This activity, this practice is what makes the thesis different from, say, a comparative literature thesis or a continental philosophy thesis. In effect, Nzeyimana’s research about generosity emerged after I had asked him about generosity in 2015 during the conversation I staged for the making of my film *Comment vivre ensemble*. As such, the practice generates the theory and the theory reflects back on the practice and, from there, a writing emerges, either by myself or at the hand of those with which the research enters the dialogue.

Nzeyimana understands philosophy (and art) in terms of “social physics” as linguistic systems capable of making a shift from being to becoming. This is a movement from statistical realism to “social philosophy” or poetry. A crucial aspect in this intellectual motion derives from Nzeyimana’s methodological process of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s dialectics, and from his understanding of existence as generosity. Following Hegel, Nzeyimana considers one’s subject, knowledge and history as movement, “not constant, static or unchanging, but as containing contradictions and change, and so as capable of overlapping or overgrasping (übergreifen) the messiness, the comings and goings, the imperfection of the physical world”.

In order to undertake this movement from social physics to social philosophy, education is a return to the future *already* within. In this sense, education does not produce a new or other type of humanity. Rather, humanity is already celestial—that is: humanity is from outside the present—and the role of art or philosophy is to accompany each subject along one’s own way in this return to outside the present time. That is the possibility and therefore the duty of education: to mobilise each subject towards their own path, as they move towards the future that is already within.

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Conflict as a Rhythmic Phenomenon of Parenthood or Heritage

During his Leçon inaugurale at the Collège de France, Roland Barthes introduced his teaching methodology through the idea of “the comings and goings of a child playing beside the mother, leaving her, returning to bring her a pebble, a piece of string, or other such found object, and thereby tracing around a calm centre a whole locus of play within which the pebble, the string come to matter less than the enthusiastic giving of them”.549

It is befitting to repeat here the striking scenario remarked by Barthes and narrated during his first lecture of How to Live Together on 12 January 1977: “From my window… I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running, like an animal, or one of Sade’s victims being whipped. She walks at her own pace, unaware of the fact that her son’s rhythm is different. And she’s his mother!” This leads Barthes to note that “[p]ower—the subtlety of power—is effected through disrhythm, heterorhythm”.550

The moral and ethical convergences between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana are illustrated by these two allegories of the relationship between education and parenthood. Beside the historical moment, the geographical contexts and the political realities of their respective intellectual operations, the other major difference between Barthes and Nzeyimana relates to the societal scale at which their respective projects operate.

Barthes’s How to Live Together is a dialogue between isolation and cohabitation: it is a novelistic simulation of forms and techniques of temporal belonging that construct spaces of human existence. The object of Barthes’s course is to explore a specific fantasy and, therefore, “not all forms of ‘living


together’ (societies, phalansteries, families, couples) but primarily the ‘living together’ of very small groups, where cohabitation does not preclude individual freedom”.551

Equally, Nzeyimana’s philosophical project is to make a passage, a crossing, an overcoming of the limit of living together. It is to move beyond the social fracture of the genocide within and beyond Rwanda and the crisis of discourse in the world, through re-thinking the rhythm of memory, economy and education in the movement of living together.

Like Nzeyimana, Barthes’s philosophical project responds to a crisis of being in the world, to the demands of history, and to the subtle subjugation effected by the need to assume a position as a subject, an intellectual, a citizen. In a liberatory orientation towards undoing such interpolation of the subject, the philosophical rendition of Barthes’s ‘living together’ reached its fullest expression during his second year at the Collège, in Le Neutre (1978-1979), his set of seminar lectures that followed How to Live Together.552

Anákrousis: Roland Barthes’s Neutral and Édouard Glissant’s Opacity, A Brief Dialogue

In The Neutral (its English translation), the ascetic movement fuelling Barthes’s intellectual motion reaches a contemporary illocution. As noted by Chinese-American theorist Yue Zhuo in her article “Gender Neutral”,553 Barthes defines the neutral as “every inflection that, dodging or baffling the paradigmatic, oppositional structure of meaning, aims at the suspension of the conflictual basis of discourse”.554 To clarify this point, it is useful to briefly draw out the connotations and differences with opacity, a more popular concept proposed by

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551 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
553 Yue Zhuo, “Gender Neutral: Rereading Barthes’s S/Z and the Figure of the Androgyne”, in Word and Text 1 (2017): pp. 119–135.
the Martinique poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant. Glissant theorised opacity as a means to assert the value of “the theory of difference”. For Glissant, this theory “has allowed us to struggle against the reductive thought produced, in genetics for example, by the presumption of racial excellence or superiority”. Glissant demanded “not merely to the right to difference but […] also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity”. For Glissant,

Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures. There would be something great and noble about initiating such a movement, referring not to Humanity but to the exultant divergence of humanities. Thought of self and thought of other here become obsolete in their duality.

More recently, queer and feminist discourses, as well as media studies, have turned to Glissant’s formulation in order to negotiate linguistic agency and aesthetic practices that outplay the dualistic demands of visibility and invisibility. For example, American artist and theorist Zach Blas suggests that Glissant “theorised opacity as an anti-imperial modality of relation and existence”. Of course, it will be apparent to the reader that my summary above does not do enough justice to the depth and complexity of opacity as formulated by Glissant,


556 Édouard Glissant, “For Opacity”, p. 189.

557 Ibid.

558 Ibid., p. 190.


or as it is understood in its current uses. I only note that, because opacity is more widely referenced than Roland Barthes’s Neutral, drawing out the former’s connotations with Barthes’s Neutral and perhaps also idiorrhythm might help to clarify Barthes’s proposition.

In any case, for Zhuo, the Neutral is “a structural destabilization, or a passage (traversée) as it comes across language, discourse, body, gesture and action”. Barthes’s ideal of living together is thus to allow his prototypical small groups a stance of “retreat” or “oscillation” that dodges or “baffles” the paradigm of binary oppositions.

Barthes is therefore outplaying dialectics, and favouring instead the development of a “socialism of distances”. His idea of living together “is a refusal to choose between, or to enter into, the sets of binary oppositions” of rhythms. This is something I would describe as an affirmative self-negation, attested by the ascetic subject-hood of “silence, retreat, non-action”, in contrast to a “committed” subject who defends a position or effects a transmission of a public message.

Letting-Being-Letting: How to Live Together as How to Rest Together

It is here that Roland Barthes’s rhythm of letting-being-letting originates. At any rate, this socialism of distance is not governed by indifference. “On the contrary, it is a principle that requires an indefatigable effort to combat the doxa, which Barthes defines as ‘Public Opinion, the mind of the majority, petit bourgeois consensus’”. Barthes aims at “a movement of displacement, a constant softening of doxa into paradoxa, or an ongoing blurring of grids into moire”.

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561 Yue Zhuo, “Gender Neutral”, p. 119.

562 Ibid., p. 120.

563 Ibid.

This softening is important to Barthes to the extent that, as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, Barthes never overtly addressed his relationship with his maternal grandfather Louis-Gustave Binger—a governor of Ivory Coast in the service of the French Empire. Furthermore, according to Zhuo, while it emerged later that Barthes was gay, he never associated himself with the struggles and the debates around gender and sexuality of his time:

This “inactivity” points to the logical tension in Barthes’s intellectual proposition of living together. In his writing, tension resides in “a purely descriptive, non-hysterical way of telling that prioritises utterance over message”. At the same time, his writing “exhibits an inner violence and has the power to ‘thwart the Image,’ to corrupt ‘languages, vocabularies, ’” and in so doing, “to destabilise social names and categorisations”. Barthes claims that this blurs the line between an escape and attack, but “how can it be both non-conflictual and combative?”

At any rate, for Barthes, the Neutral is a “free manner” or his own way of searching for “his own style of being present to the struggles of [his] time”.

In other words, Barthes’s *How to Live Together* seems to ask: what individual and collective rhythms can one develop, for better harmonies between one’s subjects, one’s communities and one’s localities? As we have seen, Barthes addresses this question from the perspective of “one’s own rhythm” or *idiorrhythm*, a theological concept from Western asceticism. From the historical perspective surveyed in Chapter One, Barthes’s lecture courses partake in the “the structuralism of the 1970s” which, according to theorist Rudolphus Teeuwen:

exalted the importance of language. It made meaning a matter not of reference to nonlinguistic reality but of difference within language, and thus gave language the conflictual shape of a battleground for assertive possibilities. From within structuralism, however, emerged its unexpressed alternative, a rich, dark seam of weariness with language, a desire to sidestep it, to be exempt from its demand for meaning. This sort of weariness, this desire for exemption from the structuralist force of

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565 Zhuo, “Gender Neutral”, p. 120. Emphasis original.

566 Barthes, *The Neutral*, p. 8; *Le Neutre*, p. 33. Quoted in Yue Zhuo, “Gender Neutral”, p. 120.

language, enriched structuralism’s analytical bent with utopian desiring.\textsuperscript{568}

Barthes’ utopian desires are in fact “remarkably low-key and remarkably private”, located in “a private retreat”.\textsuperscript{569} In particular, “the spring of Barthes’s utopia is weariness” and is drawn to and from mysticism. According to Teeuwen, the American scholar William James characterises mysticism in terms of “states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain”.\textsuperscript{570} Since Barthes’s mysticism springs from the weariness of language which finds its embodiment in mysticism, it is possible to conclude: “Barthes’s utopia, by definition, is not very clearly defined”.\textsuperscript{571}

Moreover, Belgian literary theorist Maarten De Pourcq notes that “throughout his work, Barthes has the habit of referring to antiquity and using notions which he explicitly terms ‘ancient’”.\textsuperscript{572} For De Pourcq, this habit is justified by Barthes’s studies of classical philology, while Barthes also exhibited an admiration of “authors who had their hearts in ancient Greece, such as André Gide and Nietzsche”.\textsuperscript{573} However, De Pourcq finds that Barthes “rarely questions these intertexts or the interplay between antiquity and his own writing”.

In any case, it is in this antiquity that Barthes locates “his personal ideal form of ‘living together’ which he labels with the Greek word ‘idiorrhythm’”.\textsuperscript{574} As amply explored in previous chapters, with idiorrhythm as the connective thread (and,

\textsuperscript{568} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{569} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{572} Ibid., p. 24.

\textsuperscript{573} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{574} Teeuwen, “An Epoch of Rest”, p. 4.
later, *The Neutral*), Barthes strategises through a number of traits which allow “one to absent oneself from the world’s designs”.  

In view of taking such leave from the designs of the world, Barthes mobilises “states and attitudes” that include “sleep, weariness, abstention, retreat, tact, apathy, androgyny, tolerance, and skepticism”, as well as “such inducers of states as ‘H’ (which stands for hashish, rather than heroine, and also for homosexuality), Zen, Tao, and mysticism”.  

Furthermore, Barthes investigates contrasting traits such as “arrogance, conflict, and anger”, as well as studying “deflections and dodges” of the above states and attitudes such as “silence, beside-the-point answers, side-stepping the ‘terrorism of the question,’ pretended deafness, and precipitate leave-taking”.  

Finally, Barthes also relies on practitioners of deflection, who include “Pyrrho, Jakob Boehme, André Gide, Lao-Tzu”.  

The connecting factor across Barthes’s traits, schemas or figures—outlined in Chapter One of this thesis—is their relation to the practice of idiorrhythmy. In particular, the “states and attitudes” of an idiorrhythmic community aim at “rest”. I am aware of the apparent repetition of overviewing Barthes’s lectures, and I only engage in this here in order to demonstrate that Barthes did not treat “rest” as a subject of its own. Again, as “the spring of Barthes’s utopia is weariness”, it follows that rest is a crucial subtext in the definition of Barthes’s living together. Rest also underwrites *The Neutral* as “that which defies paradigm”. Barthes considers rest not so much leisure or inaction, but an action of being sensitive to what is to come. This is apparent in Barthes’s renditions of tact, sleep, tolerance and androgyny.

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575 Ibid.

576 Ibid.


Rest is a faculty of reserve and a genesis: it is that which gives space and time to live together. At the same time, like Barthes’s Neutral, rest is that which resides outside conceptualisation. For the socialism of distance to take hold, the ideal of rest must retain its quality of a resource common to all members of such sociality. In this socialism of distance, the ethical imperative by which the members of the group operate on their own is in terms of that which adds to rest and that which takes away from rest. This rest is life itself; it is an existence—a bios is performed, that is, written, lived, by each member of such sociality.

The measure of this addition-to-life is the ability to take and to give “rest”; in other words, to let be. Here, rest is to be understood in ontological, epistemological, psychological and material contexts as that which remains. While this remaining may be in or out of reach of the members of the given sociality, rest is that which resides outside conceptualisation. Rest is also that which is left or stays proper to its own being. In other words, rest is that which is on one’s own: rest is idiorrhythm as a genesis. In Barthes, rest avoids the rhythmic conflicts borne of parenthood or procreation, in as much that the ultimate action is not to take action, not to shape, to lead, to teach, but to let be.

In this sense, rest is a common good, the remains, the remainder, the reserve from which life adds to itself. Rest is the resource and, at times, the source itself, the genesis, all of which is put in place or maintained in order to restore life as desired by each idios, by each member with their own rhythm. This is what I have meant all along by “letting-being”. The contrary to idios-rhythm then is the measure through which such “rest” may find expression. In this sense, Barthes’s idiorrhythm is a mystical privacy staged within a profane public; it is the desire for a subject to rest: to stay proper to one’s own being. In addition, this staying, or resting, leads to the becoming of its own being in the world to come, because it is a reserve of itself.

As such, for Barthes, idios is the conception and the articulation of an idea of living-together. It is a theory, or a poeisis of worlding. Rhythm is an embodiment, a practice of the ways of writing or exercising one’s own regulation and determination of this life and extending this life to “the rest”. In Barthes’s understanding of living together, “rest” emerges as a categorical conjunction of
philosophical intuitions: *idios* is the idea-making of a life and rhythm is the action-taking in the shaping of such life. This understanding can thus re-orientate the question of “how to live together” towards “how to rest together”.

**Becoming What One Already Is: Nzeyimana’s Giving-Receiving-Giving**

On this subject of rest, Isaïe Nzeyimana responds: rest as such does not exist! This I learnt from him during our conversation for my film *Comment vivre ensemble* (2015). I had travelled to Rwanda thanks to an arts grant provided by Mondriaan Fonds which is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Culture. I had been nominated for the Prix de Rome 2015 and been given a working budget to prepare for the exhibition later that year in November. Sitting in his garden in front of my camera and microphone not far from where Nzeyimana had once sat with Jean-Paul Martinon in 2012, Nzeyimana noted how, even when one thinks one is resting, one is still on a planet that is moving and rotating across space at incredible speed. For this reason, for Nzeyimana, physical rest is in itself impossible. Similarly, biological rest does not make much sense either, because all vital organs function continuously with death occurring precisely when one of those organs takes a break. Therefore, biologically, life means continuity. Psychologically, Nzeyimana also finds, “we cannot really speak of rest, because the mind operates continuously in other forms: in the form of dreams, of memories, etc”. More particularly, for Nzeyimana, in concrete terms, when we say we are resting, it may mean we are asleep. Then we rest, and we calm a little. But I wonder if resting is not a way to gather strength in order to carry on with the same actions? Such rest, which is also the gathering of strength, is an active rest. I sleep today in order to recharge for tomorrow. Is rest then not an activity? I may rest my body, I may sit and rest physically, but in that same instant I may take up reading a book. There is a simultaneity between rest and action. In my opinion, in my experience, I do not think that absolute rest exists or can take hold. And even if such rest would exist, it would be a rest that contains or prepares an action or a movement. Movement and break, action and rest share a common ground. They are siblings, one
nurses the other. Action is the nurse of rest as rest is the nurse of action.\textsuperscript{580}

Nzeyimana continues: “this balance must be established in order to create a beautiful harmony” to live by. If one were to work without rest, this would lead one to ruin. At the same time, it would be catastrophic if we were to have uninterrupted rest without work. Finally, Nzeyimana concludes by pointing out that true rest is change. For him, to rest means “to change the activity (travail), to change action”. Giving an example from his student years, Nzeyimana recounts: “When I was tired while studying cosmology, I would perhaps find it accommodating to study ethics. And currently, if I am working at the office and I get tired, resting would entail working in the garden. Resting is this alternation between activities”.\textsuperscript{581} It is this alternation, this rhythm that Nzeyimana terms \textit{injyana}.

Unlike Roland Barthes, Nzeyimana’s understanding of “rest” does not form the basis for his sociality. Rather, for Nzeyimana, hospitality emerges from the bond between rest and work, between movement and action, through the movement from “social physics” to “social philosophy”.\textsuperscript{582} It is this social movement that brings Nzeyimana to suggest the \textit{bond or the debt of receiving-giving-receiving}, a bond of generosity or freedom.

Unlike Barthes who only considers a small group, Nzeyimana’s ethics are formulated on a much wider social scale. The bond of generosity is \textit{ubuvandimwe}. As discussed in the previous chapter, this Rwandan genocide marks the moment of a temporary break of \textit{ubuvandimwe}, the bond of generosity. This break is also apparent in the economic dialectics of the rich and the poor, maintained by calculations and statistics, and by the unjust exploitation of memory, through evolutionary thesis, immigration, settlement and

\textsuperscript{580} Christian Nyampeta, \textit{Comment vivre ensemble}, 2015. The film was produced in the context of Prix de Rome 2015 at De Appel arts centre in Amsterdam from November 2015 to January 2016.

\textsuperscript{581} Ibid.


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a cultural politics of Otherness. It is as if, for Nzeyimana, humanity took a break from itself.

This break of the bond of giving-receiving-giving, borne of economic and socio-historical issues is the source of being strangers at home. The effects of this break amount to the loss of humanity’s own humanity. In order to attend to this break of humanity, philosophy is a language that may teach us how we might inhabit the world again.

The Lifeline of Generosity: The Bond of Giving-Receiving-Giving

For Isaïe Nzeyimana, existence is thus a debt or a bond. He suggests this by listing the ecological, biological, material, social and cultural conditions that precede each living being and therefore make existence indebted to its own prior existence: the oxygen that allows life to breathe; the sun that keeps the planet warm without burning it, within a universe set between two extremes of incredible heat and inconceivable cold; the sun that illuminates without blinding those on the planet, within a universe set between dazzling lights and cosmic darkness; the giant planets that serve as shields to protect Earth against collisions; and time and space, both of which provide an opening to unlimited realms that constitute the arts and sciences, and the beautiful artistic and scientific works made and built by previous generations with demanding asceticism.

For Nzeyimana, the cosmos and biodiversity—that has welcomed humans on Earth since its creation or formation—is a testament to the debt of existence. Similarly, a debt is owed for the foods and drinks consumed without worrying about their toxicities, to those who lived before the current humans who tried them at their own risk. A debt is also owed for the ability to cross the oceans, rivers and forests, to those who have drowned or gone astray while learning how to navigate them.583

583 Nzeyimana, « Exister c’est être en dette ». 
In other words, everything needed for humanity to exist was there before humanity existed. Therefore, to exist is to step into the affiliation of receiving-giving-perpetuating, so that the chain of the gift does not stop.
**Injyana: The Debt of Generosity or Freedom**

For Isaïe Nzeyimana, each of these primordial and preceding “gifts” imply that every living being is indebted. In turn, this indebtedness commands each human to make a personal and a societal effort to reciprocate these gifts: this reciprocity is effected by practising generosity. Generosity is at the same time a freedom of the kind that inscribes the subject in the bond of receiving-giving-receiving.

This is what I have tried to outline in Chapter Two: for Nzeyimana, to exist is to be generous, because existence is the above-mentioned rhythmic bond of giving-receiving-giving. Nzeyimana calls this rhythm injyana, from kujya meaning “to go, to walk, to move, to put into motion” and -na meaning “with”. This is related to ubuvandimwe, where kuva is to come from. Coincidently, my translative sociography reminds me that this condition of kinship has a number of synonyms that each denote “coming from” in Dutch: afkomst, herkomst and also komaf: af—from, her—again, return, repetition. Through another word, toekomst, the future, one could speculate about a semantic relationship between the point of “coming from” and the direction towards the future: toe—towards, forwards, and komst, from the verb coming, denoting movement.

At the same time, I also know of nageslacht in Dutch, a word that denotes offspring, progeny and posteriority. Na— means after and geslacht actually means gender or sex, from which I deduce a body or rather,—as a paleonym—a mater.585 Something from which something develops or takes form”, the substance out of which another springs into life. Paradoxically, the term geslacht is in itself already a composite of ge— which indicates a past action, and the slachten: to slaughter, to, kill, to annihilate. This double meaning of na/ge/slaacht as both procreation and annihilation begs the following question: what is exactly annihilated in the act of bringing forth? I shall return to this question

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584 See also: Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, in John Richardson and Brian Leiter (eds.), *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp. 139-164.

585 From the suffix mat— as proposed by Jean-François Lyotard and American semiologist Harold Laswell, as we learned above in Martinon, After “Rwanda”, p. surveyed in the previous chapter.
For now, this excursion aside, the reader might know the prefix (u)bu– from ubuntu, the concept denoting “humanity” made famous by the likes of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, but also of course by Abbé Alexis Kagame himself. In fact, when I was outlining Jean-Paul Martinon’s After “Rwanda” in the previous chapter I had promised the reader to explain the meaning of —ntu. This seems to be an opportune moment to do so, because it serves a further purpose to clarify the sections below.

The root syllable —ntu represents above all a mode of address to the other. As Balibusta says: “Taken on its own, the root syllable —ntu appears in daily speech only when one addresses another person: “niko ntu? (hey, you)” Or simply “ntu?” These are used when one is not using someone’s name”. However, —ntu is not just a mode of interpellation; it also stands for a supplement, that is, for what can only be perceived a posteriori as what cannot be determined. As such, the root syllable —ntu is at once an interpellation and what could be “seen” but not determined. The crucial aspect of —ntu is that it can never be understood as an essence. —Ntu is simply a conjunction between two or more syllables or prefixes used in order to form signifying abstract words: Ubu-ntu, Aka-ntu, Aha-ntu, etc. As Balibusta says: “—ntu has no specific signification. It only signifies something when it is attached to another linguistic unit”. Such a scope prevents understanding this root as a synthesis of an a priori constitution of Being and/or the way this a priori relates to the other. —Ntu is, at once, address and supplement, hence the unnerving and troubling closeness to Lyotard’s syllable mat—.587

In any case, in ubuvandimwe/injyana, the —ntu, freedom, exists only if the same freedom is extended to the fellow bavandimwe. But as Balibutsa says, —ntu, freedom, “has no specific signification. It only signifies something when it is attached to another linguistic unit”.588 In other words, it has meaning when it is


587 Martinon, After “Rwanda”, p. 38.

in a rhythmic relation. As explained by Nzeyimana in that same video in his
garden, and as explored in Chapter Three, to live is to live with, and existence is
the coordination of rhythms.589

Furthermore, each of these debts summons a different human faculty, allowing
one to participate in the making of the value of giving-receiving-giving. This
generosity or freedom commands one to refrain from misusing one’s human
faculties. For instance, language exists only in order to give praise and
blessings and not to curse. A hand is gifted in order to be able to extend it and
to give, never to tear apart or to strike. Feet and legs are for running towards
the fellow umuvandimwe, to visit and to help, never to chase or hunt. Intellect is,
according to Nzeyimana, for cultivating what is true and what is good, never in
the service of the false or the bad. The heart is for loving, worshiping, praying,
honouring—but never for hating, etc.

As such, the question is: How to honour one’s debt to humanity, in a world
where economic and political systems do not believe in having a bond with
anything or anyone unless it serves to make profit? In other words, how to
attend to the “after” one’s own life, to the aftermath, to those who are yet to
come?

From Being to Becoming, from Realism to Fiction

At the same time, this attendance and return to the future from within the
present does not preclude another prelate of existing in the world. For Isaïe
Nzeyimana, existence should be a “festival” because nature is “wise” and
provident. This can be observed in how humanity appeared only once nature
was sufficiently prepared to host it in a “festivity”, in a habitat in which humanity
could thrive. Nzeyimana makes this suggestion following the myths of creation
as well as the hypotheses of evolution.

589 Christian Nyampeta, Comment vivre ensemble.
Listing the emergence of life elements, Nzeyimana notes how first the sky and the earth, according to the myths, were empty, vague, dark and inhabitable up until the moment when “the poet or the artist of the universe” created time and space, were filled with the atmosphere, oxygen, light, water, herbs, seeds, roots, fruits and animals, which together should be enough for humans “to breathe, drink, eat, rest, feast and paint the world through the arts, philosophy, science and technology”.

As such, social inequalities manifesting as economic issues are injustices to nature, an insult to the creator, and not necessarily the problem of overpopulation or other technical issues affecting the society. Rather, for Nzeyimana, these problems result from the present organisation of life or time and space through a “configuration of inconsistencies”. Nzeyimana addresses these inconsistencies through a set of dialectics of economy, memory and education, aspects of which were surveyed in the previous chapter. For the sake of clarity, however, I will outline again the major tenets of Nzeyimana’s rhythmic propositions.

The role of philosophy is to give clarification to the situations affecting the society, by providing operational concepts that are “able to generate projects or efficient interventions”. For Nzeyimana, here lies the limit of discourse. In an attempt to translate contemporary issues of human relation, the “common language” resorts to terms and concepts such as “colonialism”, “neocolonialism”, “terrorism”, “racism”, “the poverty of some or the wealth of others”, etc.

For Nzeyimana, the universality of these terms sometimes makes them anachronistic or non-operative in contexts requiring specificities. The wider problems affecting human relations compel entering a “field of reflection” in which “a dialogue between philosophy and life” takes place. “How can philosophy question the end of life, in order to fertilise life from within?” To achieve this task, Nzeyimana lists his models who, as we saw, include Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, for whom to philosophise is “to turn the world upside down”. However, according to Nzeyimana, Hegel finds that this is “in fact putting
the world back in place, since the common world is already upside down”.

Nzeyimana also resorts to Friedrich Nietzsche who writes: “Philosophy, as I have so far understood and lived it, means living voluntarily among ice and high mountains—seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality”.

Nzeyimana offers that, within societies that he calls “at the stage of simplicity”, every member of the society has to fulfil all the tasks pertaining to her or his activities. For example, a singer or a dancer or a filmmaker is at the same time one’s own composer, one’s own actor and one’s own performer but, because those who can sing may not necessarily have concepts and ideas to sing about, their music may lack the depth it deserves. As such, the song retreats into banality. Similarly, those who have concepts without musical talents may miss a public space in which to channel their ideas.

This is the case of the disengaged intellectual, for lack of a public outlet. In remedying this issue, the solution proposed by an aesthetic of beauty is the complementarity between the technician and the artist, who then communicates with the intellectual. The technician provides the tools and instruments; the artist conjures the form, voice and rhythm; and the intellectual provides the content from culture, society, economy, politics, etc. For Isaïe Nzeyimana, this complementarity allows a movement from the world as-it-is to the world as-it-should-be.

**Conclusion: The Bond of Giving-Receiving-Giving**

The above was Isaïe Nzeyimana’s answer in response to Roland Barthes’s understanding of living together as resting together. In summary, Nzeyimana concludes that life, existence, has a meaning only once humanity learns that it is inscribed in the bond or chain of giving-receiving-giving. For Nzeyimana, the destruction of *ubuvandimwe*, inscribed in the embodiment of the bond of royalty/loyalty—manifested in but distinct from traditional harmonies of family,

590 Nzeyimana, “Exister”.

community, nation, economy and politics—result in the emergence of a humanity that, in the words of Homer, are “without lineages, without lifelines”. For Nzeyimana, this destruction produces a sociality in which its members feel as though they owe no debt to anyone else. The disintegration of lifelines is amplified by our world which is experiencing a crisis of discourse. In rich countries, this crisis is exemplified in the formalism or the nominalism of a social, cultural, political and economic discourse of content, which leaves no room for actual inhabitation of life.
Chapter 5: Beyond the Limits of Rest and Generosity in Practice

The previous chapter attempted to bring into dialogue key concerns in the work of Isaïe Nzeyimana and in Roland Barthes’s *How to Live Together*. I have argued that the phenomenon of “rest” is elemental to Barthes’s understanding of living together, apprehended at the scale of a small, prototypical group such as an ascetic community. This means that, for Barthes, *idiorrhythm* is the maintenance of one’s own rhythm in a manner that produces a socialism of distances.

However, for Nzeyimana, rest does not even exist. Instead, rhythm, *injyana*, is a movement with oneself and with one’s fellow *muvandimwe* who, in effect, cannot be “Other”, since they are from the same womb. Nzeyimana’s thought is a project of overcoming, of crossing the limit of living together. For Nzeyimana, existence is a spiral movement, a motion orientated ahead and also returning towards its own history.

Nzeyimana’s thought is formulated from within a localised political reality of post-genocide but, as I have explored, this is a condition that is intertwined with the global moment that fragments and separates life in a myriad of prohibitions and isolations. As such, Nzeyimana’s concerns are to “understand life in its unity, in its essential indivisible propriety”.

Nzeyimana’s concerns imply that one’s own rhythm, *injyana*, is a bond of *giving-receiving-giving*. This is because—despite the break of this bond manifested through the genocide but also through colonial, postcolonial and economic injustices—the universe, society and the community are *already* gifts which benefit each living thing’s existence. Therefore, for Nzeyimana, it is imperative for each living being to partake in this bond, and to return the received gifts to those who come *after* it.

In the guise of a conclusion, I would like to reflect on the possible limits of the understanding of one’s own rhythm as generosity and one’s own rhythm as rest

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592 Ibid., p. 8.
in the respective analyses of living together by Nzeyimana and Barthes. I would also like to conclude this thesis with a reflection on how these theories have become a practice and, vice versa, how I have theorised such practice.

The Dialectics of Generosity and Genocide: Conflict Is Inherent to Communality

Recently, in the summer of 2019, I attended the birthday celebrations of a colleague who works at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The birthday was held in Long Island City. As I was about to leave, a couple at the party mentioned that they had ordered a taxi and offered me a lift home. I had planned on taking the subway, so that I could read, but I accepted the offer of the lift nevertheless: not only was it the polite thing to do, but it also turned out we were heading in the same direction. The taxi journey was very convivial and I soon learnt that one of my fellow passengers was none other than Paola Antonelli, the Senior Curator of the Design and Architecture Department at MoMA.

I was thrilled to be able to tell Paola Antonelli that, as a former student of Industrial Design at Central Saint Martins in London, I had benefited greatly from reading her essays. I joked that some of my colleagues would be very jealous when they heard that I had shared a taxi with her! Soon our conversation turned to the subject of accents. Sadly, the next rather predictable question Paula asked was: “Are you a Hutu or a Tutsi?” The question was not at all surprising, as I had been asked it by so many other interlocutors over the years, but I had not entirely anticipated it either. I became aware of the puzzling vertiginous descent from an Uber ride in Manhattan, via my design studies in London supported by various Dutch cultural bodies thanks to my Dutch naturalisation, to the sudden reduction of what my interlocutor wished that I really was. The southbound surroundings on Broadway in Manhattan, the vague relations formed a minute before, the knowledge acquired along the way, the desires, the aspirations for the future, the hopes and the dreams—all of this is beside the point: I must be either a Hutu or a Tutsi.
This same question is occasionally posed by colleagues and new acquaintances, in convivial contexts, but also in formal contexts. During the Fifth Visual Cultures Forum held at Goldsmiths in 2012 I mentioned in Chapter Two, Professor Astrid Schmetterling asked me the same question, Professor Schmetterling whose research at Goldsmiths focuses on the relation between history, culture and memory, between the act of bearing witness and the act of making art. I was speaking at the panel; I had just presented a sketch for a film that later became *Words After the World* (2017), and there I was having to address my purported ethnicity.

Finally, here is another exemplary encounter: in 2014, after learning that I was born in Rwanda, a now relatively close friend who was born in Antwerp to a mother of Rwandan heritage and a Belgian father, declared to me that she could never befriend a Hutu, because of the extreme violence and suffering they had caused her family. She had never visited Rwanda and yet she carried and perhaps still carries with her this vivid notion of what she is, what she is not and what the limits of her friendships may be. All of this had been decided by her (or for her) following ethnic lines defined by global histories enforced upon geographies that are rather remote from a dinner table in Whitechapel, East London, where that initial conversation took place.

In these three cases which gave rise to these questions and declarations what was at stake was not whether I am a Hutu or a Tutsi. The real question the otherwise learned interlocutors were asking was: am I a victim or a perpetrator? In other words, the denuding, inhospitable question of who I *really* am supposed to be is asked in order to determine if I am to be pitied, sympathised and empathised with, or if I am to be despised and abhorred as a barbarian. In both cases, such questions risk to negate the human mutuality between myself and my interlocutor, because they proceed by the denial of ubuvandimwe: The question is asked not in order to measure one’s own distance, but to produce the Other in the form of either a victim or a perpetrator. This decision between charitable affiliation and demonising enmity is solely defined on the actual or imagined actions or deaths of a previous generation that are imputed on my subject, on the basis of the biographical coincidence that no living being can choose.
This forceful transference of the actions, histories, sufferings and sorrows of the previous generation upon my current subject is what Roland Barthes would describe as a rhythmic medium. This transference, once again, proceeds through language: a parasite of a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of human history and not only to political, historical history. As suggested in the Introduction of this study, in rhythm we find the inscription of memory, hospitality and exchange. Rhythm traverses matters of the heart and the stone: between emotions and architecture, thought and action. Rhythm relates to the body, its subject, its social formation and its governance. For Barthes, the symbolism of rhythm is an exhausted body.

The anecdote of my tiredness at the outset of this study results from the weight of this history, memory and exchange. At that time in 2011, I chose to retreat into a room, a symbolic but also actual repository of a concentric system that requires the expansion of gigantic infrastructures of neighbourhoods, cities and nations, which, ultimately, give pulse to the maintenance of boundaries, borders and, by extension, ideologies. Rhythm is the inscription of this flow that compels one to ask: How to live? With whom to live? Will I survive? What will remain of my life? Rhythm is the act of giving accompaniment, purpose, structure and direction to this flowing of life.

The Evening News: Rest, Rhythm and Power

The concentricity of this diagrammatic system is obviously much more complex than I sketch above but neither is it a metaphor. To bring this point home, I would like to invoke another chorus. I might already have mentioned how in July 2018 I convened the International Meeting of Another Roadmap School in Huye, Rwanda. Part of the activities included staging an international exhibition drawn from practices, methods but also artworks from the members of the different working groups that constitute the Intertwined Hi/Stories Cluster of Another Roadmap School.
As reported by writer and photographer Lineo Segoete and photographer Zachary Rosen of the Lesotho-based Ba re e ne re Literary Festival—who took part the Huye meeting in their capacity as members of the Maseru Working Group:

Ba re e ne re was in Huye, Rwanda in August 2018 for the final international meeting of the first phase of the Another Roadmap school. There, representatives from 4 continents were present to reflect on their respective researches since 2015, share outcomes, and pave a way forward as it was clear that the collective was nowhere near the end of the road. This meeting was hosted by the Nyanza Working Group and overseen by artist Christian Nyampeta. Some of the outcomes from that meeting included an exhibition and panel on the interconnections of philosophy and art.593

The projected outcomes of this first three-years phase are an Un/Chronological Timeline, an Exhibition Kit, and Learning Units. “The un/chrono/logical timeline is an educational tool developed by intertwining hi/stories to engage with arts education histories and their global connections”.594 The Exhibition Kit is a set of mobile and transportable display structures that plays host to the material recording of the processes, methods, practices and artworks of the working group that constitute the Intertwined Hi/Stories Cluster. The Learning Units each present arts education histories with a different geographical and historical focus”.595

Coincidently, I was already part of the Exhibition Kit team before taking on the role of the convenor of the 2018 International Meeting, together with three

593 https://barelifest.com/2018/12/31/a-communion-of-spirits/. The programme of the workweek and meeting is included in the Appendices.

594 https://another-roadmap.net/intertwining-histories/blog/now-online-learning-units-and-unchronological-timeline

595 Ibid. “The Learning Units “invite to engage with histories, to reflect on one’s own previously acquired knowledge and to re-activate historical experiences in current art and education practice. Seven topics provide orientation in the resources, allowing you to follow different paths, each connecting several learning units: Missionary Dimensions in Arts Education; Reflexive Pedagogies/Critical Literacies; Letterwriting; Working with Images; Critical Pedagogy and its Critiques; Archival Activism and ‘the Artist’-‘the Child’-‘the Native’".

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other colleagues. These are Swiss curator Andrea Thal who traveled from Cairo where she is the director of the Contemporary Image Center; and Belgian curator Sari Middernacht and Congolese curator Patrick Muderekeza who run Centre d’art Waza the art centre in Lubumbashi already mentioned in Chapter Two. Andrea, Sari and Patrick arrived ahead of the nearly thirty other colleagues so that we could work on the Exhibition Kit.

The aspect of the process and the question of method was crucial to us, and for this reason I drove my colleagues around in Nzeyimana’s white Toyota and the four of us undertook a short programme of studio visits across the country. We visited artists and theorists in order to learn from them, and also in order to invite them to contribute to the International Exhibition. But all of this is besides the point: I am mentioning this in relation to the question of the relationship between rest, infrastructure and power.

Apart from that first visit to Isaïe Nzeyimana I mentioned, where I overnighted at Ibis Hotel, now when I am in Huye I stay at the home of Nzeyimana and his spouse. For obvious logistical reasons, when I myself was hosting the three colleagues and soon also almost thirty more, I had made arrangements to stay and to host our colleagues at Centre d’Acceuil Mater Boni Consilii. The architecture of this hotel was designed by a former student of Nzeyimana at the now-closed Nile Polytechnic of Applied Arts (NSPA), once again a school of applied art, design and architecture founded by Nzeyimana, where the activities of Another Roadmap School took place in that summer, as I have already indicated.

One evening we were returning to the hotel from the buildings of former NSPA located at about five minutes walking distance from the hotel. The four of us members of the Exhibition Kit encountered roadblocks. As the reader might deduce from a geographical map, Rwanda sits near the equator and as a result the sun sets rather punctually and with a surprising abruptness at all seasons of the year: the sunset takes place around six in the evening and the sun rises sharply around six in the morning. It was around eight o’clock and, summer time or not, the sun had well set beyond the horizon. The neighbourhood of Bonii Consilli and NSPA is Taba, an area renowned for the tranquility and
quietness where historically the university professors and the lower-ranking dignitaries had dwelled. But this time it was really quiet; even Chez Aline, the usually exuberant side road restaurant was closed. Chez Aline had been unfailing in providing Emerance, Nzeyimana and I the occasional late night drinks and snacks.

Instead, there we were, facing a road block on a moonless night. The street lamps were lit of course. Which is how I could see that behind the light and portable barricade there were a group of figures in military uniform that made them look like they belonged to special corps. In my role as the host I stepped forward to seek passage for my guests and myself. I am actually fearful of uniforms to the point that even on board of an airplane I think twice at the sight of a flight attendant. I worry that, even at the cruising altitude of thirty-thousand feet above the ground I might have the wrong papers! But there I was speaking to formidably armed Robocop-like figures. The following was the scenario:

Soldier A:
Where do you think you are going? [In a commandingly lyrical and low-voiced Kinyarwanda].

Christian Nyampeta:
Oh we are going to sleep. We are just on our way to bed. [In a remarkably accentuated Kinyarwanda].

Soldier B:
Where is your bed? [Sounding rhetorical but extremely serious].

Christian Nyampeta:
Just over there, I can see it from here, Boni Consilii. [Gesturing with head and pointing with hand].

Soldiers A+ B:
Are you sure?
Christian Nyampeta:
Pretty much.

Without turning his head, Soldier B touched his temple and spoke to someone over the phone through his earpiece. Then Soldiers A + B instructed us to walk up a few blocks north. Once there, we were to state that we are guests at Boni Consilii and if that checked out then someone would guide us back to the hotel. Once we arrived at this other roadblock and did as instructed, a remarkably gentle mannered fellow in uniform came forth greeted us. He had no discernible decoration on his more humane outfit nor was he wearing a hat; he only carried a pistol, nonchalantly holstered around one of his hips. He smiled and asked us to follow him. “What are you doing in Huye—and of all places in Taba, actually?”, he asked over his shoulder. “Oh, we are just artists”, I said in response. “Yes, we are *commissionaires culturels*”, Patrick added, in his impeccable and inventive Congolese French, the poetry of which was lost on the Anglophone General-looking officer. While escorting us through a few more roadblocks, the high ranking officer had learnt about Another Roadmap School, our collective interests in the histories of art education, and the forthcoming conference. The end of our ambulatory elevator pitch coincided with our arrival at the gate of Boni Consilii.

Unlike the previous days, all four of us went through a metal detector whose installation seems to have had mushroomed on that same day. We then underwent expert bodily pat-downs, after which our handbags were checked. Finally we were inside the hotel and the usually jovial staff members were unmistakably curt. In fact, I was informed by the hotel staff that my room had been changed without my prior knowledge or consent but I had the impression that it was more prudent to acquiesce and to go to bed early.

As it had become my habit during the period of preparation of such momentous events, I woke up with the first rays of the morning light and from the window I discerned an unusual sight: a convoy of SUVs parked outside the gate next to two ambulances, two fully equipped military tanks, and a whole detail of military trucks. There was also a helicopter hovering above the hotel at regular intervals. And standing there in the courtyard where I usually parked
Nzeyimana’s decommissioned white Toyota was a majestic black Mercedes Benz sedan whose number plate simply was a gilded insignia that I had only seen on bank notes, coins, postal stamps, visas and other such stately devices. I stepped out of my room and when I greeted the staff at the reception desk en route to my daily walk, they confirmed the obvious: his excellency President Paul Kagame himself was a guest; he might even had been sleeping in the room in which I had slept only a night ago. It was a period of elections and he was there on a campaign trail. I could hardly believe that his excellency the president of Rwanda was effectively my temporary neighbour! And I could hardly believe that the four of us were granted permission to stay at the same hotel as he did.

But why am I bothering the reader with this long presidential chorus? What does all of this have to do with rest, rhythm, infrastructure and power? First of all, this theoretic fiction is recounted in order to draw out the infrastructural materiality of the diagram of rest I had sketched above. With this chorus I wish to emphasise the complexity and the movement at the heart of the phenomenon of a tired body. The rest or exhaustion is indeed no mere stasis. Rest is not the opposite of mobility. The resolution of tiredness demands a room and therefore an architecture and therefore an infrastructure and this consequential structure can be expanded quite a few degrees further. Which is to say, the possibility to perform rest—understood as self-governance in the senses I have outlined above—is what lies at the heart of this chorus. Spectacular infrastructures are needed in order for the president to be, to be there, to be with and to be at rest. Antennas and satellites are mobilised, roadblocks are elected, complete silences are imposed, ambulances are standing-by, etc. The rest of president is in and of itself an infrastructure that sets forth the rhythm of the nation, and not just because a president is primarily the symbol of the nation and the state. For there to be “rest” in the nation, wide structures of networks will have to be mobilised: battalions of armies have to stay up all night, and so on. The moment the figure of the president decides to sleep then the whole nation sleeps. The state does not, though; the state is the power, and the nation is the governed. The only way that we could stay at the hotel is by following the rhythm set forth by the (presence of) the figure of the president. This is the obvious nature of the flux of giving-receiving giving: the
four of us could sleep under the same roof as the highest authority only if we are subsumed under the latter's cenobitic regulations.

Even though Isaïe Nzeyimana rejects the possibility of rest as a fundamental category of living together, Barthes and Nzeyimana do meet at the intersection of rest as authority, legacy and heritage. In my case, in the anecdotal moment of exhaustion, I chose to use rest not as remains but as a break: a way of undoing the burden of heritage and of measuring my own distance towards the pressures of the history of the present. In retrospect, I have followed idios-rhythm and other such paleonymic old names that precede the history of the present, in order to cheat the trans-social organism that has no outside, as Barthes would say.

The result is a theoretic fiction, as Michel de Certeau calls it: the chorus as practised in the writing of this thesis, but also artworking at the heart of the practice component of this research. These modes help to establish what is actually one’s own which does not amount to a relinquishing of social responsibility and moral obligations. On the contrary, I have set up stages, interfaces and sequential infrastructures for dialogue and conversation between otherwise antagonistic forces, subjects and histories. A theoretic fiction is therefore a search for a change of what is actually one’s own. The thrust of this search of one’s own rhythm is not so much for the sake of identity, differentiation and erasure, but is orientated towards working out what one’s own contribution can be. It is at this question that Barthes and Nzeyimana meet: what can I change and what can this change look like?

This is how the ascetics two thousand years ago and the Rwandan philosopher in the seminary today consider themselves to be “guarding the wall” from within the desert, for the benefit of those inside the wall in remote cities. In any case, to measure one’s own distance in relation to the event is essential, because the experience itself passes, moves on and becomes part of the new reality.
A New Distance Between *Ubuvandimwe* and *Ubuntu*

This thought can be extended to the history of philosophy itself. On this point, Isaïe Nzeyimana’s thinking is a legacy of Abbé Alexis Kagame, for whom there is a certain aim or objective of existence, which Kagame outlines in his renowned text, *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’Être* (1956):

*Intorezo iratema, umuhoro ugasongora*, [meaning] The hatch cuts and the sickle mows. This is to say that it would be unreasonable to use whatever tool to achieve a specific goal. In order to complete a precise task, it is necessary to use an instrument, or means, that is specifically designed. If one uses a different tool, one would never achieve what one proposes.\(^{596}\)

This phrase implies that each human has a “goal” and that, at the same time, each human is a *tool*, node or link in the bond of *ubuvandimwe*, understood as the chain of loyalty/royalty outlined in Nzeyimana’s diagram sketched in Chapter Four: as a bond of loyalty between subject/family/nation.

Throughout this thesis I have approached the indisciplinary dialogue between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana through *how* to live together, but this question can be further complicated by asking: *Why* to live? *Why* to live together? What is the end, the object of living? Kagame has reflected on this question and proposes that, first of all, “[t]he specific faculties of a human being are intelligence and the will, whose respective acts are intellection and volition (love)”. For Kagame, therefore, “a human being [*l’homme*] was created to know and to love”.\(^{597}\)

This further leads to, *what* is the human being supposed to love? For Kagame, because “all created beings in the universe are, after all, explanatory charts of the nature of their creator, humanity was created to know and to love God”\(^{598}\). If this sentence echoes the formulations of the desert ascetics explored in the First Chapter of this thesis, it is because Kagame derives his thought from

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\(^{597}\) Ibid.

\(^{598}\) Ibid.
Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁹⁹ In any case, for Kagame, the ultimate end or “the destiny towards which the totality of all beings converge, is God”,⁶⁰⁰ while “intelligence and the will characterise the specific principle of the human being”.⁶⁰¹

What implication does this insight have for the understanding of Nzeyimana’s notion of generosity as debt, and in relation to Barthes’s rhythmic flow of life as rest? Although the totality of being converges towards God, the actual destiny, aim or object of existence for humanity is to give life, especially in Patrice Nganang’s condition of the afterlife. This explains in part why Nzeyimana insists on the rhythmicisation of giving-receiving-giving, as opposed to resting/breaking. As we saw in Chapter Three, according to Nzeyimana, it is precisely the break of ubuvandimwe that produced the genocide. Therefore, any break in sociality is to be avoided.

This logic of continuity is already found in Kagame. Reflecting on the following proverb or adage: Indishyi y’ urupfu, ni ukubyara, Kagame suggests that “the counterweight of death is to procreate”.⁶⁰² By this, Kagame is saying: “although a human being may disappear as an individual, her or his living-existence continues through her or his progeny [descendance]. This resolves the dilemma posed by existing without a goal [sans fin] and by death”.⁶⁰³

Indeed, for Kagame, “the tragedy of all tragedies [...] is to pass away without leaving behind a son”.⁶⁰⁴ But on whom does the burden of this misery come to bear? Kagame asks. The burden “cannot be carried by the living-being, because a priori there is none! Therefore, it is a tragedy that falls upon the bazimu of one’s heritage”.⁶⁰⁵

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⁵⁹⁹ Saint Thomas D’Aquin, Summa Theologica, c. Gent., lib. III, Lc. XXV et CXVI.

⁶⁰⁰ Kagame, La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’Être, p. 365.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., p. 367: “L’intelligence et la volonté caractérisent le principe spécifique de l’homme”.

⁶⁰² Ibid.: “Le contrepoids de la mort, c’est engendrer”.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 371.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 377.
This is an important point: if the tragedy befalls the *bazimu*—the dead—then it means the dead are sentient beings capable of intervening or at least being impacted by the actions of the living. The dead, of course, are the parents of the living. As Jean-Paul Martinon outlines following Maniragaba Balibutsa, “death is not understood as a final destination or an end-point, but as marking that knows no point and therefore no limit in time”.606 “This does not mean that there is an afterlife as such, but that death is not a liberation or a passage but a metamorphosis”.607

In effect, for Balibutsa: “The Expression *umuzimu* (the dead) expresses the converse side of *umuzima* (the living, the one who possesses *ubuzima*, i.e. life), and yet the etymological relation between the two is essentially blurred”. The living therefore are those who live in *ikuzimu*, where the *bazimu* (the dead) live, whereas *ikuzima* is where the *bazima* (the living) live.608 This etymological blurring of the living and the dead means that Nzeyimana’s debt of generosity is always owed not only to those living, but to those already dead.

**Beyond Ubuntu: Overcoming the Debt of Existence**

If I attempt an application of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s dialectics on Isaïe Nzeyimana’s understanding of generosity, a terrifying limit of generosity approaches; in other words, generosity as indebtedness procreates a perpetual debt, so that the victim will always be the victim, and the perpetrator always the perpetrator. This approaching terror compels me to rethink understanding (*idios*) and practice (*rhythm*) through the bond of generosity as *giving-receiving-giving* and rest as *letting-being-letting*. If rhythm really is the organisation of space and time, then it is not quite a bond or debt but a human right. In order to better


608 Ibid.
understand this, I return to Abbé Alexis Kagame and reformulate his views of the end, object or destiny of human life, read from his take on “Bantu ethics”:

Bantu-Rwandan philosophy establishes that: 1. Human beings have humanity [l’homme] as its destiny. 2. Humanity’s ultimate destiny is to perpetuate the rational-existent through procreation. This also means that procreation is human’s destiny.\(^{609}\)

As we just saw, this thought is explored by Jean-Paul Martinon in his volume *After “Rwanda”*, but of all the copious amount of writing of and about the thinking of Kagame, I find Dismas A. Masolo’s eulogy the most concise and diagrammatical. In his summary of Kagame’s ethics, Masolo writes:

Kagame talks of Bantu ethics or body of codes of social conduct which, he says, revolve around the concept of the finality of man. According to Bantu philosophy, the finality of man has been traced not from the aspect of his vital principle, but from that of his body. Since man is realized in two sexes, Bantu traditional philosophy concludes from it that man’s greatest purpose of being is *procreation*, the perpetuation of the lineage. Perpetuation of one’s lineage is the biggest concern for all, such that death without or before getting an offspring is considered the greatest evil that can ever befall men.

All virtuous and vicious acts are judgeable so according to how they effect this great concern of men, how they affect one’s own or another person’s permanence or stability of lineage. All laws or regulations of conduct must therefore conform with this finality. In view of this, the Bantu have two categories of law. The first one is the body of laws with juridical content and where a transgressor is sueable by the judiciary authorities. These laws don’t oblige in conscience. The second category is that of taboo laws, and which are purely religious. They are essentially negative laws in that they oblige the subject above all to avoid the acts in question, e.g. “don’t…”; “it is bad to…”\(^{610}\)

However, as has long been established, a pressing amount of criticism has been expressed against the philosophical contributions of Kagame and other

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such ethnophilosophers.\textsuperscript{611} Most notably, as I have already recorded, Paulin J. Hountondji considers Placide Tempel's \textit{Bantu Philosophy} (1945)—the school from which Kagame draws—an “ethnological work with philosophical pretensions” or “a work of ethnophilosophy”. Aiming particularly at Kagame, Hountondji finds it concerning that “African philosophers have themselves made reference to it in their efforts to reconstruct, in the wake of the Belgian writer, a specifically African philosophy”.\textsuperscript{612}

These criticisms of Kagame’s ideological objectives and conceptual methods are irrefutable. Nevertheless, in further dialogue with contemporary philosophers from the Great Lakes region, Kagame’s consideration of the most virtuous human right remains shared amongst his contemporary colleagues, as the ability to allow oneself and others to procreate.

\textsuperscript{611} For example, Lyndon Harries writes: “[Kagame’s] concern should surely be to expound and illustrate from the Ruanda language the distinctive philosophy belonging to Ruanda thought, but the control he exercises over his material does not result in the exposition of any concepts that be said to belong exclusively to his own people”. Lyndon Harries, “La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l’Être by l’Abbé Alexis Kagame”, \textit{Africa: Journal of the International African Institute} 27, no. 3 (July 1957): 305. Claudine Vidal, \textit{Sociologie des passions: Rwanda, Côte d’Ivoire} (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1991), pp. 60-61: Similarly, Vidal finds that “[Alexis Kagame] cannot be understood as providing an ‘authentic’ approach to Rwandan history and culture... Kagame only provides a particular conception of Rwandan society and history”. Quoted in Martinon, \textit{After “Rwanda”}. Like Hountondji, Aminata Diaw finds that Kagame is writing for the other. For her, “Kagame attempt(s) to search for an African metaphysics made out of the culture of the Bantu people. The aim of such an ethnophilosophical endeavour is necessarily extroverted. It indeed gives itself over as incapable of breaking up its epistemological links with the colonial context and therefore as the mark of a true ‘indigenous’ conceptual space. The affirmation of subjectivity that comes out of this philosophy is therefore not that of a subject-in-itself, but that of an always for-the-other identity; the mark of which remains necessarily colonial”. In Aminata Diaw, “Hountondji: Le sens d’un combat”, in \textit{Ethiopiques} 76 (1st Semester 2006) http://www.refer.sn/ethiopiques (November 2009). Finally, Marcien Towa and Fabien Eboussi Boulaga find that Kagame’s text “is simply intuitive and unsystematic”. In Marcien Towa, \textit{Essai sur la problematique philosophique dans l’Afrique actuelle} (Yaoundé: Editions Clé, 1979); Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, \textit{La crise du Muntu} (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977). Cited in Jean-Paul Martinon, \textit{After “Rwanda”}, pp. 27-28.

In effect, what Abbé Alexis Kagame and his students describe as “procreation” could be approached as generosity: ubuntu, the genesis of all life, but also the knowledge and acknowledgment of that life. Perhaps this is what Isaïe Nzeyimana describes as a debt, a bond that inscribes the subject in the “rhythm” of giving-receiving-giving as the ethical and also ontological condition of being in the world.

At the same time, what if this ethics reaches a terrifying limit? What happens to this Bantu ethics over time, as an ideal value? After all, it is an ethics enacted as a practice, in philosophy and outside philosophy in other realms of discourse, so its scope is vast. What if this ethics of giving-receiving-giving life allows a negative generosity to take hold and to manifest itself in the form of taking life?

Here, I am qualifying Nzeyimana’s thought and accepting that the Rwandan genocide is a rupture of ubuvandimwe, in that it breaks apart this bond of generosity. However, what if this genocide was fuelled in part by the perceived return, or giving back, or taking, of the “received” negative generosity? What if Nzeyimana’s understanding of indebtedness harbours the possibility of generosity without recompense becoming generosity that demands compensation?

This thought is by no means a justification for the genocide. It is simply a thought: a dialogue with Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nzeyimana, an exercise in thinking beyond the immediacy of the genocide, the horror of which, as the immense literature testifies, cannot be simply explained. Any such attempt at explanation would banalise the testimony of its victims, and the pragmatism of the post-genocide cultural production, education and governance. Rather, this thought stands alongside Nzeyimana, for whom “within the testimony and the historical analysis, there remains risks of fighting against the ideology of the genocide without fundamentally overcoming it”.

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613 Isaïe Nzeyimana, Histoire et pragmatisme: Le Rwanda, sur sa route (Paris: Éditions du net, 2017), p. 8. My translation. Nzeyimana’s “unity” should be understood in the sense that the freedom of one can only take place if the other is also free.
This reflection is warranted, because Kagame formulated his ideas in the post-war era of 1956, whilst I myself am writing this in a moment marked by Patrice Nganang and Isaïe Nzeyimana as the post-genocide context. Therefore, to think with Kagame after the genocide is a very different problematic. A new set of problems has arisen and therefore Kagame’s formulations need to be historically differentiated from those of Nzeyimana.

Furthermore, if I take Nganang’s formulations of the limits of philosophy in addressing genocide and the post-genocide condition seriously, then this obliges me to put all pre-existing concepts in a certain kind of philological motion.

That is to say that procreation is not the same as it was when Kagame formulated it in 1956. Rather, it has moved, like all concepts, and I am suggesting that it has become generosity, and that from here, as I explain below, the concept contains genocide.

**Ubuntu: From Generosity to Genocide, via Debt**

Addressing this claim requires me to reflect again on Isaïe Nzeyimana’s understanding of debt. The reader will have noticed how Nzeyimana’s formulations about debt differ from more familiar uses of debt in recent studies by authors such as Maurizio Lazzarato, David Graeber or Margaret Atwood, who analyse the contemporary political formation of debt, its histories and its social ramifications as a neoliberal instrument of power. In their mind, debt forecloses the future, debt imprisons and captures potentiality, debt is an economic weapon that prevents the leading of an independent life, because debt immiserates by consuming life from within. I draw from these studies, for

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good reason, because I myself experience my own life as a series of smaller debts nested in one large debt.

Although Nzeyimana’s formulation can be and effectively is adopted by these neoliberal forces, his primary concern is not a critique of neoliberalism as it plays out in terms of structural adjustment on the continent. In this sense, Nzeyimana is not working on a critique of economy or a critique of neoliberalism. Nzeyimana’s debt cannot be understood in terms of the student debt that I still have, as money that is owed or due.

Nzeyimana’s formulation is different, as it is not concerned with financial or economic transactions but rather moral and ethical considerations of how to live together: to what do I owe my life? Still, Nzeyimana’s thought does not escape the negative pull of debt that is structural to the neoliberal inequalities that mark the history of the present. There is a good reason why these writers, philosophers and anthropologists work on debt.

In fact, according to David Graeber, “[t]he language of money, debt, and finance provided powerful—and ultimately irresistible ways to think about moral problems”.615 Graeber compares the emergence of the phenomenon of debt in ancient societies in China, Africa, Europe and Asia, and concludes that the reflection on debt is at the basis of (Western) philosophy itself:

Much as in Vedic India, people started talking about life as a debt to the gods, of obligations as debts, about literal debts of honour, of debt as sin and of vengeance as debt collection. Yet if debt was morality—and certainly at the very least it was in the interest of creditors, who often had little legal recourse to compel debtors to pay up, to insist that it was—what was one to make of the fact that money, that very thing that seemed capable of turning morality into an exact and quantifiable science, also seemed to encourage the very worst sorts of behaviour?616

For Graeber, “[i]t is from such dilemmas that modern ethics and moral philosophy begin”.617 Graeber describes how Plato’s Republic “begins when

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615 David Graeber, Debt, p. 195.
616 Ibid.
617 Ibid.
Socrates visits an old friend, a wealthy arms manufacturer, at the port of Piraeus. They get into a discussion of justice, which begins when the old man proposes that money cannot be a bad thing, since it allows those who have it to be just, and that justice consists in two things: telling the truth, and always paying one’s debts”. This was not only the case in Athens, but once again in the ancient societies surveyed by Graeber.618

This sudden ethical and moral consideration coincides with the introduction of money: currency produced a new form of abstraction on a global scale that forced humanity to reflect on the material constitution of existence. For instance, “Greek thinkers were suddenly confronted with a profoundly new type of object, one of extraordinary importance—as evidenced by the fact that so many [wo/]men were willing to risk their lives to get their hands on it—but whose nature was a profound enigma”.619 This is not just a striking thought, but is actually demonstrable, following the reformulation of Axial Age, a phrase coined by German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers to describe a fascinating period spanning from 800 BC to 600 AC—a period that I have partially desedimented throughout this thesis.620 In this period, “figures like Pythagoras (570-495 BC), the Buddha (563-483 BC), and Confucius (551-479 BC), were all alive at exactly the same time […] Greece, India, and China […] all saw a sudden efflorescence of debate between contending intellectual schools, each group apparently, unaware of the others’ existence”.621

Graeber analyses Jaspers’ thinking, reflecting:

[Karl Jaspers] observed that all these great regions of the world, China, India, and the Mediterranean, saw the emergence of remarkably parallel philosophical trends, from skepticism to idealism—in fact, almost the entire range of positions about the nature of the cosmos, mind, action,

618 Ibid.
619 Ibid., p. 246.
620 For Karl Jaspers, the Axial Age is the period that “begins with the Persian prophet Zoroaster, around 800 BC, and ends around 200 BC, to be followed by a Spiritual Age that centres on figures like Jesus and Mohammed”. Graeber, on the other hand, prefers to combine the two Ages, and reconfigures the Axial Age as 800 BC to 600 AC.
and the ends of human existence that have remained the stuff of philosophy to this day. As one of Jaspers’ disciples later put it—overstating only slightly—“no really new ideas have been added since that time”.

This realisation forces Graeber to conclude that “Axial Age spirituality […] is built on a bedrock of materialism” which constitutes “its secret; one might almost say, the thing that has become invisible to us”:

[I]f one looks at the very beginnings of philosophical inquiry in Greece and India—the point when there was as yet no difference between what we’d now call “philosophy” and what we’d now call “science”—this is exactly what one finds. “Theory,” if we can call it that, begins with the questions: “What substance is the world made of?” “What is the underlying material behind the physical forms of objects in the world?” “Is everything made up of varying combinations of certain basic elements (earth, air, water, fire, stone, motion, mind, number…), or are these basic elements just the forms taken by some even more elementary substance (for instance, as Nyaya and later Democritus proposed, atomic particles…” In just about every case, some notion of God, Mind, Spirit, some active organizing principle that gave form to and was not itself substance, emerged as well. But this was the kind of spirit that […] only emerges in relation to inert matter.

In drawing attention to these early reflections about life through materiality which led to morality and ethics, I wish to highlight that debt is always a moral question: that is not particular to Nzeyimana. What is unique in Nzeyimana is that his questions have been formulated at a point in which humanity is faced with a new, extreme, unprecedented abstraction of the ending of life. In the face of this, Abbé Alexis Kagame’s question of procreation shifts into Nzeyimana’s question: “to what do I owe my life?”

However, this shift retains the paleonym of ubuvandimwe. Therefore, Nzeyimana’s diagram described in the Fourth Chapter of this thesis can be reformulated in Kagame’s terms as:

*Ibintu n’iby’abantu*: Things belong to men;
*Abantu n’abu’umwami*: Men belong to the king;
*Umwami ni nyili u Rwanda*: The king is the owner of Rwanda.

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Debt as a Currency and Abstraction of Life

A debt, therefore, even in Isaïe Nzeyimana’s sense of royalty/loyalty, is not entirely free of conflict, for a debt is a bond of giving-receiving-giving and constitutes one of the plural addresses to the question of belonging to humanity. But what kind of bond is it? In his discussions of hospitality as the basis of economy, Nzeyimana contests this very same idea of a bond, effected through the transmission of precarity and motioned through parental heritage:

Since Darwin, like produces like. This could mean that a child of poor parents may be perpetually condemned to remain poor, from father to mother to son or daughter, from generation to generation. This explains how it has become a habit to see a farmer, a teacher and other small-income employees who,—from the outset of their careers till the day of their retirement—retain the same economic incomes. When starting a family with a similarly poor spouse, both of them expect a descendant as vulnerable as their own parents, and their offspring faces decimation, except if, with a lucky effort, a descendant among them succeeds in breaking the chain of poverty and recreating a prosperous family.624

Similarly, in one of his volumes on “the complexities of remembering and forgetting in Rwanda”, the same theorist Olivier Nyirubugara explores how this “bill metaphor” explains “relationships between the old and the young generations”.625 Quoting German historian Hermann von der Dunk, Nyirubugara writes: “Each generation inherits a bill [from the previous generation], and leaves its own behind”. This is effectively the inheritance of indebtedness.

Nyirubugara expands with an example of the first president of the then newly-formed Rwandan Republic, Grégoire Kayibanda, whose “personal notes about his father and his experience as a serf push to think that Kayibanda inherited that unpaid bill from his father”.626

624 Nzeyimana, Histoire et pragmatisme, p. 324. See also Nzeyimana’s Lecture of 24 July 2018 at Kabgayi.


626 Ibid.
... Like “everybody else,” [Kayibanda’s father] had worked for ‘customary authorities’... but had never accepted to engage in seeking favours, getting the only leisure allowed by his own labour. While doing everything to get “the best” out of the situation, he waited for the usual cow without bowing down, and, above all, had refused to have his children involved in the cattle-based clientelism that “he abhorred”.627

Here, Nyirubugara points to Jacques Derrida’s discussion of “inheritance and its connections with language”. For Derrida, inheritance “always passes from one singularity to another” implying “a filiation with language and a singular memory”. One could also pause here and ask: What did Roland Barthes inherit? How did Barthes outplay his inheritance? Was Barthes’s drive towards idiorrhythmy and the Neutral a search for a way to disinherit his negative inheritance, his negative generosity?

For Nyirubugara, Derrida’s understanding relates to Aleida Assmann’s theory of the generation of confession.628 For Derrida, “inheritance is not simply a good I receive; it is an assignation of fidelity, an injunction to responsibility”.629 This means that inheritance entails responsibility. In other words, as Pierre Lévy explained, “a generation finds itself confronted with one essential question, which is really a meta question, namely, ‘what is the essential problem facing us?’”630

Returning to Kayibanda, Nyirubugara surmises: “There is no doubt that the most essential issue Kayibanda’s father was facing was his status of serf”.631


631 Olivier Nyirubugara, The Complexities of Remembering, p. 44.
Nyirubugara continues: “As first post-monarchy president, Kayibanda started paying the bill, or taking what he considered to be his responsibility, by bringing radical changes at all levels. All those who shared his ethnic identity and memories found in him their hero, whilst those with opposite memories, those who were fighting for the status quo, found in him their enemy”.632

**Circularity of Generosity as Indebtedness and Perceived Debt**

There is, I believe, a circularity here, in which cause and effect are essentially the same thing: a vicious circle rather than a virtuous circle. This is how indebtedness perpetuates itself in a continuous loop and how all the agents get caught in the loop. It is when ethics becomes circular that it creates these vicious rationalisations, or these kinds of regimes of justification in which the reasons or explanations people give for why they do the things they do (the cause) are essentially the same as the consequences of their actions (the effect)—and vice versa.

Then, how to overcome the limit imposed by such perceived debt? I say this because, while it is understood as inheritance, Isaïe Nzeyimana’s generosity has the potential to become indebtedness. What if Nzeyimana’s rhythmic conception of debt produces a circularity that generates a negative generosity, manifested in incremental violences that culminate in a genocidal humanism? This is a particularly dangerous circularity, in which, again, cause equals effect. As we saw in Chapter Two of this thesis, this genocidal polarisation is at least partly attributable to the impact of colonialism. Mahmood Mamdani characterises colonialism as an inherently genocidal project. Patrice Nganang also confirms the “entry” of Africa into world history through its acceding to the genocidal humanism that has characterised all civilisations. At the same time, Christianity and the colonial encounter alone cannot account for the horror and the degradation of life inflicted during and as a result of the genocide.

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632 Ibid.
Ubuvandimwe: From Intersubjectivity to Intrasubjectivity

My point here can be driven home by returning to Jean-Paul Martinon’s volume, *After Rwanda: In Search of a New Ethics* (2013). As I have tried to outline, Martinon’s book “attempts to re-think peace not by analysing it as a key term of philosophical significance (from cease-fires to armistices and from perpetual to messianic peace), but by simply investigating how it could be seen to operate between a Rwandan genocide survivor and a European visitor.”\(^{633}\)

The book movingly and ingeniously explores this encounter between Martinon and Emilienne Kwibanda, a Tutsi genocide survivor, noting how both Emilienne and Martinon “carry for each other the possibility of something other: [they] give each other more than [they] can think.”\(^{634}\) For these reasons, Martinon argues, Emilienne and himself are essentially “Ubuntu to each other, described by Martinon as “a condition of generosity that takes place prior to any form of politeness, altruism or charity.”\(^{635}\) To this condition of *a priori* generosity I would also add “justice” and therefore also morality, and consequently also debt.

However, in what way can such additions be contained within Martinon’s *Ubuntu*? One way to engage with this hypothesis would be to risk posing the following question—and it really is a risk, for which I apologise in advance: Would there be any *Ubuntu* between Martinon and a genocide perpetrator? The risk I am taking here is this: being wrongly accused by an inattentive reader of committing a sacrilegious sin of linking the figure of the Survivor with that of the Perpetrator. In the unfortunate case of such an inattentive and therefore accusatory reading, I wish to clarify that by no means do I consider the victim or the survivor in terms of *as well*, nor in those of *instead of*. I do not intend to equate the survivor and the perpetrator, nor do I consider them interchangeable; they are obviously not a replacement of each other, nor are they mutually equivalent. Neither is reciprocal the suffering of the victim and survivor, just

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\(^{633}\) Martinon, *After “Rwanda”*, p. 274, emphasis original.

\(^{634}\) Ibid., p. 275.

\(^{635}\) Ibid., p. 15, citing Jean-François Lyotard, “Discussion, ou: ‘Phraser après ‘Auschwitz’”
because it is caused by the perpetrator and received by the victim and survivor. There is no giving-receiving-giving here as such.

The question is simply risked in response to Martinon’s narration of his encounter that forms the pre-text of his reflections: What kind of Ubuntu would form between Martinon and a perpetrator? Is this even possible? If yes how? And if not what does remain of Ubuntu? Does Ubuntu then not effectively procreate the xenos, a form-of-non-life, a graveyard of life, even if that life is embodied in the figure of the genocide perpetrator? In other words, if Ubuntu cannot exist between Martinon and a perpetrator, then would the kind of Ubuntu described by Martinon not simply be entangled in a circular logic of a partial and conditional humanity?

If so, then Ubuntu can procreate a humanity adjudicated only through the “priority” warranted according to Martinon’s new ethics that comes After “Rwanda”. In Martinon’s constructions, such partial humanity can only be conferred to the figure of the victim and to the figure of the survivor. This limit of humanity in Martinon’s Ubuntu arises in part because there cannot be more than one Ubuntu in the terms described by Martinon, Kagame and Balibutsa; Ubuntu risks to become a total singularity. And in this singularity, can there be any Ubuntu between Martinon and a perpetrator within “Rwanda” and beyond? If, as vile and as reprehensible as the genocide perpetrator is, if no humanity can be conferred to them, then Ubuntu as such is a dangerous vicious circle, because anyone who falls outside of the Ubuntu as the form-of-life—now acceded only in as a victim and survivor—is a xenos, the form-of-non-life, the non-human, the demonic, the common enemy of all humankind. This I believe it to be the limit of Ubuntu as it was formulated by Alexis Kagame in the post-war era, which is “where Martinon is drawing from.”

Evidently, I am well aware that such thought is not the object of Martinon’s generously detailed volume. Still, I do believe that my question is not preposterously out of order. Should that be the case, then it would simply be because I am posing this question merely as a student working in the contexts of a doctoral thesis undertaken in practice and theory: It is once again an indisciplinary writing in text and otherwise that attempts—as Martinon
suggested following of Lyotard and Adorno—to intervene in the history of the present whereby “Rwanda” is “a situation that can only prescribe or command me to start here ‘a linking of phrases’”\textsuperscript{636}

If my question is unnerving, it is also because I am making a linking of Martinon’s phrases with those of Nganang. As I have explored in the previous chapters, Nganang has suggested that the Rwandan genocide or “Rwanda” in quotation marks is a graveyard of African philosophy as it was known then. If this is the case, this ending or “afterlife” would also includes \textit{Ubuntu}. I tried to point out that Nganang himself made his provocative statements from within comparative literature where it is possible to adopt a different tone. It could be that the \textit{indisciplinary} movement taken by this thesis accounts for the unnerving nature of my questions, as I move Nganang’s formulations from comparative literature into the field of visual cultures, located somewhere between art and philosophy.

From here, I would also like to risk another remark, which helps to clarify the contribution of Nzeyimana’s \textit{ubuvandimwe}. In \textit{After “Rwanda”}, Martinon asks: “does this approach aim to come up with a type of inter-cultural enterprise?” Martinon answer to this question is yes \textit{and no}: “Yes, in as much as, philosophy is by nature inter-cultural,”\textsuperscript{637} to which I concur. This is already asserted by Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux’s “indisciplinarity” practiced in this thesis. For Martinon the answer is also no: his volume does not “fall under the category of inter-cultural philosophy”.\textsuperscript{638} Effectively, Martinon contests the assumption by which “there are cultures and that there is a space in-between where these cultures supposedly meet.”\textsuperscript{639} Martinon draws from Ivorian philosopher Bourahima Ouattara, for whom “philosophy is nothing other than the invention of concepts developed from an infinite hermeneutic of

\textsuperscript{636} Martinon, \textit{After “Rwanda”}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{637} Ibid., p. 31.

\textsuperscript{638} Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{639} Ibid.
already existing concepts belonging to the Book”. For Martinon, such premise derives from “a common Western habit to divide, dualize, dichotomize and (if lucky) to combine, confuse, collude.”

Admirably, Martinon strives “to avoid this divide/combine”, a task which, according to him, would necessitate the evasion of “any spatial metaphor (which the word inter—necessarily implies) and rethink the task of inter-cultural philosophy from a temporal and hermeneutic standpoint.” This is a useful and urgent movement from culture to future practiced also in this thesis, through the works of Nzeyimana who understands education as a return to the future; and through Nganang’s notions of a pre-emptive writing.

Still, once again, here I would like to point out the crucial discernment that exists between the intersubjective direction at play in Martinon and the intramural motion at stake in my own thesis. Martinon is right in insisting on the limit of the common understanding of the inter-cultural as a temporal space rather than a simply a spatial reality. At the same time Martinon draws from that same Ivorian philosopher Bourahima Ouattara, whose volume Penser l’Afrique (2001) “exposes that “Sub-Saharan African is effectively allergic to the methodologies and paradigms of European rationality and participates, in being so allergic, to a crucial and necessary questioning of their ever persistent and imposing limits.”

Three brief comments are useful to make here. Firstly, designating a people as “Sub-Saharan” is perpetuating epistemic violence borne of geographic divisions and economic exploitations that originated by slavery and colonial injustices. This is already established by the Cape Town-based publishing collective Chimurenga cited above. And it is also testified by the incredible entanglements of theology and philosophy at the inception of Christianity—the rhythm of modernity—in the Egyptian deserts. It does not matter if Africans themselves describe the region located in the south of the Sahara as “sub”.


There is Trans-Sahara, historically, religiously, culturally and geographically. There is only “Sub-Sahara” in the deliberate or incidental workings that surreptitiously expand the divisions in knowledge and in geographies.642

The second point I would like to make relates to the putative differences between the European or Western rationality, and the African one. In order to clarify my point, I would like to cite Bourahima Ouattara by way of Martinon:

“Philosophy is nothing other than the invention of concepts developed from an infinite hermeneutic of already existing concepts belonging to the Book. But Africa is without it; Africa is only an actor, the punch-bag for those who have it. As such, it falls upon this being-third to seek out its freedom and redemption. Without Book, that is, without an upright Concept, this other of philosophy, or more precisely, this being-third (to the world and to philosophy) will have to submit the question of conceptuality through a questioning of limits. These will inevitably expose the unbearable suffering and intolerable sensation of ‘being superfluous’ in a world drunk with its own alienation.”643

I would like to propose that what is different is not rationality as such—whatever that actually means—but the history thereof. It is not that the African and the European have each an innately different rationality and grasp of the Hegelian Concept or any such grandiose claim to universality. This thought is, once again a relatively recent phenomenon, as Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux demonstrates.644 There is a history of ideas and a history of how these ideas have manifested themselves in the world as religions, ethics, aesthetics, geographies, cosmogonies, and futures. There is also a history of how these have been used, misused and recorded, architecturally, on the body, on the mind, in education, orally, in Book or otherwise. But I contest whether the rationality itself at the heart of these ideas can differ from one “sub-race”—which in this particular case coincides with Sub-Saharan Africans—to the “Other”.


My third and final point on this subject is that *ubuvandimwe* complicates the intersubjective relation. Instead, ubuvandimwe inaugurates an intrasubjective relation, where the intra- is a translative proximity rather than distance. It is this proximity that is the promise for commonality and possibly also community. But it is this same sharing of closeness that threatens that very same commonality. The threat and the promise are constitutive of *ubuvandimwe*.

To conclude this analysis I propose to reflect on another chorus. Recently I had a drink with my colleague Chinese-American curator and *e-flux journal* editor Brian Kuan-Wood at a bar in Brooklyn. Brian recently became father, while my life companion and I recently lost a pregnancy. In our conversation we reflected on the abundance of life. It is a precarious abundance. This complexity is apparent in how a pregnancy can be had and can be lost. This abundant precarity is also embodied in a temporal register. In this case it is exemplified by how Brian’s new-born daughter came to the world a few weeks earlier than biologically usual. Her early arrival has entailed a host of minor and major complications for herself and her mother.

From these insights, Brian remarked a linguistic and epistemic shift of register: from making a life, to giving life and to taking a life. Before the birth of her daughter, metaphorically, he would *give* his life to save a friend or a family member. But after the birth of her daughter, this metaphorical category has shifted: he would *take* a life to save her daughter. All of this is of course a metaphor. But it is not hard to see how such words lay at the foundation of religiosity and ethics, in which giving and taking, that is sacrifice and debt are intertwined and constitutive.

This is the implication of Nzeyimana’s insight: only those who have something in common can enter the conflict. By the same token, among the most antagonistic forces, this thought engenders a relation of inclusive disjunction. Such conjunctive relationships put pressure and perhaps even outdate notions by which an African would have a different rationality than a European. Similarly, this paleonymic thought contests that a victim *is* categorically different from the perpetrator. Rather, their respective “histories” of the same event are different.
This is an important point that emerges from a Practice/Theory thesis as is the case here: ethics is not ontology, doing is not being. Thinking is not being as such. It is the other way around: I am therefore I think. This is the merit of a Practice/Theory thesis. It is a praxis that helps to realise that the victim of the genocide is a victim because of a history that turns externalities (aesthetics, practices, thoughts, etc), to the category of being. In order to intervene in the history of such present that insists on these impositions, it is important to foreground this distinction desedimented by the paleonym of *ubuvandimwe*.

But the implicit remains, as it is also desedimented by my unnerving question above. The perpetrator is first and foremost an *umuvandimwe* who has committed the break of *ubuvandimwe*. This is the difficulty and the enormous challenge facing a more just future. A victim has undergone violence and therefore received victimhood but in effect the humanity or *Ubuntu* of a victim is not solely defined by her or his victimhood. Conversely, a perpetrator has committed the break and therefore s/he has accumulated guilt. However, the history of the present conflates guilt with being—one is guilty. This conflation harbours a circularity, and this circularity is tenaciously parasitical. It perpetuates itself trans-socially, as Barthes would say. Unless a deliberate attempt is made to grasp this rhythm wherever it occurs, across disciplines, within and beyond *Ubuntu*. 
In his deliberation on *ubuvandimwe*—from the same womb—Nzeyimana affirms the maternity and fraternity of all Rwandans, a bond that makes all Rwandans brothers and sisters, across classes and clans.\(^{645}\) This maternity/fraternity is of course also extended to all humanity within and beyond Rwanda. In the contexts of Rwanda, the break of *ubuvandimwe* is in part ascribable to the reduction of the subject to their exteriority,\(^{646}\) an act that is certainly extractable to the colonial encounter in its many moments. Most notably, through the racialised modes of colonial governance including the introduction of racialising identity cards, the humanity of Rwandans was turned into its exterior biological manifestation in the world.

Regardless of the originary moment of the break of *ubuvandimwe*, it remains that this fracture can result in the desire or the willingness to inflict a supposed dutiful *taking* of life borne of a conviction of a previous reception of wrongdoing.

In these instances, an imagined but distorted “justice” is rendered through the performance of generosity, as a rhythm of *giving-receiving-giving*. It matters little whether this gift is positive—giving life, or negative—taking life. All what matters is the “matching” of a supposed reception of a wrongdoing with a gift of a wrongdoing. This is a contradiction which could be the summary of “when victims become killers”,\(^{647}\) and I believe this is where *ubuntu* reaches a limit.

What does this contradiction say about the limits of the ethics of procreation (*ubuntu*), or generosity, or giving-receiving-giving? To what degree does (*ethno*)philosophy negate the mobility and agency of subjecthood, while tasking the subject only with the imperative to procreate? What if this procreation becomes negative and produces a form-of-non-life?

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\(^{646}\) Ibid., p. 54.

Roland Barthes’s rhythmicisation of life is drawn from an ascetic break, an anachōrēsis, but how can such a break—a flux—constitute a flow—a restful, continuous, copious and effortless movement? As seen in Chapter One, the ascetic figure puts into question the norms of the society. This questioning takes place by means of an anachōrēsis, a departure which is also a return to oneself—whether through a symbolic or literal gesture, it constitutes an act of thinking anew by the society. This thinking-act is inscribed in two primary motions: the “departure” from society and the subsequent socialism of this distance in relation to the society, by means of self-control, or askēsis. In short, the ascetic is engaged in the process of inventing and instituting new ideas of inhabiting the world from within.

Is there also any form of anachōrēsis possible within Nzeyimana’s understanding of ubuvandimwe? In what ways does an artist, working from the post-genocide realities within and beyond Rwanda ascend to “the alien or foreign character of theoria or contemplation” that is characteristic of Aristotle and Plato?

How does ubuvandimwe allow “men to imitate beasts, women to imitate men, and men, in order to outwit Fortuna, to imitate fickle women?” How does ubuvandimwe allow its subject to seek the desert, to combat the metaphorical common enemy in the form of a “bill” that exhorts its holders to perform a negative generosity? What if ubuvandimwe becomes so universalising, to the point of becoming “the common enemy of all human kind?”

Nzeyimana warns against collating testimony with history, while also encouraging this ascendance to theoria: a thinking across the immediacy of the event, of witnessing. As we saw in Chapter Two, what is at stake is, to realise the extreme contradiction that marks the history of the present: to work out one’s own complicit position or acknowledgement, and therefore to think with


oneself against oneself by oneself. This realisation might help to think of one’s own intellectual formation and inheritance as formerly racialised, colonised, modernists, post-modernists, Christians, and so on.

As explored in Chapter Two—and it is worth repeating here at length—this is a contradiction that embodies one of the challenges facing current and future generations of philosophers, educators, artists, policymakers and other civic bodies: how and where to bury the ghosts of defunct modernisms, and the ghosts of its victims?

Now that Christianity has become “African”, where to bury its African ghosts? The ghosts of “our” troubled histories have no resting ground. Some are addressed as living and others are buried in the wrong graves. The “Christian”, the “French”, the “English”, the “Islamic” and the “African” now have ghosts in common, intertwined and fused.

Burying the defunct Christianity would bury the living “African” with it, again in the wrong grave. How to ascribe proper graves to our common ghosts?

Attending to this question could foreground the conflicted historical mutuality and reciprocity in a way that implicates “us”, for example, in thinking negatively with Hegel or Christianity, in order to survive it all.650

Thinking beyond the limit is thinking in the afterlife. The encounter between ethics and aesthetics is thus a “self-autopsy” upon one’s own intellectual bodies, and to perform such auto-optics, eye-witnessing or seeing for oneself is to accept the burden of conversing outside of our languages, in the meantime, in translation, beyond one’s own zones of times, or exiles of knowledge. Once again, it is writing or conversing as “exploratory surgery”, as Algerian writer

Christiane Chaulet-Achour approaches Yambo Ouologuem’s *Bound to Violence*.651

As the same Chapter Two suggested, aspects of the violence emanate from a certain kind of disciplinary self-interdiction of philosophy, and exterior and interior inabilities by generations of philosophers in the Great Lakes region to address the questions of their locale and historical moment.

In this, a closer analysis of ethnophilosophy may contribute to understanding its causes. As such, *ubuvandimwe* offers a more precise analysis of *ubuntu*. At a smaller scale, *ubuvandimwe* operates on a visceral regime that compels the subject to enter a fraternal/maternal bond, inscribed in the psyche of a mother nation or fatherland. *Ubuvandimwe* reads as a term belonging to sociology and anthropology.

When the Common Is Its Own Enemy: Conflict is Constitutive of Communality

Isaïe Nzyeimana’s use of *ubuvandimwe* is different in that it mobilises it towards the regime of political philosophy: of the same womb. Suddenly, in Nzyeimana, the term presupposes a fatherland, in which all citizens are brothers and sisters. This bond is at the level of the nation and the state, while its potency retains the biological valence of the womb. Paradoxically, even if this bond can break, the same bond can also allow for a future dialogue to take place. As explored above, Nzyeimana’s insight here is that only those who have something in common can enter the conflict. Rwanda cannot wage a war with Senegal, or with Morocco, or with South Africa, simply because there are no shared grounds—nothing in common.

This is the ethics of an originary communality and it is on the basis of this originary community that the conflict takes place. Only in communality lies the potentiality for conflict. Therefore, communality is potentially as threatening as it is uniting. It has the potential to do both: unify and fracture. This means that the potential for conflict was always there, in so far as all Rwandans were always potentially unified and, at the same time, always potentially conflictual. To emphasise, unity and conflict are not separate. Unity harbours conflict and conflict contains unity: the two are not in opposition.

Perhaps this is what Patrice Nganang attempts to formulate, when Nganang “[takes] the West out of the equation in the Rwandan genocide (that is, a will to autonomy that means taking responsibility for the genocide, insofar as this is how Africa has joined the universal barbarism of humanity)”.

As addressed in the Introduction of this thesis, such movement is not without worrisome concerns. This is the point made by Michael Syrotinski when he asks: “Is there not a very grave danger in exculpating the West in the desire to get away from a syndrome of victimization?” Here, Syrotinski struggles with the fact that Nganang exculpates the West and aims at “making this a story that has to do essentially with Africa’s self-destruction, the failure and collapse of African

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653 Ibid.
philosophy (and how it moves beyond the ‘temps du malheur’). I believe Syrotinski’s reservations are warranted but more precisely, the complexity resides in the intramurality, so to speak, of the history of the present: burying the defunct Christianity would bury the living “African” with it, again in the wrong grave. Therefore, ascribing proper graves to “our” common ghosts is an exercise in measuring one’s own distance in complicity, by which of course I mean complexity.

As such, the notion of Other is irrelevant. For instance, Rwandans are not “other” to each other. There is a much more complex set of relations at play here. Rwandans and Burundis, Rwandans and Tanzanians, Rwandans and Senegalese: these are all degrees of distances and proximities that form the gradual intensity of ubuvandimwe, in a way that can be misread as “other” to each other. However, Rwandans can never be other to each other. On the contrary, they are in common with each other. This is the meaning of ubuvandimwe which points to the antagonism that is inside communality. Formulated in these terms, ubuvandimwe echoes what American theorist and philosopher Christina Sharpe calls “monstrous intimacy”.

In the Introduction I mentioned also how ubuvandimwe speaks to what the late Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor characterised as “intense proximity”, or what African-American philosopher and psychoanalyst Hortense J. Spillers designates as “the intramural”. This is not the interracial violence but the intraracial conflict. It is not a fight between Rwandans and Nigerians, or Rwandans and Congolese, or Rwandans and Burundians. It is a struggle within Rwanda itself, borne of the intracranial dynamics between Rwandans themselves. Ubuvandimwe is Nzeyimana’s formulation for the monstrosity of commonality, the monstrosity that is not found outside of commonality, but rather which was and is and always will be already within.

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654 Ibid.

This is what leads Nzeyimana to assert a mutuality between the victim and the perpetrator: it is only those who have something in common that can enter the conflict. From this, it follows that according to Nzeyimana, the usual “logic of the unity of oppositions means that any party that would otherwise impose and solidify itself in the relation of exclusion and separation, learns that such relation is a moment that commands a whole. As such, even among victims and perpetrators, the relation of inclusive disjunction becomes conjunctive relationships”.

**In the Beginning There Was Plurality: Complexity and “Complicity”**

This complexity is borne from itself. It can harbour a terrible danger, but it can also harbour a great promise, neither of which are found outside the complexity: they are not introduced by someone else. Rather, both the threat and the promise are located inside the complexity; they are constitutive, not external, elements of the complexity.

Isaïe Nzeyimana draws from the “national literature”, such as myths and maxims, the most famous of which is *Imana yirirwa ahandi igataha i Rwanda*: God might spend the day somewhere else, but at night he returns to Rwanda. According to literary theorist and translator Anthère Nzabatsinda:

This traditional saying, firmly anchored in the mind and speech habits of Rwandans, is made up of three distinct, fundamental figures that, over the centuries, have determined the contours of a people’s mentality: first, the favorable, immanent divinity called “Imana,” or God; second, the relatively hostile and haughty relationship fostered toward the outside, the “ahandi,” or foreign; third, the idea of a privileged nation inhabiting the country called “Rwanda”. This mentality of the Rwandans is not devoid of a philosophical and religious naiveté accompanied by a certain intellectual ignorance and perpetuated by the political domination that they have experienced throughout successive hegemonial regimes. Nevertheless, with the passing of the centuries, its foundation was

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656 Nzeyimana, *Histoire et pragmatisme*, p. 191: “La logique de l’unité des oppositions veut dire que toute partie qui allait s’imposer et se fixer en rapport d’exclusion et de solitude, apprend qu’elle est plutôt un moment d’un tout. Ainsi, ces rapports de disjonction inclusive, convoquant plutôt des rapports de conjonction”.

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constructed as the product of convergent factors: politics and religion, the
history and secular traditions of the country, its geographic and physical
configuration, and lastly its particularities in the realms of sociology,
linguistics, and literature.\textsuperscript{657}

As such, even if myths are indeed compromised, Nzeyimana is right to draw
from them as a source of knowledge and learning about the self-understanding
of the social and cultural formations within “Rwanda” and, in particular, about
self-representation and memorisation. Specifically, myths have a pacifying
function in mediating a reality that is inhospitable: on this point, Nzeyimana
invites the reader to imagine the first ever encounter humanity will have had
with “water, forests, deserts, volcanoes, thunderbolts” and other such elements.

Since humanity could not allow itself to be completely overwhelmed by
[these elements], it rather sought to dominate nature, to exorcise it, to
name it, to understand it because humanity had the intuition that all its
fear comes from the incomprehension of something. This is how religion,
art and mythology were the first languages of humanity on a terrifying
land.\textsuperscript{658}

This helps to explain why, during his seminar on 12 December 2013 at
Goldsmiths and also at The Showroom in London, Rwandan philosopher
Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo referred to “political myths”. The seminar at
Goldsmiths was organised by Martinon, who had generously invited
Nzahabwanayo to London. Nzahabwanayo’s presentation at The Showroom
was convened by myself, in collaboration with Martinon and Emily Pethick, who
directed The Showroom at that time. Our announcement of the lecture
circulated by The Showroom mentioned how Nzahabwanayo would presented a
lecture on one of the burning questions of political philosophy: how are regimes
founded? What brings them into being and sustains them over time? This
question sought to establish whether political institutions are created by
reflection and choice or are always the product of accident, circumstance,
custom, and history? Drawing from Nzahabwanayo’s presentation, the
announcement went on to state that

\textsuperscript{657} Anthère N zabatsinda, “The Aesthetics of Transcribing Orality in the Works of Alexis Kagame,
Oral-Written Interface (Spring, 1997 ), pp. 98-111, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{658} Nzeyimana, \textit{Histoire et pragmatisme}, p. 166.
Today, Rwanda is determined to make politics a matter of choice and reflection. This new move is in sharp contrast with the politics that led to the Genocide of 1994, a politics fundamentally driven by divisionism and discrimination. Currently, Rwandans are wholeheartedly set to rebuild all sectors of life. This resilience revolves mainly around four major pillars: good governance, justice, economic development and social welfare.\(^{659}\)

For Nzahabwanayo, “resilience revolves mainly around four major pillars: good governance, justice, economic development and social welfare.”\(^{660}\) In effect, when pressed on the exact meanings of these terms, Nzahabwanayo conceded that indeed these were political myths meant to overcome contact with the uninhabitable of the end of the world characterised by the genocide.

Similarly, while aware of the limitations they pose, Nzeyimana points out how the history of Rwanda—as found through myths and other similar narrations—avoids the question of who arrived first. Unlike the anthropologist who insists on determining who arrived first and second, and what people colonised what group and displaced what tribe, Nzeyimana points to the contrast found within the myths of origins, whereby the narration of Rwanda starts when all the three principal ethnicities—Tutsi, Hutu and Twa—are all there.

The denomination of the inhabitants of Rwanda in terms of ethnicities is fraught with controversies. This is a subject that has already been widely analysed, as evidenced by the extensive literature surveyed in Chapter Three. Therefore, I will only make a brief remark, following Nzeyimana: “in order to alleviate the recalcitrant nature of ethnic groups: the three principal ethnic groups that populated Rwanda were actually spread across the same clans”.\(^{661}\) The hypothesis of ethnicities might hold among a certain people grouped through

\(^{659}\) See “Contours of Resilience”, an “event is organised by artist Christian Nyampeta as part of his ongoing research on the subject of How To Live Together. Nyampeta is currently developing a forthcoming project at The Showroom as part of the programme Communal Knowledge. Contours of Resilience is held in conjunction with Nzahabwanayo’s seminar at Goldsmiths organised by Jean-Paul Martinon, at the Department of Visual Cultures. https://www.theshowroom.org/events/contours-of-resilience. Accessed: 15 August 2016.

\(^{660}\) Ibid.

\(^{661}\) Ibid., 99–100.
national boundaries in which, according to Nzeyimana, “circles of memberships such as clans, tribes, ethnic groups or castes are accepted and managed politically.”

“In contrast”, for Nzeyimana, “the ethnic formation in Rwanda defies any effort of conceptualisation; it does not correspond to any ethnological reference hitherto known”.

From here, Nzeyimana lists how all recorded clans include what has become known as the three principal ethnicities. As such, in terms of the “Bassinga (Siinga), Basindi (Siindi), Bazigaba (Zigaaba), Bagesera (Gesera), Banyiginya (Nyiginya), Bega (Ega), Babanda (Baanda), Bacyaba (Cyaaba), Bungura (Uungura), Bashambo (Shaambo), Batsobe (Tsobe), Bakono (Kono), Baha (Ha), Bashingo (Shiingo), Banyakarama (Nyakarama), Basita (Sita), Bongera (Oongera, Benengwe (Eenengwe), etc, one and each of these clans included [and might still include] the Batwa, the Bahutu and the Batutsi”.

All of this is to say that, whether through the complexity of the ethnic or clan denominations, a plurality whose social formations constituted a people were all already there, they all went about their business and they all tried to find a way of living together. As such, in the beginning, there were many. Nzeyimana is aware of the need to study history through evolution. However, working within a pragmatism commanded by the post-genocide present, Nzeyimana’s project is not a historical—or an anthropological one. Rather, Nzeyimana proceeds to think on the basis of life itself, of life as it is lived in the historical present, in other words, on what is there.

This pragmatism aims at avoiding privileging or marginalising one group above another on the basis of their earlier or later arrival. In the context of Rwanda, the primacy or indigeneity of ancestral arrivals thousands of years ago should not justify current political structures. This argument is solely in reference to post-

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662 Ibid., 97. Nzeyimana gives an example of the Sultans of Cameroon or the Supreme Spiritual Chiefs of Chefs in Ivory Coast.

663 Ibid., p. 98.

genocide Rwanda, because clearly it would not necessarily hold somewhere else without further contextualisation. In any case, in the context of Rwanda, there is a commonality that pre-exists what Rwanda is today. This commonality is also what might allow the resolution of a conflict, as well as being what actually produces the conflict.

Nzeyimana then concludes that, before the arrival of the Germans, the Belgians and the French, followed by the Americans and the Chinese, there were these three groups, and this is more than enough complexity to be getting on with. There were no settlers, no colonisers and no colonised. No-one followed anyone; there were three to begin with.

Of course, one group could have turned round and tried to occupy another. It is not that there is no colonisation, occupation or conflict as such. It is simply that it arises from inside, not outside, the three groups. It also does not arise in terms of priority. Groups fight each other not based on who came first or second, but because they came at the same time: it is a rivalry based on sharedness.

In the beginning there was plurality, and this plurality contains both the potential for communality and for conflict, but this conflict and communality is not based on priority or secondary-ness: it is based on itself. Conflict is based on the fact of communality and communality is based on the fact of conflict. It is not based on who came first or second.

Therefore, in the beginning there were the three tribes. They were always there. They will never not be there. There will always be those three tribes. With all the complexity that comes with being three, there is never one so there is no unity. In a way, Nzeyimana is saying there is no singularity; there is complexity from the outset, and this complexity is both a threat to itself and the resolution. This complexity is power, because it is the beginning of everything.
A Thesis in the Complexities of How to Live Together

The ethics of plurality that is inherent to these origin myths also set up conditions whereby every affirmative term contains a negative. The subsequent colonial occupation could be said to affirm these qualities: the potential for conflict that is imminent to the plurality, at the foundation of Rwanda. However, it could be that the three tribes in Rwanda were working on antagonism and conflict and monstrous intimacy or intense proximity, and that colonisation comes later and affirms these conflictual tendencies, which are there to begin with. In that sense, the question of negative generosity, or negative ethics is already entailed in this notion of cosmogony, or the mythology of the founding of the Rwandan universe, that is *ubuvandimwe*. These arguments are long before the Republic, long before the first state. From the inaugural myths, we learn that the potential for conflict is there from the beginning.

The lesson then is, what methods did the first three groups employ for managing conflict? What methods were there for affirming communality? Ethically speaking, negative ethics are as primary as positive ethics. My analysis then is that there are negative ethics in *ubuvandimwe* for a commandment that all Rwandans come from the same womb is not to say that there is unanimity by all Rwandans. This should not be misread. The idea of being from the same womb does not necessarily equate to there being a primary agreement or consensus. The maternity or fraternity of all Rwandans does not guarantee a bond. The idea of a bond presupposes a breakage.

This is a repetition of the pronouncement that for there to be conflict there must be communality. To put it the other way round: a bond presupposes its breakage. Further, the maternity or fraternity of all Rwandans presupposes breaks along the axes of maternity and fraternity. In other words, to put it in Hortense J. Spillers’ terms, the intramural presupposes conflict along intramural lines, that is to say intraraciality, within the race: raciality does not confer unanimity. It might do, but it might just as well confer the opposite. So what does raciality guarantee? What does ethnicity guarantee? What does *ubuvandimwe* guarantee? What is the basis of unanimity? Is it possible to know
if this myth infers unanimity or not? I would say it does not. I would say these things are internal and constitutive.

Communality and conflictuality are inseparable from each other, rather than introduced from the outside. They are not introduced from the temporal distinction from the first coming first and the second coming second, or the second occupying the first, or the first occupying the second. They are not introduced spatially by a group coming inside from outside. The relation between communality and conflictuality is not a temporal one where tribe number two comes later and occupies tribe number one. It is also not spatial where tribe number two comes from outside and occupies tribes inside a given territory. Communality and conflictuality are neither temporal nor spatial; they are constitutive. They are inside each other. They belong to each other.

The old name then—the paleonym—becomes crucial, because the displacement of “Rwandaness” proceeds at the level of the refusal of being considered Rwandan or any such totalising denomination. This has been the object of the technical study of *anachōrēsis*: to displace heritage and to invent a new life, a new ethics that does not proceed by bondage or indebtedness.
A “Moment of Momentum”, in the Guise of a Conclusion

At the latest possible moment in the completion process of this thesis, I received an email from art historian and queer theorist John Paul Ricco that reads as follows:

I thought I would share with you my recently published essay on the film Moonlight. I think it will resonate with your work and the conversation that we had in NYC back in February [2019]. I hope you are well and that we will have the opportunity to meet and speak again soon.665

In parting with the reader, I would like to reflect on the content and the context of this message, and on Ricco’s essay, as I believe this will summarise this thesis while also opening it up—certainly not imparting it on—other readings. In the period leading up to my upgrade from MPhil student to PhD candidate, I was drawing from Ricco’s volume, The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes (2014). Ricco asks: how to theorise separation as an ethical practice? In response, he argues that separation is what makes the origin of living and being. In other words, separation is the primary spatial and temporal condition of existence and living together in space and time. Ricco finds evidence of this claim in the etymology of the word “separate”, with se—meaning “without” or “apart”, and parare meaning “to make ready” or “to prepare”.666

In March 2018, Ricco visited In the Meantime,667 my exhibition held at Artspeak Gallery in Vancouver, Canada. This visit led him to invite me to join him in proposing a panel for the College Art Association (CAA) Annual Conference the following year. The panel was co-organised by American media theorist and art

665 John Paul Ricco, “Ricco, Moonlight essay”, email received on 28 September 2019.


667 Christian Nyampeta’s exhibition ‘In The Meantime’ is a continuation of his research into modes of working together and being in common. ‘In the Meantime’ is a hosting structure and working space that is a meditation on the process of translation as a continual work-in-progress. A selection of Nyampeta’s publications will include his translations of selected texts from Alain Mabanckou’s Penser et écrire l’Afrique aujourd’hui, an edited volume containing lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 2017 by Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Lucy Mushita among others. In the meantime was curated by Bopha Chhay and it was staged in the period of March 3–April 21, 2018, at Artspeak in Vancouver, Canada.
historian Kris Cohen, and the two other invited panelists were New York-based curator Aria Elise Dean and British philosopher Naomi Waltham-Smith. Our proposed panel was accepted: *Rhythm, Race and Aesthetics of Being Together* was held at CCA on Saturday, 16 February 2019, in the Madison Suite of the New York Hilton Midtown.\textsuperscript{668}

Unfortunately, in the end, Dean and Waltham-Smith could not attend the conference due to unforeseen circumstances. However, their absences meant that I myself had more time to present a longer paper. My presentation at CAA drew from the Second Chapter of this thesis, and Ricco, Cohen and myself continued our lively discussions at a nearby bar afterwards.

As such, Ricco’s email is essentially a continuation of an ongoing conversation between us, and this is why I believe it makes sense to present an ending to this thesis in the mode of this chorus. In Ricco’s new essay, “Mourning, Melancholia, *Moonlight*” (2019), he offers a reading of Barry Jenkins’s film *Moonlight* (2016),\textsuperscript{669} following a reading of Roland Barthes’s *The Neutral*, “[a]s that which happens but doesn’t last, it is perhaps not even a matter of being ‘formative,’ even though it can be said to singularly endure in its very momentariness”.\textsuperscript{670} For Ricco, “[i]t is what Roland Barthes described as a ‘hole-filled temporality’ as opposed to what we might describe as a crystallization of time”.\textsuperscript{671}

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to stage a dialogue between Roland Barthes and Isaïe Nseyimana. At the beginning, I stated that their respective rhythmicisations amounted to two different ethical configurations: Barthes’s ideal of living together is through rest, whereas Nseyimana’s ethics lead to a “procreative” generosity. At the same time, the reader might recall how, for Nseyimana, thinking from a position of pragmatism that attempts to overcome

\textsuperscript{668} https://caa.confex.com/caa/2019/meetingapp.cgi/Session/1715.


\textsuperscript{671} Ibid., citing Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*. 

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the afterlife is an invitation, but also a risk. It is always a movement in which “[the] logic of the unity of oppositions means that any party that would otherwise impose and solidify itself in the relation of exclusion and separation, learns that such relation is a moment that commands a whole”, to the extent that “even among victims and perpetrators, the relation of inclusive disjunction becomes conjunctive relationships”.  

Ricco would describe the moment (Barthes) that is also a movement (Nzeyimana) in the following terms:

I read the empirical and absolute contingency of this extemporaneous [literally: out of time] and erotic moment as the scene of queer feeling, and indeed as a potential source of a sense of liberation and freedom. Free in part from the neoliberal script of individual development and self-becoming, and thus also free from the measure of a subject’s failure to become paradigmatic—in terms of racial, gendered, sexual, and social class identity and other forms of sociological categorization.

Ricco is actually describing a scene from the same film *Moonlight* here, an instance composed of “a temporal moment that is also a movement, yet to the precise extent that this mobility is conjoined with—rather than separate from—the stasis of the momentary”. For Ricco, “[a] ‘moment of momentum’ would be a description of what moves or affects someone (or something), yet without either that moment or that momentum being extended or subsumed within a temporal duration of development, progress, or becoming.

I borrow Ricco’s sculpturally compressed and complex sets of phrases to compose my own *exphrasis* to describe the following Appendixes section. The “Practice” of dialogues and colloquiums of this research rehearses the paleonymic and “the polysemy of the Latin ‘momentum,’ a term that combines

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672 Nzeyimana, *Histoire et pragmatisme*, p. 191: “La logique de l’unité des oppositions veut dire que toute partie qui allait s’imposer et se fixer en rapport d’exclusion et de solitude, apprend qu’elle est plutôt un moment d’un tout. Ainsi, ces rapports de disjonction inclusive, convoquant plutôt des rapports de conjonction”.


674 Ibid.

675 Ibid.
the temporal moment and the mechanical movement into one word that bears within it the tension of these seemingly contradictory forces of stasis and mobility”.676 Perhaps this is how “art”, a “doing”, resolves the contradiction that resides between Barthes and Nzeyimana, and establishes instead a relation—a proximity—of inclusive disjunction. As such “the stasis or inertia of a moment [which is to say rest in Barthes’s terms] can be its own form of movement [which is to say Nzeyimana’s generosity]”. This inclusive disjunction is not mobilised “toward pure being, encounter, sense, or experience”.677 The spiral movement of proximities is orientated towards a horizon that is more and that is less than the outdated prescriptive and procreative generosity of ubuntu, if that is the genesis of a circularity that, as a genesis, inevitably engenders debt, indebtedness and always a genocide.

676 Ibid., p. 24.
677 Ibid. Here, I am drawing from Ricco: “In other words, I am suggesting that the stasis or inertia of a moment can be its own form of movement, if not toward pure being, encounter, sense, or experience, then toward what I want to theorise as neutral affect—its a-temporality or ex-temporality. The contention is that feeling queer/queer feeling is outside the temporal orders of continuity, directionality, or teleology”.
In my case, this “doing”, this “moment of momentum”, this proximity of movements, has been explored through mobilising *idios/rhythm*. I have visited philosophers and fellow artists, not only in Rwanda but also elsewhere, but always as *idios*, understood not so much or not simply as a foreigner or a stranger, but a visitor. In some way, living in the Netherlands, the UK and the US is a form of *anachórēsis*: it has stripped me of the literary comforts of what would otherwise be a native tongue, and translation has become the essential mode of thought: consultation, revision, reflection and hesitation.

Conversing in Kinyarwanda poses a limit of living and working together with those who are supposedly my kith and kin of birth—my *bavandimwe*. However, this limit has also become a resource, because of the constant enquiries of the meaning of terms in Kinyarwanda. What is art in Kinyarwanda? What is theory? What is philosophy? What is rhythm? The nativity of these questions is also a receptacle: it turns out that even philosophers cannot fully agree on what is art or philosophy. From this “evening” of knowledge, I have staged conferences, study groups and research projects concerned with mapping the intellectual histories of such terms and the migrations of their meanings in ethics and aesthetics.

Therefore, the suggestion here is not to leave the world, in the classical manner of an ascetic *anachórēsis*. Instead, the suggestion here is to leave *with* the world. In this thesis, in practice and in theory, that is one of the manners through which to conceptualise a passage beyond rest or generosity, beyond the anecdotal crisis of discourse alluded to in the Introduction of this document.

This passage (and the following Appendixes) makes the subject not Other but a foreigner, a Sophist stranger “who has travelled far and seen much”, yet the object is also to reduce the sense of being strangers in the world. Nevertheless, this elective strangeness, or exteriority, produces rest and respite from the world; it achieves the return to the celestial humanity, effected through “casting the theorist as a stranger”, heightened and dramatised by Plato as having “no name, age, or any significant attributes other than [her or] his vocation or
‘way’ (aporie)”. Then, if a dialogue is a simulation, the figure of the artist, who has broken away from the society for the society is the archetype of thinking (idios) and moving (rhythm) beyond the limits of living together (genocide). It is a subject who performs an affirmative self-negation, in the rest of Roland Barthes or in the movement of Isaïe Nzyirimana, in the restful movement of living together.

This concluding section performs a visit from the perspective of this restful movement, this moment of momentum, this strangeness (idios), a movement (rhythm) across the geographical and intellectual regions of Rwanda and beyond. It is a search for an audience, a chorus, the presence and company of artists, theorists, philosophers and mythologists. It is a conversation about how to conciliate actual, not to say “true” and yet conflicting layers of memory and history.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to sketch a diagram of circular causality, a diagram of feedback, which can be negative or a positive feedback, a virtuous or a vicious loop. It is a diagram of a cycle. The virtue or danger of it depends on which way it goes, but it means that the conditions of giving-receiving-giving or letting-being-letting are to be found inside rather than outside: communality and conflict are constitutive and inherent. This is the diagram of this thesis, of how ethics work, of how power works, of how politics work. It is inside the wall and I could conclude that this is how not to live together.

The attempt entails also how to measure one’s own distance to the intransigence of the history of the present. The preference is to end with question marks in the form of filmic, photographic and documentary recordings of the practice of this thesis because, if I am to truly break and maintain the bonds of giving-receiving-giving and letting-being-letting, then, as the saying

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678 Terence Ball, “Theory and Practice: An Examination of the Platonic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Political Theory”, pp. 539-540.
goes, *amaziro n’amaciro birangana*: the ends and the beginnings are identical.\(^\text{679}\)

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