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## **The Dilemma of Representation of Catastrophe in Literature**

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### Abstract

Chronicling genocide through documents, statistics or archives, dehumanizes and isolates the victim. Thereby, the victim loses her voice and eventually becomes ignored. As a result, the reader can only have a general overview of the subject and his/her knowledge cannot cross the border of numeric, geographic or political information, such as death toll and whatsoever. Scarcely, genocide takes its place among the courses of violent acts in world history. History books cannot give voice to the victim. History excludes the reader. S/he can only establish a mutual relationship with the victim's words. S/he internalizes the suffering, makes it his/her own grief. S/he finds the meaning not in the facts but in the words of the victim, which get through her imagination. Hence, there occurs the urge of telling the unspeakable through literature.

The aim of this study is to analyze why literature is the essential way to find a meaning in catastrophic events, both for the victim herself and for the reader. Marc Nishanian's striking work 'Edebiyat ve Felaket' will light the way to give us a perspective while analyzing Rwandan writer Scholastique Mukasonga's vivacious novel '*Our Lady of the Nile*'. It is my intention to scrutinize the relationship between history, literature and genocide, to track the steps that paved the road to the catastrophe, to put forth how the writer made a sense of catastrophe through literature and brought the real meaning of catastrophe for her into the light.

**Keywords:** Post-colonial literature, Literature and Catastrophe, Rwandan Genocide, Marc Nishanian, Scholastique Mukasonga

## Introduction

Mama, I wasn't there to cover your body, and all I have left is words – words in a language you didn't understand – to do as you asked. And I'm all alone with my feeble words, and on the pages of my notebook, over and over, my sentences weave a shroud for your missing body.

Scholastique Mukasonga, *Bare Foot Woman*

The further we get into the reading Scholastique Mukasonga's novel *Our Lady of the Nile* the more we realize that the novel is not about the Rwandan genocide. The main theme of the novel, which is also Marc Nishanian's main focus in *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, is the crisis of representation of catastrophes. The novel represents a true picture of the colonized and decolonized Rwanda, but actually, as we get into it, we realize that Mukasonga shows a bigger picture, that is, the issue is not limited to Rwanda. It is a universal concept and this concept, the tension between the reality about the atrocities and their representations, can be applied to anywhere in the world, where people suffer under any kind of oppression. Through the novel, we become engaged thinkers. We understand the relationship between the text and the reality. We care more about the reality, what is going on around us, and we kind of feel responsibility. We either search for Rwandan genocide or any other catastrophe in the world and this leads us to the truth which can be found through literary works. The truth must be said because the victims and their killers have to move on in the aftermath of the genocide. As writing is an act of remembrance and reconciliation, literature will allow them to learn living together, side by side. The Hutu will remember the circumstances that led them to what they did, so there will be peace and unity, which is the sole purpose of Mukasonga to have established. Through her novel, she manages to break the dominant discourse set by the colonial powers, that is the Africans are barbarians and it is normal that they are killing each other, without falling into that reductive reasoning. As art has the ability to reach a broader public and broaden the scope of the issue, literature plays a crucial role

in representing catastrophic events. Life continues and since the Hutu and the Tutsi are living together, sharing daily chores in their villages, they should forgive and ask for forgiveness. Otherwise, you cannot build a country. All in all truth must be said, and since history looks at the issue from a general perspective and is engaged with ideological, political and economic concerns, literature and cultural product in general have a significant role in representation of violence.

From the excerpt above, we can infer that writing is the sole way for Mukasonga to mourn and seek a remedy. She writes to deal with the catastrophic loss to be mourned, to make sense of her suffering and make it perceivable for the reader. In an interview, she brought forth that writing had been a way of mourning to remember and respect those lost ones who even did not have a proper grave. For her, her books are ‘Tombeau de Papier’<sup>2</sup> of her loved ones that enable her to keep them beside and to remember them.

Scholastique Mukasonga was born in Rwanda in 1956, before the social revolution in 1959 which was a turning point in the history of Rwanda. That is to say, she was born into an atmosphere of conflict, hatred and fear, for revolution brought not peace but turmoil to the country. She witnessed brutal assaults of the Hutu, until she settled in France in 1992, leaving her family behind. She experienced malevolence during her studentship, which later turned into the subject of her novel, *Our Lady of the Nile*. Finally, in 1994, during one of the most horrendous mass violences in history, she lost 27 members of her family, including her parents.

Although she was not a flesh witness<sup>3</sup> of the genocide, Mukasonga witnessed the Hutu violence throughout her life. In her books, which consist of two autobiographies, several short stories and novels, she accomplished to show the grounds of the genocide in 1994 effectively and

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<sup>1</sup> Mukasonga describes her books as ‘Tombeau de Papier’ in French, which means ‘Tomb of Paper’, for the victims of the genocide do not have a proper grave.

<sup>2</sup>This term is borrowed from Yuval Noah Harari’s article *Scholars, Eyewitnesses and Flesh Witnesses of War*. In the article, Harari claims that knowledge is something we obtain through experience and sensibility. Flesh witness lives through the phenomenon, feels it, tastes it and sees it, and that makes him/her gain authority over the eyewitnesses and scholars.

realistically. After her two autobiographies, *The Bare foot Woman* and *Cockroaches*, Mukasonga wrote her first novel *Our Lady of the Nile*. In an interview she claimed that she had started writing fiction because she felt it gave her the distance she needed to say things that couldn't be expressed in a straightforward autobiography. For her it was a dilemma to express her grief. Yet, literature gives her the opportunity to overcome this dilemma, and using it as a tool, she explores the borders of her imagination, which we see, clearly in her novel.

As a moral witness, she also aims to delve deep into the root causes of the genocide. For her, it would be insufficient to address the Hutu as the perpetrators of the violence and ignore the colonial impact on the dynamics of the country. She believes that to change the Western perception of the Rwandan conflict and African people in general, the truth must be said, which is something that couldn't be found in history books. In her novel, she achieves her goal and tells the reader the untold. To do so she adapts the turmoil of Rwanda to the girls' school and uses adolescent female characters to demonstrate a divided nation.

Mukasonga notes that she chose fiction as the form of her narrative because, "fiction makes it possible to take on subjects that would be too difficult or painful to address in the first person. It allows me also to maintain a certain distance from what I write."<sup>4</sup> She also contends assuredly in an interview, "I'm not a political writer or a historian. Many African specialists, like Jean-Pierre Chrétien, have studied the way in which the myths of nineteenth-century European racist anthropology interpreted Rwandan society in terms of races and invasions – an interpretation that had tragic consequences for Rwandan society."<sup>5</sup> Here, Mukasonga refers to the Hamitic myth, which was made up by the colonizers to form a new history for the peoples of Rwanda. The

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<sup>4</sup> Scholastique Mukasonga, "Scholastique Mukasonga on Tutsi Life and the Rwandan Genocide," interview by Deborah Treisman, *The New Yorker*, November 2018,

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/this-week-in-fiction/scholastique-mukasonga-11-12-18>

<sup>5</sup> Scholastique Mukasonga, "Interview with Scholastique Mukasonga," interview by Suzy Ceulan, *New Welsh Review*, Issue 102, <https://www.newwelshreview.com/article.php?id=645>

Hamitic myth, which bore the idea that Tutsi came from somewhere else and they were superior while the Hutu were the natives, was written by the colonizers and translated into Kinyarwanda<sup>6</sup> immediately in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With this came the race policy, which got into every aspect of life of the Hutu and the Tutsi. What is significant in Mukasonga's two statements is that, on the one hand writing is a way for her to recover the colonial trauma she had been through; and, on the other hand, as history writing is made by the Western world, it is literature that will break the dominant influence of the West on the country. Marc Nichanian puts forth this point by claiming that art has the power to reestablish the phenomenon in the universal memory.<sup>7</sup> This is one initial purpose of Mukasonga; writing to unfold the truth for the next generation and the whole world.

Nichanian indicates in *Edebiyat ve Felaket* that, "History is denialist by its essence."<sup>8</sup> For this reason, according to the ever-changing conjuncture and ideologies, diversifications occur in historiography. Another comment comes from Sara R. Horowitz:

"[...] writing history entails the same set of problems, that as soon as one writes history, one has produced a narrative similarly shaped and distorted by the limitations of language, generic conventions, ideology, and the like. "Just write history," I told him, is precisely what we cannot do."<sup>9</sup>

So, what Mukasonga needed to do was to confront the Western gaze on Rwanda which was and still being defined by the colonial forces.

Historical writings give only a general framework of the phenomena; they dehumanize and finally exclude the victims. All in all, the victim loses his or her voice. Through the literary

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<sup>6</sup> Kinyarwanda is one of the official languages in Rwanda.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, translated by Ayşegül Sönmezay (İstanbul: İletişim, 2011), p.111.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p.16.

<sup>9</sup> Sara R. Horowitz, "Review: Rethinking Holocaust Testimony: The Making and Unmaking of the Witness," *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1992), pp. 45-68  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/743434>

representations, the victim gains her identity back. “Fiction restores souls to the victims”.<sup>10</sup> Marc Nichanian, too, argues that the unique realm to give voice to catastrophic events is literature: “[...] we think we can write history based on testimonies. Even worse, we presume testimonies display pure experience for the world to see and, in this way, transcend the fictionality literature requires.”<sup>11</sup> Testimonies fail to touch the essence of the catastrophe, because it is impossible for the victim-survivor to confront the power of the perpetrators which forms the denialist disposition of genocide. Moreover, we do not understand what testimony means in reality, for we cannot comprehend what catastrophe comprises.

Having said the above, my research indicates that history, archives, testimonies and whatsoever are insufficient to put forth the unseen. As Edward Hallett Carr argues, “...the historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate.”<sup>12</sup> Carr hits the right note on the issue in his autobiography. He puts forth that the first idea that gave him the meaning of history was when he learned that Herodotus’s narrative of Persian Wars had been formed and interpreted according to his attitude against the Peloponnesian War which had been ongoing at that time. His statement makes us infer that to reach the bare truth is something almost impossible. I believe it will be to the point to refer to Fanon here:

“History, of course, though nevertheless written by the Westerners and to serve their purposes, will be able to evaluate from time to time certain periods of the African past. But, standing face to face with his country at the present time, and observing clearly and objectively the events of today throughout the continent, which he wants to make his own, the intellectual is terrified by the void, the degradation, and the savagery he sees there.

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<sup>10</sup> “Literary Responses to Mass Violence”, Brandeis University, last access March 12, 2020 [https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Literary\\_Responses.pdf](https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Literary_Responses.pdf), p.120

<sup>11</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.37

<sup>12</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987), p.12

Now he feels that he must get away from the white culture. He must seek his culture elsewhere, anywhere at all; and if he fails to find the substance of culture of the same grandeur and scope as displayed by the ruling power, the native intellectual will very often fall back upon emotional attitudes and will develop a psychology which is dominated by exceptional sensitivity and susceptibility. This withdrawal, which is due in the first instance to a begging of the question in his internal behavior mechanism and his own character, brings out, above all, a reflex and contradiction which is muscular”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, my study will focus on the theories on how literature deals with catastrophic events. I will try to show how literature succeeds to speak for future generations while historiography fails to do so. As my research indicates history is engaged by its nature. The ideologies and conjuncture, international relations and future concerns of politics form history as a necessity.

I believe it is necessary to give a brief information about the Rwandan conflict and the novel. The title of the novel represents the elite Catholic boarding school for girls, which, with its inhabitants, displays Rwanda on a micro scale. In the novel, the river Nile and Virgin Mary stand as the root of the conflict between the Hutu and the Tutsi. That is to say, colonial powers created a myth that the Tutsi had come from Egypt and invaded Rwanda. This made the Tutsi invaders, and the Hutu righteous owners of the country, which turned the Hutu against the Tutsi, instead of the colonial powers. The emergence of the Hamitic myth brought race policy and the novel puts it in the center to show how the Hutu as well as the missionaries welcomed it. What Mukasonga marks in her novel is that it is not a racial conflict that comes up, but the colonial-made hatred based on superiority and subalternity. No doubt she brilliantly uses those concepts to lay bare what really was the motivation of that animosity, of those who massacred their neighbors, even in some cases, people from their own blood. To show that the division of the Hutu and the Tutsi was engineered by the church and the Belgian administration hand in hand, Mukasonga depicts the girls as close friends who chat and laugh about the boys or argue about the best recipes of their

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<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p.220.

mothers' cooking. All in all, the use of Hamitic myth and its reflection on the inhabitants of the school deserves a scrutiny.

The social revolution stands as the turning point in Rwanda's history of violence. It is known that before the independence in 1962, the Tutsi king was in charge and the Hutu were the secondary citizens. After the social revolution in 1959, the Hutu asked for their democratic rights as it was the dream of Africa as a whole. However, it was not a Rwandan revolution. It was a Hutu revolution that sought freedom both from the Tutsi and the colonial powers. Following the revolution, the regime shifted and with the support of the church and the Belgian administration Hutu gained power. It was the starting point of the violence against the Tutsi, and Mukasonga reiterates the case in the novel in several occasions that takes the reader to one of the root causes of the genocide.

The revolution did not bring stability to Rwanda, but it poured out the consciousness of the oppressed Hutu. Mahmood Mamdani's comment on the subject is that "the underside of the Rwandan revolution, its political tragedy, was that this relentless pursuit of justice turned into a quest for revenge. That quest was the hallmark of the First Republic."<sup>14</sup> For the Hutu, the Tutsi were aliens to be got rid of. Adopting the Hamitic Myth, they justified their suppression by claiming the Tutsi were aliens who invaded the country. When and how did the racial segregation start? To what extent did the colonizers support racial conflict? Although the Rwandan genocide has been frequently described as the 'neighbors killing their neighbors', were the Tutsi and the Hutu really neighbors? We will trace the answers for these questions in the novel. Also, in the chapter entitled 'Cultural Bomb'<sup>15</sup>, the identity confusion among the girls will be analyzed. As the novel indicates, there are significant instances where the reader sees the standing European values

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<sup>14</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.55.

<sup>15</sup> Ngugi wa Thiongo'o describes the term 'Cultural Bomb' in his work 'Decolonising The Mind' which will be discussed in chapter 2

in the country, specifically in the region where the school is located. In the novel it can be seen that even the vegetables served at the school are not local but from Europe, because it was believed that this was a necessity to civilize the girls. Also, at a significant moment, girls try to whiten their skin color with a lotion to look like their favorite European film stars. All in all, Mukasonga demonstrates the fragmented identities of the girls under white supremacy. Madan Sarup defines identity as follows:

“I believe that our identities are, to some extent constructed by social structures. To put it briefly, structures are often constraints on the way we act. These constraints can be material, or political. Political constraints mean that, in some situations, other people have the power to determine how we act and even influence how we think.”<sup>16</sup>

As Sarup puts forth clearly, the identity of a person, tribe, society and nation is formed by the external powers, which can be a father, a chief, a powerful intellectual, or a political leader. Here the important thing to ask is how identity or let's say lack of identity motivates a person to commit such violent acts; first at the school among the students, then all over the country. This is a significant point to be examined to understand one of the chief reasons of the Rwandan Genocide. With their given identity, first the Tutsi had the power and oppressed the Hutu. And when the wind blew from a different way, colonizers shifted the subjects. Accordingly, the suppression of the Tutsi by the Hutu started. That was the reason for the failure of the social revolution. For, it was the revolution of the Hutu, not of Rwanda. There was not a unity in the nation, which was fundamental to form a free nation. Eventually, the violence evolved into the 1994 genocide. As Fanon states,

“National culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong. National culture in the

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<sup>16</sup> Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 1996), p.9.

underdeveloped countries, therefore, must lie at the very heart of the liberation struggle these countries are waging.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, I believe that Mukasonga’s choice to demonstrate the origin of the violence through girls deserves a scrutiny. I argue that, by doing so, she tries to show that the seeds of hatred had been planted long before the genocide. It did not just pop up as a sudden reflex. Unquestionably, even innocence of young girls, if there remained any, could not help it and failed, because along with the racial segregation hatred had been rooted long before and internalized by the Hutu as a natural notion. Mukasonga puts her finger on the subject:

“The character of Fontenailles in *Notre-Dame du Nil* (Our Lady of the Nile), uses irony to lay bare the myths the colonial administrators and missionaries had created about the Tutsis. The genocide didn’t suddenly erupt on 7 April 1994; it began on 1 November 1959, and its ideological roots go back to the 1930s and beyond.”<sup>18</sup>

No doubt she skillfully shows the reader that the colonial powers distorted Rwanda by writing a new history, reconstructing the identities, and annihilating its culture. “With a strong indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation,”<sup>19</sup> stresses Cabral. What happened in Rwanda like the other colonized countries all over the world is exactly what he brings forth. The colonizers came, reconstructed the country, exploited it however they wished, and finally ‘seemed to’ left it in ruins.

As a final point, the school was built after Rwanda had gained independence and was raising well-educated Christian girls. We see that the French-speaking school with its administrative staff embodies the colonial powers and the students are stuck between several identities as well as Western values and their own beliefs. Overall, we see that as the novel

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<sup>17</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.168

<sup>18</sup> Mukasonga, “Interview with Scholastique Mukasonga,” *New Welsh Review*

<sup>19</sup> Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1973), p.89.

proceeds, the horror, prejudice, hatred and violence unveil giving the marks of the genocide of 1994.

It is not the objective of Mukasonga to ‘write’ the genocide. Rather, she wants to unfold the truth that had been hidden for such a long time, and her novel gives her that opportunity. How should she approach to her goal? The reader of this paper will see how a catastrophic event turns into an inexpressible delusion. Likewise, the reader will comprehend why literature is necessary to show what the ‘real’ thing is among the concrete but questionable facts. Nishanian’s illuminating work will show us how this happens.

A well-told story is a powerful thing that can change the world. *Our Lady of the Nile*, which was also adapted to a feature film with the same title, fits well into that definition. It accomplishes to demonstrate the pre-colonial culture of peoples, unfolds the truth to confront the colonizers’ influence, and attempts to change the view of the Western world on Rwanda.

Before moving into details, Amilcar Cabral’s words will summarize Mukasonga’s overall intention for writing:

“In combatting racism, we don't make progress if we combat the people themselves. We have to combat the causes of racism. If a bandit comes in my house and I have a gun I cannot shoot the shadow of this bandit. I have to shoot the bandit. Many people lose energy and effort, and make sacrifices combatting shadows. We have to combat the material reality that produces the shadow. If we cannot change the light that is one cause of the shadow, we can at least change the body. It is important to avoid confusion between the shadow and the body that projects the shadow. We are encouraged by the fact that each day more of our people, here and in Africa, realize this reality. This reinforces our confidence in our final victory.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, p.77.

As a post-colonial writer, Mukasonga gives herself and the countless victim-survivors a chance to mourn their loss, and gives voice to the victims and the survivors who had been silenced for a long time. She restores the identities of her peoples and evokes recognition of the Western world.

### **Predicament of Literature as a Response to Catastrophe**

Scholastique Mukasonga did not witness the genocide herself. Yet this does not make her an invalid narrator of the catastrophic events entreated in her writings. The Rwandan genocide, or in Nichanian's words the 'catastrophe', was a result of linear events dated back to almost a century beforehand. So, it would be deficient to focus on the 'genocide' itself, with the horrid acts, types of torture, and figures of death toll and so on. This attitude would give 'genocide' a kind of identity and take it as a materialized phenomenon, which does not bear the human and human factors in itself. To be more precise, genocide makes no sense to its victims. It is beyond comprehension and articulation for them. What remains for the victim is either death or unspeakable grief.

To demonstrate the motive of using the word catastrophe in lieu of genocide, Marc Nichanian succinctly points out the difference between the two terms. If they were used interchangeably, it would be disrespectful to both terms. Consequently, what genocide means for the victim, how it turns into a catastrophe for her would be inevitably eluded.<sup>21</sup> The source for the catastrophic events in Rwanda, in which the subjected group changed as per historical and economical context, started in 1916 when the country was recolonized by Belgium<sup>22</sup> who put in the race conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu. From then until the end of the genocide, which followed four years of civil war, the Tutsi and the Hutu switched the roles as oppressors and

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<sup>21</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.20

<sup>22</sup> Rwanda was first colonized by the German forces in 1889. After the WWII, in 1916, it came under the rule of Belgian administration.

victims. Yet the majority of the victims were Tutsi who faced the horrendous incidents, which caused almost one million deaths in a very short span of time.

What were the factors that brought a country to such a dreaded point? Mukasonga is on the way of searching for the answers to this question. As she had been the flesh witness of the process of displacement of the Tutsis which resulted in the oppressive and humiliating acts of Hutus and as the moral witness of the mass killings in 1994 in which she lost almost her entire family, she had a word to utter not only for herself but also for the ones who didn't have the chance to do so; for they were either dead or lack such opportunity. Her 'feeble' words will try to provide remedy for her grief, and through her words a nation will be appreciated by the world and remembered by the future generations.

Rwanda is unique in the black continent in terms of the ethnic conflict enduring still today with regard to political and scholar interpretations of the discord. Peter Uvin lays bare the condition in Rwanda as follows: "There is no place in the world where such a radically opposed views of ethnicity confront each other in such a bloody manner in the political arena."<sup>23</sup> As he stresses in the same article, the "[...] polarizing interpretation of the history of ethnicity in Rwanda"<sup>24</sup> is still standing among the scholars. As he claims, the debate on the ethnicity realities and the internal and external factors of the genocide as well as the failures of the international intervention in the phenomenon are still a major matter of debate among the arbiters of the issue. Here the point is, among the highly complicated issues such as ethnicity, identity, political and economic concerns in a formidable country where the clash of authorities had a major role, to find the truth is not within possibility. In these circumstances, the truth will be bent, reconstructed, written and finally presented by the authorities (needless to say, they would be the Western authorities and scholars).

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Uvin, "Reading the Rwandan Genocide", in *International Studies Review* Vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 75-99

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

As the colonizers have formed the Rwandan history since 1916, and still have an influence on the geography, it would be insufficient to take the notion of the authorities as the truth. To add more, since Rwandan peoples did not have an alphabet, their culture was highly based on oral tradition until the colonization of the country. Their traditions had been transferred by oral literature centered in mythology, in which the political and cultural life was framed. Yet, colonizers replaced their mythology with an invented one, namely the Hamitic myth. What is more important is that oral literature bears the culture of a nation, which plays a crucial role in forming and preserving identity. Unfortunately, it was interrupted as French became the dominant language as the colonizers entered the region. During the colonization, Rwandan mother tongue Kinyarwanda was restricted. Specifically, at schools French became the only language that children were taught. To come to the point, these cases show that what is left for the nation is literature as a truthful ground liberated from the imperialist ideologies to form their identity and expose it to the world and future generations, which unfortunately was formed only after the genocide.

Why Mukasonga does not write the genocide? The genocide did not pop up all of a sudden. As she points out, ‘The genocide didn’t suddenly erupt on 7 April 1994; it began on 1 November 1959, and its ideological roots go back to the 1930s and beyond.’<sup>25</sup> During her school years in 1970s, which stand as the epicenter in her novel, there already had been genocide-like barbaric doings and they just repeated themselves in 1994. Ultimately, it may be claimed that while Mukasonga leaves the question of ‘genocide’ to the arbiters such as scholars and power holders, she tries to lay bare the truth behind the curtains. She has a word on this point:

“I want nothing to be forgotten. Justice has not been done. So we have to continue commemorating. To do so, truth must be told. Actually, genocide is an ending. That is why,

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<sup>25</sup> Mukasonga, “Scholastique Mukasonga on Tutsi Life and the Rwandan Genocide,” *The Newyorker*, November 2018

with this book I tried to plumb the depths of its reasons. Who closed his eyes and turned their backs? I write because I want the truth to take place in the international literature.”<sup>26</sup>

In the pursuit of the truth, Mukasonga looks back and wanders among the infamous events of pre-genocide era.

Another crucial question is why Nchanian uses ‘catastrophe’ in lieu of ‘genocide’? Marie Berry has a clear explanation. She states that in recent years scholars debate on conflicts to be named ‘genocide’. While the UN Genocide Convention refers to the conflicts in Bosnia, Armenia, Cambodia and Rwanda as ‘genocide’, scholars including human right activists and Western policymakers debate on whether the destruction of indigenous people in Americas or elsewhere should be counted as genocide.<sup>27</sup> We may add Indonesia as a case at this point and ask how the authorities account for it. She claims that the problem here is not only the genocides but also the wars, which should be counted as evil and immoral by the authorities. She also points out that civilian casualties have been climbing up to 90% in recent wars of the 1990s especially when the Middle East is taken into consideration. It is certain that the matter of classifying those requires further examination. She has more to say on the subject:

“Moreover, the term “genocide” tends to simplify complex, overlapping conflicts into a neat framework, wherein one social group is the perpetrator and another is the victim... the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) massacred tens of thousands of Rwandans as it invaded and took control of the country... Even further, some members of each ethnic group committed atrocities against their co-ethnics; for example, Hutu extremists killed tens of thousands of Hutu who were political opponents of the regime, were married to Tutsi, or who refused to participate in the violence. Hutu men also raped Hutu women. Genocidal racism, in other words, harms many beyond the target group. In any case, when

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<sup>26</sup> *L'invité*, “Scholastique Mukasonga: “Le Rwanda Veut la Vérité sur le Genocide,” June 26, 2014, video, 9:56 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMjMneUXVPs&t=46s>

<sup>27</sup> Marie E. Berry, *War, Women, and Power*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 22.

we exclusively refer to these conflicts as genocides, we unintentionally neglect these diverse and multilayered logics of violence. Understanding those killed in genocidal violence as somehow more definitive victims than those killed in more conventional military engagements can create hierarchies of victimhood that intensify social divisions, thwart reconciliation and justice, and perpetuate cycles of violence.”<sup>28</sup>

Conflicts in a given geography do not bear homogeneous traits. It was not only the Tutsi who were massacred in Rwanda. The Hutu had their share in 1972. We know that the Tutsi troops in Burundi attacked the Hutu killing almost two hundred of them. Yet, it would be insufficient to ignore the Western influence both as an initiator of the conflict during the colonial era and later as a supporter of the mass violence during decolonization. If the essence of any kind of conflict becomes comprehensible, if it is put on the table with its multiple dimensions, then there can be a chance of peace on earth. The multifaceted components of genocide, or ‘mass violence’ as Berry prefers to state, need to be examined. This is one reason why Mukasonga does not write, cannot write about the genocide. For her, the genocide was an end and it is insufficient to focus on genocide to find the truth. In an interview she pinpoints the issue:

“They lay the blame of the genocide on Rwandan people. However, there is a responsibility on international level. They are responsible because they turned their backs. For this reason the justice has not been done. Yes it was the Rwandan that did it. But there are things in necessity to be uncovered. That is why I am writing. Why have all this happened? Why have we killed children? In Rwanda Tutsis and Hutus are parts of a mosaic. They are dependent on each other all the time. Why have we all lived through such horrendous events? If people know the covered truth, then justice will be covered.”<sup>29</sup>

‘Catastrophe and Genocide do not amount to the same thing’<sup>30</sup> says Nichanian. Coinciding with

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p.23-24

<sup>29</sup> *L’invité*, “Scholastique Mukasonga: “Le Rwanda Veut la Vérité sur le Genocide,”

<sup>30</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p. 19

Berry, he argues that, since there are so many people suffering in this world, it is not general facts, experiences or sufferings of the victims that he deals with. He is interested in the catastrophe not the genocidal case.<sup>31</sup> As he repeatedly points out genocide is something that the historian should deal with, and catastrophe is the destruction of the linguistic competence of the victim; it is the death of the witness.<sup>32</sup> “It is necessary to distinguish phenomenon from case. My objective is the phenomenon of catastrophe itself; not the historical case nor the historical events.”<sup>33</sup> Nchanian proceeds in his book putting a divergent yet thought-provoking view on the subject, underlining how insufficient, further manipulative it is to write about genocide. For, “...catastrophe is not the totality of atrocities. Yet, no human being bears the capacity to calculate this totality.”<sup>34</sup> Mukasonga meditates on the same subject as follows:

“I’m not a political writer or a historian. Many Africa specialists, like Jean-Pierre Chrétien, have studied the way in which the myths of nineteenth-century European racist anthropology interpreted Rwandan society in terms of races and invasions – an interpretation that had tragic consequences for Rwandan society.”<sup>35</sup>

So, we may suggest that something beyond the ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ can have a word for catastrophe. So, it is precisely literature that will set the victim/survivor free to demonstrate her view on the catastrophe and not the perpetrator’s will. She says:

“I am telling the poison that had been injected to us from the day I was born. I wrote what I saw. I wrote the reasons of the genocide. We already were expecting the genocide. So I do not want to address the perpetrators directly. They already know themselves. Yet there are still things waiting to be uncovered... I do not blame Hutus. We are all responsible for what had happened. Yet it is just a result. We need to discuss the causes.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, p.20.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p.33.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.25.

<sup>35</sup> Mukasonga, “Scholastique Mukasonga on Tutsi Life and the Rwandan Genocide,” *The Newyorker*

<sup>36</sup> *L’invité*, “Scholastique Mukasonga: “Le Rwanda Veut la Vérité sur le Genocide,”

In *Our Lady of the Nile*, Mukasonga depicts the daily life of girls and their struggles within their identity under the influence of Christian and Western values. She pictures her experiences of school years and points out the discriminative implements (such as 10% quotas<sup>37</sup> for Tutsi students' admission to the school or taking the end of the food line) along with the cheerfulness of the girls with all their innocence, dealing with menstruation, and sharing recipes of cooking banana. While Mukasonga tries to signify a Rwandan identity by depicting daily life routines and Rwandan characteristics, she tries to direct the attention of the reader to the roots of the genocide. No doubt, Mukasonga is not an exploitative writer. She does not write the ferocity she experienced in Rwanda. Even her autobiography '*Bare Foot Woman*', which is dedicated to her mother, does not involve horrendous actions or any dreadful deeds. For, she is in search of the reasons not the actions. Then, as she points out repeatedly, there might be a chance of unity and solidarity among Rwandan people.

On this point Nichanian's view on the subject must again be taken into consideration. It can be claimed that Mukasonga is the kind of writer who precisely fits in Nichanian's account on writers of disaster. He argues that the subject who is exposed to torture betrays the incident when s/he starts telling or writing.<sup>38</sup> For, catastrophe destroys the language. Since the former is beyond any kind of comprehension and is unspeakable, the attempt to tell or write the catastrophe in order to form language integrity for salvation would be a betrayal to the victim. He proceeds: "If you do so, you betray the experience of the victim and you lie to her. You establish normality for denial-driven experience to a certain extent. You force the victim to reject her own experience."<sup>39</sup> Precisely for this reason, Mukasonga writes about daily routines and specific details of Rwandan

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<sup>37</sup> In 1960, the Hutu majority took over the power in Rwanda. The following years brought turmoil between the Hutu and the Tutsi, which resulted in 20.000 Tutsi's death in seven years. By the mid-1960s it was estimated that half of the Tutsi population were living in neighboring countries. The remaining Tutsis faced discriminative policies, one of which was the quota system. Accordingly, the Tutsi had a 10% of allocation in social and political life in Rwanda, including education and employment.

<sup>38</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.27.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, p.28

folklore, which seem to be insignificant, yet they bear life in themselves that is subjected to forgetfulness. Does she depict a kind of denial of the horrendous acts? It is quite clear that the themes she points out in her novel show the opposite. While she points to Rwandan folklore and pagan rituals, she tells about racism and hatred in between the lines. When she deals with political issues, the reader realizes how a nation delved into an atmosphere of hatred and paved the road to an inevitable ending. Mukasonga does not give detailed accounts of hideous acts in her works. This would mean to repeat the will of the executioner.<sup>40</sup> Those evils do not belong to the victims. They are beyond the victim's horizon. Therefore, Mukasonga makes an exchange between life and death. She chooses 'life' instead of death. No doubt it is the culture, language and traditional rituals that humanize people, give them an identity, and make them bear a 'self' rather than otherness. Most importantly, these features form the collective memory of peoples. Ultimately a nation is supposed to emerge, which was expected after the decolonization period in Rwanda. Instead genocide came up .

Mukasonga's novel is a heart-warming story. She writes what she remembers and most importantly what she longs for. While she depicts the beautiful landscapes of Rwanda in the chapter entitled 'Rain', she writes how the girls miss their homemade food instead of white people's food. She gives a certain amount of space, as she explains the girls' chatting about their mothers' recipes, which makes the reader feel for and form a genuine link with the girls. It is rational to say that her writings function as a bearer of collective memory, in which she puts her soul and heart as well as the lost ones. Trinh T.Minh-ha's comment on the issue is worth noting:

“The simplest vehicle of truth, the story is also said to be ‘a phase of communication’, the natural form for revealing life’. Its fascination may be explained by its power both to give a vividly felt insight into the life of other people and to revive or keep alive the forgotten, dead ended, turned into stones parts of ourselves.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p.80.

<sup>41</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 123.

To revive or keep alive the forgotten is the motivation for Mukasonga to write. In an interview she says:

“I know why I write...to revive the lost ones. If I close my eyes, I'm forever walking down that path nobody takes anymore. For there are no more houses, no more coffee shrubs, no more sorghum or sweet potato fields...no more little girls dragging their dolls by a string. They have all fallen to the machete, without proper graves.”<sup>42</sup>

Mukasonga commemorates those who are lost by writing about them. Also, she brings her memories back to life, finds remedy for her grief and thus, has the opportunity to mourn. In another interview she tells:

“I've often said it was the genocide of Rwanda's Tutsis in 1994 that made me a writer. Writing has been a way of mourning for me and, with my books, I've woven a shroud for those whose bodies, buried in mass graves or scattered in ossuaries, are lost forever. It was in 2004, when I finally found the courage to go home to Nyamata, that I became aware of my duty of remembrance, because I could write. I was somehow the memory-bearer for those whose very existence, whose every trace, the génocidaires had wanted to wipe out and deny. That's why my first two books were autobiographical. I started writing fiction because I felt it gave me the distance I needed to say things that couldn't be expressed in straightforward autobiography.”<sup>43</sup>

Mukasonga is a survivor. Yet she does not consider herself a survivor. While she has been holding a guilty conscience as the sole family member who remained alive, she has been shouldering a responsibility for the lost ones. In her autobiographies, *Cockroaches* and *Bare Foot Woman*, the reader can see that Mukasonga does not directly point out the implements of Hutus. Rather, she gives life to the reminiscences of being a Rwandan and lays bare the Rwandan culture for the world. Most importantly, it must be underlined that in a world where Rwanda or any other colonizer-violated geography is perceived and put forth through the colonizer's gaze as an 'other,'

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<sup>42</sup> *L'invité*, “Scholastique Mukasonga: “Le Rwanda Veut la Vérité sur le Genocide,”

<sup>43</sup> Mukasonga, “Scholastique Mukasonga on Tutsi Life and the Rwandan Genocide,” *The Newyorker*

Mukasonga's attempt to make a nation visible is of vital importance. A short excerpt from *Cockroaches* gives a hint of her approach to the subject matter of her writing objective:

“In 1994, the old woman was viciously attacked. I won't describe how she was humiliated, raped, tortured. I want to remember only the woman who gave us milk, Gicanda, the queen with the beautiful face.”<sup>44</sup>

Or when she writes about her mother, who constitutes the biggest portion in her memoirs, she mostly depicts her daily chores softly and in a lyrical way:

“Sometimes she spent the whole afternoon on the little patch of land she set aside for plants no one grew anymore. For her they were like the survivors of a happier time, and she seemed to draw a new energy from them. She grew them not for daily consumption but as a way of bearing witness to what was in danger of disappearing, what did disappear in the cataclysm of the genocide.”<sup>45</sup>

Mukasonga is a memory bearer. She bears memories of her life, of her family, not the genocidaire's implements. As a flesh witness of the violence during the exile, and a moral witness of the genocide, she feels a responsibility not to forget to honor her family's memory. And those are definitely not the memories formed under the tyrant's genocidal acts. Mukasonga thinks of herself as a ‘witness of suffering, but writer and poet all over’<sup>46</sup>:

“It took me ten years to overcome the guilt of surviving and return to Rwanda, to Nyamata, where my family had been deported in 1960, from where I left for exile in 1973, and where all my loved ones were massacred in April 1994. There I found nothing, not a grave, not a witness – bushes had covered everything. This may be a myth I forged for myself, but I am convinced that my parents chose me for exile not only to save my life, but also to perpetuate their memory. By writing I hope to have accomplished what they expected of me.”<sup>47</sup>

If we turn back to Nichanian, he clarifies the issue in a short yet effective way: “The experience of the survivor (if there is any) is an unrepairable loss; both a specific and immeasurable loss. What

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<sup>44</sup> Scholastique Mukasonga, *Cockroaches*, (Paris: Archipelago Books, 2016), p.44.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, p.66.

<sup>46</sup> Mukasonga, “Scholastique Mukasonga on Tutsi Life and the Rwandan Genocide,” *The Newyorker*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*

the survivor lost is precisely the capacity to make mention of the loss.”<sup>48</sup> Since the lexical integrity is destroyed, the demonstration of any catastrophic event in any kind of language is irrevocable. As a result, catastrophe is beyond the ability of articulation of the survivors.<sup>49</sup> The linguistic deed, which is far beyond the approach of the witness, which experiences despair and impossibility in itself, is literature only.<sup>50</sup> Briefly, literature can create a room for the survivor to find a way out of demonstration dilemma. The following quotation is taken from Maurice Blanchot’s thought provoking book *Writers of Disaster* that corroborates Nichanian’s account on the issue:

“The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; “I” am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me — an other than I who passively become other. There is no reaching the disaster. Out of reach is he whom it threatens, whether from afar or close up, it is impossible to say: the infiniteness of the threat has in some way broken every limit. We are on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future: it is rather always already past, and yet we are on the edge or under the threat, all formulations which would imply the future — that which is yet to come— if the disaster were not that which does not come, that which has put a stop to every arrival. To think the disaster (if this is possible, and it is not possible inasmuch as we suspect that the disaster is thought) is to have no longer any future in which to think it... We are passive with respect to the disaster, but the disaster is perhaps passivity, and thus past, always past, even in the past, out of date.”<sup>51</sup>

The victim is passive or muted against the implements of the menace. Yet there are no words left to describe what she went through. It is in the past and it cannot bear anything for the future. The victim is passive, for ‘she is considered to be the steady bearer of its (disaster’s) madness.’ In Nichanian’s words, as he shows how Zabel Yesayan fails to put the agony of a ‘respected nation’ into words, the victim cannot bear witness because the witness is dead.

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<sup>48</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.88.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, p.33.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, p.34.

<sup>51</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, translated by Ann Smock, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p.1.

Literature creates a room for those representations. It can pass beyond the law of witnessing and demonstrate the unseen, make it comprehensible both for the victim/writer and the reader. With its immensity, literature allows the writer to pass beyond his/her imagination, gives her an opportunity to express his/her feelings and creates a realm in which the reader establishes a strong bond with the characters. *Our Lady of the Nile* is such a novel written with a humoristic style, which makes the reader either cheer up or grieve with the characters. Precisely this empathy establishes a bond between the novel and the reader that ultimately allows creating a condition for recognition of the ‘peoples’ of the catastrophe. Mukasonga’s meditation on the subject is clarifying for us:

“Humor has always been an integral part of my books. It gives me the distance I need to carry on writing without succumbing to the pain and madness that stalk survivors. Even in tragic circumstances, a sense of humor is something that all Rwandans share. It feels important to stress that.”<sup>52</sup>

Literature is the bearer of memory and emotions and these are the concerns that will pass on to future generations. That is, there will be a chance of peace among the peoples. Moreover, there will be a chance to create a public consciousness if the reasons of the catastrophe are taken at hand, not the consequences. On this point, Nichanian elaborates on two Armenian writers: Zabel Yesayan and Hagop Osagan. It will be necessary to scrutinize Nichanian’s analysis of these writers to fully understand the impossibility of narrating catastrophic events. He puts forth that catastrophe is not a sum of brutal acts. No human being has the capacity to calculate the sum of those brutalities.<sup>53</sup> Having said that, he takes Zabel Yesayan, who serves a significant point as a representation to Nichanian’s account on writing about catastrophe. As he argues, for Yesayan, while mourning still was within possibility after her experiences in Adana Kilikya, she

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<sup>52</sup>Mukasonga, “Interview with Scholastique Mukasonga,” *New Welsh Review*.

<sup>53</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.25.

failed to do so after 1915.<sup>54</sup> She asserts that the deaths during the Adana massacre had been in the name of becoming a nation, forming a civic consciousness within the Empire. Nichanian argues that one needs to find a meaning to death, and the capacity of mourning allows one to do so.<sup>55</sup> For, a reason has to stand for those deaths. Yesayan had the power to write what she had witnessed in Adana, but when it comes to 1915, she was devoid of making a sense of her people's annihilation. What has changed for Yesayan in 1915? The answer to this question will take us to the point. Nichanian argues, "the hesitation between literature and history in terms of testimonials, takes hold of Armenian writers during 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>56</sup> Yesayan, as the witness of the Armenian Genocide, fails to pass beyond being an archivist after 1915, because she cannot find the words to vocalize the catastrophe. According to Yesayan literature was not possible anymore. Quoting from Nichanian, here is her reason:

"She knew that the country was demolished; the citizen turned out to be an executioner, thus, during the transformation of the witness who is obliged to multiply herself to find evidence for a utopic court, the victim faces the reality of genocide machine which crushes her and aims to wipe off the concept of genocidal fact."<sup>57</sup>

It is obvious that Yesayan cannot grasp people's grief. She cannot calculate the despair and indescribable sorrow, which is beyond her imagination. The most important reason for her struggle is that she comes against the concept of 'death of the witness'. Moreover, she cannot break loose of the competence of the archive. Thus, she forbids herself to make such suffering a subject of literature. For, it would be a sinful act against those who had lost their lives.<sup>58</sup> Nichanian clarifies the issue: "The modern reign of the archive... The survivor's memory is subjected to the rules of the archive."<sup>59</sup> Then how can we write about catastrophe? How will the survivor find the words

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<sup>54</sup> During the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid in 1909, an estimated of 30.000 Armenians were massacred in Adana province, in Turkey.

<sup>55</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.48.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, p.75.

<sup>57</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.78.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p.78.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, p.80.

to talk about the catastrophic events? If there is a dead-end, what and how the survivor will transmit the grief, and how is s/he going to succeed? Above all, why does she need to write? Mukasonga writes because she needs to keep her memories about the beloved ones that she lost. To do so, she has to ignore the colonial-made identity, look inside herself, and find her origin as a Rwandan. That is why, by positioning Rwandan values against Western values that had been imposed for decades, she tries to show the realities of the Rwandan genocide to the international community. Moreover, for Mukasonga, writing in French supports this argument. In an interview she says, “Of course, I’d love to write in Kinyarwanda. But who would publish me? In Rwanda, even though English is now the official language, my readers are still mainly French speakers.”<sup>60</sup> She also adds that it is an opportunity to write in French because it allows her to put the issue on the international platform, which stands as a significant motivation for her writings. Hence, we may argue that she stands as a representative of Rwandan Literature in particular, African Literature in general. To raise awareness in the Western perception of the effects of colonialism in Africa, in particular Rwanda, she bears responsibility as a writer. She has to demonstrate the truth about 1994 and draw the attention of the world to the political and economical interests of the European powers that led a nation to catastrophe. She needs to make Rwanda visible and help sustain peace, not only in Rwanda but also in other parts of the world. For, it is not only about Rwanda. Mukasonga demonstrates the true picture of the colonized countries all over the world. With her novel the reader becomes an engaged thinker and finds out that violence is a universal concept and understands the relationship between the text, the universality of violence and its representation. Boubacar Boris Diop has a striking view on the subject:

“In an Africa viewed as the natural site of all the world’s disasters, the Rwandan massacres were just one more tragedy to add to those in Somalia, Algeria, and Liberia. This attitude

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<sup>60</sup> Mukasonga, “Interview with Scholastique Mukasonga,” *New Welsh Review*

demonstrates a racism so complacent that it no longer even knows it exists.”<sup>61</sup>

Africa remains as the ‘other’ for the rest of the world. It has been perceived in such a way in history, literature, cinema and several other fields for decades. Thereby the conflicts in the continent are perceived as typical of the geography, and thanks to the power holders, they are assumed to be natural and subsequently overlooked by the global conscience. Therefore, literature plays a crucial role in showing what the real issue is in terms of politics in the geography. Since the power holders made up the history of Rwanda, since history itself hardly bears the truth and is denialist by its essence, why should not imagination undertake the role as the narrator of the genocide? As a participant of the project “*Rwanda: Writing by Duty of Memory*”, Diop has more to say:

“These texts have given rise to debates that will continue all over the world. This proves, by the way, that different forms of expression are not necessarily in conflict. Because of our novels, journalists are returning to the subject and asking questions of themselves. We used, to a great extent, the work of historians and journalists to create our own lies, which in the end have become even more profound truths.”<sup>62</sup>

As we come to an end, Mukasonga’s rejection of being a historian or a political writer gains more meaning. The genocide did not pop up all of a sudden. Peoples were massacred in just three months, yet the issue involves more than this. There is more to tell than the events of those infamous three months and the accurate way to do so is possible through literature, which will humanize the victims and subsequently make them visible and unforgettable. To reiterate the point, Mukasonga calls her books ‘*Tombeau de papier*’, which is a striking expression for the situation. The victims of the genocide do not have proper graves and with these books, it seems they have

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<sup>61</sup> Boubacar Boris Diop, “African Authors in Rwanda”, in *Literary Responses*, Brandeis University, p.110 [https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Literary\\_Responses.pdf](https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Literary_Responses.pdf), last access March 13, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Diop, “African Authors in Rwanda”, in *Literary Responses*, p.121

one. She says, “In this way they are with me. It is like visiting them in their graveyards”. The project ‘*Writing by Duty of Memory*’, which was presented in a symposium hosted by Brandeis University in 2003, supports Mukasonga’s position by showing the crucial role of literature in dealing with genocidal events. The project gathered African authors such as Boubacar Boris Diop in Rwanda and their task was to write about the genocide in literary forms. Diop claims that the project has been helping to preserve the memory of 1994. He proceeds that the novels they wrote drew the attention of the journalists, made them revisit the subject, and face the truth that is subjected to cover the works of historians and the arbiters. Hence, it will be appropriate to finish this part with Diop’s words:

*“[...] fiction is an excellent way to fight back against genocide. It restores souls to the victims; even if it can’t bring them back to life it can at least give them back their humanity through a ritual of mourning in which the novel becomes a sort of funerary monument.”*<sup>63</sup>

In a place where reality and fiction clash with each other, literature creates a unique place for the demonstration of the phenomena.

### **“I’m Not a Political Writer or a Historian” or “The Modern Reign of the Archive”**

Like a journalist facing a deadline, forced to jump from one massacre to another, the historian has no choice but to let the dead bury the dead. The novelist, on the other hand, tries to bring them back to life. We must put faces on events rather than just state facts and reel off statistics.<sup>64</sup>

One cannot fathom Rwanda without considering the colonial influence on the country, which dominated every aspect of life.. Starting from the 1896 German occupation and gaining strength

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<sup>63</sup> idib, p.120.

<sup>64</sup> idib, p.119

with the takeover of Belgian powers, the colonial dominancy interpenetrated to such a degree that the Belgian authorities formed a new Rwanda. As a result, the crucial elements of being a nation, such as history, language and collective memory were transferred into Eurocentric forms. Since Rwanda is a nation whose history had been formed by colonial powers, importance of literature emerges to resettle the identity of the peoples as it is the unique tool to replace culture and memory.

Mahmood Mamdani writes in *When Victims Become Killers*:

“In the absence of written archival sources that go back more than a century, and a recognition that it is difficult to stretch the reliability of oral sources for more than a few generations, historians have looked for other source materials, mainly archaeological and linguistic, to piece together a narrative.”<sup>65</sup>

It is known that peoples of Rwanda had an oral tradition and after the colonization of the territory, it was the Belgian authorities that composed the Rwandan history. At this point, Mukasonga's rejection of being a political writer or a historicist becomes more of an issue. There is already a history formed by the colonials, which has been perceived by the Western world, especially during the neocolonial era, and precisely after the 1994 genocide. Moreover, history in general looks at issues from a general perspective. There is not the victim to be mentioned in history. For this very reason, literature has a key role to plug the reader into a longer set of discourses. With her novel Mukasonga says 'here is the reality, how it is unfolded.' As a cultural production, literature affects us in a way that can broaden the scope of the issue. We know a little bit more. It signals more interest for us and ignites feelings of empathy and curiosity as well. As a result the dominant colonial discourse about the African continent that people have been believing, that the African people were barbarians, will not make sense any longer. This makes literature significant in representing catastrophe.

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<sup>65</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p.96.

The most ill-fated ideology, which was the main motivation of the emergence of racial segregation, and later on, of the 1994 violation, was the Hamitic theory. It is a colonizer-made theory, which claimed the Tutsi's origins are Hamites. The Belgian colonial reform of 1926-1936 put forth the idea of the Tutsi having Egyptian origin for the Tutsi had different physical characteristics than the Hutu. The Tutsi were taller than the Hutu and had narrow structured noses; they looked more like whites than the Hutu. This was a convenient excuse for the Belgians to exploit the country. Subsequently, in 1935 they promulgated the most significant implement, that is the ethnicity discrimination were to be put on the cards, which enforced the racial segregation in Rwanda. This was one of the major reasons of the 1994 events (In fact after the genocide, during the recovery, Rwandan people removed ethnic discrimination of their identity cards). When the Tutsi were disempowered, colonial powers supported the Hutu and until the genocide, they supported the Hutu to resume the exploitation. It will be to the point to state that this double-crossing ideology of the Belgians served a major role in the conflict between the two parties. For this reason Mukasonga places her narrative of *Our Lady of the Nile* into the frame of Hamitic theory, and shows the origin of 1994 genocide in the novel, which will be scrutinized in the second chapter of this research.

If we turn back to the problematic state of writing the catastrophe, Mukasonga's claim quoted in the title needs to be further clarified. Let us turn back to Nichanian. He argues that history is denialist by its essence.<sup>66</sup> It is a situation where Osagan finally finds himself in after struggling with writing about the catastrophe. Nichanian finds Osagan's statement extraordinary:

“Tens of hundreds of books would remain incapable to tell exactly what a simple village had been through. Yet what had happened is not even a narration. It is a tragedy that extends over years. The only difference is that, the scene in which the tragedy took place spread all over the world and the actors were the human material adorned with diverse and

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<sup>66</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.16.

imaginable various types of psychology. One human being would be unable to demonstrate all of these with the reference of historical approach. After all, I believe Cyprus is not Island of Saint Lazarus. I have to content within the bounds of my power.”<sup>67</sup>

Nichanian comments that what Osagan tries to say here is that since he does not have the archives, he cannot write the 1915 events. Nichanian continues that the necessity of testimonials for Osagan occurs when he faces the truth of impossible demonstration of catastrophe through literature.<sup>68</sup> Osagan apparently finds himself in a kind of dilemma. While he takes history as a denialist concept, he relies on testimonies and archives as tools to approach for the demonstration of the catastrophe. Keeping a certain distance with historiography, as Mukasonga did in her works, would forge a possibility of understanding, mourning and lastly presenting the grief of a whole nation, bearing the capacity of reaching the whole world.

In her autobiographical work *Bare Foot Woman*; Mukasonga reluctantly gives a few testimonial accounts of the exile towards the ending. What she takes into account is, as in chapters like “Medicine”, “Bread” and “Land of Stories”, telling about Rwandan folklore, her mother’s traditional medicines, ways to plant sorghum and everyday life chores that sometimes make the reader cheer up. By doing this, she overcomes the dilemma of being a witness and turns testimonial accounts into a commemoration which allows her to remember warm and joyful times that she spent with her family. As Nichanian asserts, the reason Osagan failed to get over the dead end was that he could not set himself free from the testimonials, namely archives. Mukasonga does not rely on testimonies while she puts catastrophic events into words in her works. She knows well what catastrophe is: The death of the witness, the impossibility of vocalizing the catastrophe, and finally the invisibility of a nation. Mukasonga intersperses the oppression coming from either colonial

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, p.114.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, p.115.

supremacy or extremists Hutus in her narrative in her books. In *Bare Foot Woman*, while she tells about everyday life, she doesn't exclude the outcomes of colonial influence on her nation. Here is a striking example of her mother's answer as she refuses to use a box of matches given by the missionaries to build a fire in their hut:

“[...] the white people have given us so many gifts, and look where it's gotten us! So, when I have to, let me go looking for fire just as we've always done here. At least that's one thing we have left.”<sup>69</sup>

We see similar interspersions in her novel *Our Lady of the Nile*. Yet it is crucial to make a point here. The question is why Mukasonga needs to refuse being a political writer or historicist? Nichanian sets forth brilliantly that not the genocide but the catastrophe is the experience of the victim. And it is only literature that will pass this experience and make it comprehensible.<sup>70</sup> For this reason, Mukasonga does not give testimonial facts in her autobiography. Most importantly, she does not write about the genocide in any of her works. Moreover, following *Bare Foot Woman*, she writes her novel *Our Lady of the Nile*, again not to focus on the genocide but to tell about the past. It is not about being a flesh witness or even being present in that situation. Mukasonga might not be in Rwanda during the mass killings. Yet, it is not the genocide that is worth noticing. Genocide is a political and historical issue that is taken into consideration by the power holders. It is worth laying bare the circumstances, reasons and conditions that lead the way to such a catastrophic phenomenon. It is crucial to state again that the four months of mass killings did not just start all of a sudden. There is a background to this phenomenon, to how the Hutu became butchers and the Tutsi became the victims. It is useless to point at the Hutu as the criminals. Yet it

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<sup>69</sup> Scholastique Mukasonga, *Bare Foot Women*, translated from French by Jordan Stump, (Newyork: First Archipelago Books, 2014), p.58.

<sup>70</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.190.

is important to point out how the Hutu turned into ‘mimic men’<sup>71</sup> and how the Tutsi walked the road to annihilation. This is precisely what Mukasonga achieves in her works. She escapes from the realm of genocide’s will and deals with her grief and tries to find a meaning for it. And this struggle can be performed in the field of literature. The loss of the capacity of verbalizing the loss and the loss of the ability of interpretation<sup>72</sup>...that is the catastrophe and it is all about the process, not the final deed. Nichanian quotes the clarifying statement from Osagan, which supports Mukasonga’s approach to catastrophe in her novel: “Yet novels cannot come to life in the epilogue.”<sup>73</sup> According to Nichanian, what Osagan tries to assert here is that a novel should carry itself to a time before the catastrophe and once more, accompany the whole process that led the nation to the catastrophe. One should look back to find a meaning and pass that meaning to the peoples of the world. This is striking when we think about Mukasonga’s works. Through her life with her people, she suffered being an exile in her own country, and subsequently, almost one million Tutsi were slaughtered. Genocide put aside, her experiences under the oppression of the neo-colonial influence and the Hutu’s tyrannical acts don’t play a major role in her novel. Nichanian’s words will clarify the point. He firmly states that the catastrophe is not an abstraction and any kind of political or historical approach would fail to define the experience of the victim.<sup>74</sup> That is to say, genocide is a case that should be evaluated on the historical and political grounds.

Mukasonga says: “I started writing fiction because I felt it gave me the distance I needed to say things that couldn’t be expressed in straightforward autobiography.”<sup>75</sup> As we see, and there is more to come, Mukasonga overcomes the challenge of demonstrating what she has been through in Rwanda as an exile. She finds a way to tell catastrophic events where Yesayan and

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<sup>71</sup> V.S. Naipaul uses the term ‘mimic man’ to define the colonized people who adopted Western values. I borrowed the term to emphasize the Hutu who mimicked the colonizers in terms of violence in addition to Naipaul’s view.

<sup>72</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.176.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p.177.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*, p.190

<sup>75</sup> Mukasonga, “Scholastique Mukasonga on Tutsi Life and the Rwandan Genocide,” *The New Yorker*

Osagan reach the dead end. The two writers Nichanian refers to in his book fail to demonstrate their perception of the catastrophe. At this point, it will be crucial to analyze the situation of Hagop Osagan after Yesayan. Nichanian says that, “[...] is it novel itself that gives the necessary space for presenting the impossible to the full extent? If it is so, then the novel will give the opportunity for us to express the essence of the catastrophe.”<sup>76</sup> Nichanian comes to this point after stating the failure of Osagan in writing his novel’s last chapter, which was intended to tell the 1915 events.

Hagop Osagan is a leading writer and novelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenian Literature. He survived the exile of intellectuals in April 1915 and gave his life to the reconstruction of Western Armenian culture. The significant books among his works are the ten-volume *Panorama of Armenian Literature* and *Mnatsortats (The Remnants)*. Nichanian defines Osagan as “[...]the only writer who possesses the knowledge of obligation to cope with the magnitude of catastrophe and the power of writing”.<sup>77</sup> Osagan tries to write about the catastrophe in *The Remnants* in novel form. Yet, eventually he cannot deal with this challenge. According to Nichanian, Osagan believed that, to form a nation, one needs to aestheticize literature: “It is not possible to live without imagination...we will not be disappointed to prefer literature as a final voice of self determination”.<sup>78</sup> Nichanian stresses that Osagan puts forth the idea of creating fiction, a mythos for the needs of the nation.<sup>79</sup> Yet he failed to express the catastrophe in the last chapter and the novel was left unfinished. His failure will be analyzed as we proceed but first, we need to fully understand the phases he went through. As Nichanian proceeds, we see the crucial point of the matter. He quotes the words of Osagan as follows:

“This will be the most difficult part, for sure. For, to rely on power of novel will be

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<sup>76</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.110.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*, p.85

<sup>78</sup> *ibid*, p.97

<sup>79</sup> *ibid*, p.98

insufficient to penetrate to the subject...the catastrophe which is both limitless and oddly ordinary, does not fit in the imagination of the artist, who attempts to penetrate to the subject.”<sup>80</sup>

To repeat Nichanian, “... then novel will give the opportunity for us to express the essence of the catastrophe”.<sup>81</sup> Why does Osagan need to form a new literature for the Armenian nation? Why do Mukasonga and many other writers of disaster from various geographies feel the urge to write? There is nothing else left for them. Mukasonga needs to step out of the catastrophic demolition in order to recollect her identity via her memories and re-form her identity. Madan Sarup has a clear answer that is worth noting:

“Any minority group, when faced with hostile acts, does several things. One of its first reactions is that it draws in on itself; it tightens its cultural bonds to present a united front against its oppressor. The group gains strength by emphasizing its collective identity. This inevitably means a conscious explicit decision on the part of some not to integrate with ‘the dominant group’ but to validate their own culture (their religion, language, values, ways of life).”<sup>82</sup>

‘The dominant group’ Sarup refers to is, in *Our Lady of the Nile*, the more than one hundred years of colonial influence in Rwanda. To confront the Western-centered ideologies, to restore Rwandan identity Mukasonga feels the urge to write. As for Osagan, he needs to form a new literature, an aestheticized Armenian philology, to form an Armenian nation under the influence of Ottoman Empire. Most importantly, it is the argument of this thesis as well as the main notion of Nichanian’s work *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, that writing the catastrophe in the form of novel, excluding hideous details passing mostly through testimonials, is achievable for the writer and eloquent for the reader. Doing otherwise would mean to draw the victim/survivor as well as the whole persecuted and

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, p.110

<sup>81</sup> *ibid*, p.110.

<sup>82</sup> Sarup, *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World*, p.3.

destructured nation in the meager realm of History. At this point, it may be said that while Mukasonga refuses to be a political writer, Osagan falls into the trap of necessity of testimonials in demonstrating catastrophe. How does he fall into that trap? The answer is that he cannot grasp the state of witnessing (death of the witness) and comprehend the immensity of literature. As Nichanian claims, Osagan thinks of novel as the '*lesser evil of History*'.<sup>83</sup>

### Conclusion

All in all, as it is underlined, it is certainly not the archives or testimonies that allow the victim/survivor to describe the indescribable. The phenomenon remains as an inexplicable experience for the survivor. Moreover, giving a detailed description of the catastrophe would mean to serve the perpetrators' will. To be more precise, writing on catastrophe within this context excludes the victim and puts the catastrophe in the center, repeats the perpetrator's deeds and says nothing for the victim, for the lost ones and for the future generations. As a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, we see that Mukasonga avoids giving details of gruesome events she experienced until her migration to France in 1992. She chooses to share those lovely memories with her loved ones. Using her mother tongue Kinyarwanda alongside with French, she writes about everyday life of Rwandan people, remembering and by this way commemorating her family and in the last instance, her country. She writes because she only has words left from her loss. She writes because she needs to call out to the world to break down the Eurocentric view on the issue, to show the truth and make it visible:

“We are told to forget what had happened. In fact, there was a saying like the Rwandan genocide was not that serious. Today, I want to say that it is dead serious and also horrendous. I want to show that... What happened to us is definitely a direct consequence

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<sup>83</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.115.

of Christian colonization. We did our best but the power holders who sit around a table, negotiate and finally come to a decision, should take the responsibility of what had happened.”<sup>84</sup>

Why do we need to write? Madan Sarup says, “one needs a homeland to feel stable, to defy alienation, to survive in rapidly changing world”.<sup>85</sup> He suggests that the concept of home is tied up to the notion of identity. Using Sarup’s point of view, we may argue that in the pursuit of Rwandan collective identity Mukasonga finds her homeland in her books, and thereby shows it to many others. Daniel Terris also meditates on the issue as follows:

“These writers and scholars—and the others who came to Brandeis<sup>[SEP]</sup> in September—remind us that literature can help individuals<sup>[SEP]</sup> and nations recover their humanity in the aftermath of brutality. Literature can also call the larger human community to account<sup>[SEP]</sup> for the humanity we are abjuring every time we fail to prevent such atrocities. Silence has its place, but ultimately we must count on literature—alongside history and law and activism—to rouse us from complacency”.<sup>86</sup>

Other than this, we may say that the victim/survivor needs to write about the catastrophic events in order to find a balance in his/her psychological condition. Thus s/he will gain the ability to mourn, find remedy and pass hope onto the future generations. Shoshana Felman in *Testimony, Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* demonstrates a Holocaust survivor’s statement about the issue, which serves as a timely example at this point. Felman quotes the survivor:

“The thing that troubles me right now is the following: if we don’t deal with our feelings, if we don’t understand our experience, what are we doing to our children...Are we transferring our anxieties, or fears, our problems, to the generations to come? And this is why I feel that we are talking here not only of the lost generation like the term they coined

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<sup>84</sup> *L’invité*, “Scholastique Mukasonga: “Le Rwanda Veut la Vérité sur le Genocide,”

<sup>85</sup> Sarup, *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World*, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> “Literary Responses to Mass Violence”, Brandeis University, last access March 12, 2020 [https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Literary\\_Responses.pdf](https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/pdfs/publications/Literary_Responses.pdf), p.12

after World War I- this time we are dealing with lost generations. It's not only us. It's the generations to come".<sup>87</sup>

In addition to the quote above, a crucial point must be underlined. It is not the testimonial literature that will set the victim free from her nightmares. As it is the argument of this work, which takes Marc Nichanian's claim on the subject into its center, the sole way to access to the realm of indescribable catastrophic events is to ponder on the borders of language, which will be possible solely in the realm of literature.

Another instance Felman puts her finger on while talking about the necessity of literature in demonstrating the catastrophe is quite striking. She lays bare how her students remain speechless after seeing Holocaust videotapes for her lecture. The reaction of the students is remarkable and gives us a kind of justification of how a victim/survivor of a catastrophic event loses his/her balance, becomes fragmented or 'disconnected' and subsequently unspeakable. For Felman this crisis was unique and bore the 'germination' of her book. She describes the situation as follows:

"They were set apart and set themselves apart from others who had not gone through the same experience. They were obsessed. They felt apart, and yet not quite together. They sought out each other and yet felt they could not reach each other. They kept turning to each other and to me. They felt alone, suddenly deprived of their bonding to the world and to one another. As I listened to their outpour, I realized the class was entirely at a loss, disoriented and uprooted".<sup>88</sup>

The situation Felman depicts shows us the necessity of literature in demonstrating the unspeakable. As in the case of Paul Celan, art will allow the victim/survivor to pass beyond the wordlessness. Felman makes another crucial quotation from the poet Celan, who was a victim/survivor of the

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<sup>87</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.47

<sup>88</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, p.48

Holocaust:

“Within reach, close and not lost, there remained, in the midst of the losses, this one thing: language. This, the language, was not lost but remained, yes in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through a frightful falling-mute, and pass through the thousand darkneses of death-bringing speech. It passes through and yielded no words for what was happening-but it went through those happenings. Went through and could come into the light of day again, ‘enriched’ by all that”.<sup>89</sup>

These ‘passing through’ experiences of Celan are the ones that Osagan experienced himself. It is the dilemma that the victim/survivor finds herself in, in searching for a way to demonstrate her grief. In Mukasonga’s case, wandering among the death-bearing memories, she finds her own ‘feeble’ words to demonstrate her grief and to commemorate her beloved ones.

“Like a journalist facing a deadline, forced to jump from one massacre to another, the historian has no choice but to let the dead bury the dead. The novelist, on the other hand, tries to bring them back to life”.<sup>90</sup>

As Nichanian considerably refers in his book, Dori Laub’s remark on witnessing situations justifies the essentiality of literature of catastrophe. She puts forth that the victim loses her capacity of witnessing the tyrannical acts. In the case of Holocaust, the survivors who remained silent became disintegrated in terms of their memory. The more they continue holding to their silence, the less they know about themselves. With her books Mukasonga brings her people’ grief into the open as an attempt to form a collective memory to form a decolonized country.

“And the rain fell on the cattle, on the Tutsi, on the Hutu, on the Batwa.”<sup>91</sup>

Colonizers’ goal in Africa, particularly in Rwanda, was to notice the potential of convenient circumstances for their interests and make use of them. Thus, exploiting the social and

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<sup>89</sup> idib, p.50

<sup>90</sup> Diop, “African Authors in Rwanda”, in *Literary Responses*, p.119

<sup>91</sup> Mukasonga, *Our Lady of the Nile*, p.62

political difference between the Hutu and the Tutsi by drawing a racial frame around them, they formed a conflict, made it visible and turned it into a massacre, which was unmatched to any other in terms of the death toll in a very short time. My study claims that literature bears veracity more than history. The latter fails to demonstrate the essence of catastrophic events, ignores the victims within their entirety of culture and history, and finally makes the grief unseen. What is left for the survivor? How does she find a way to deal with her suffering? How can she find a meaning to all those incomprehensible events? The victim-survivor is in need to utter her own words, restore the truth as she witnessed, reclaim her suffering in her own terms, and finally make all these seen by the whole world.

Nichanian claims that, if there is a slight meaning to catastrophe, it is the loss of the capacity to find a place in the realm of forgiveness.<sup>92</sup> In addition, what is exactly impossible for the victim-survivor is to forgive the deprivation of having the right to speak.<sup>93</sup> Mukasonga breaks this dilemma with her novel. “I want an apology from the United Nations. I want international community to take responsibility and they also owe an apology to us,” says Mukasonga. She directly addresses the Western world to acknowledge their part in the catastrophe. In her novel, she skillfully demonstrates the ignorance of the West as follows:

“Mother Superior has shut herself away in order not to see anything; Belgian teachers will “keep on teaching, unperturbed”, while the French educators will obey their embassy’s instruction of “no interference” and respond, when the killing starts, with the usual comments that “it’s always been like that in Africa”, with locals “killing one another for no discernible reason.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.198.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*, p.124.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, p.225.

In her heart warming yet somber story, she achieves to demonstrate the truth of the doom of Rwanda, and the multifaceted components of the conflict. Most importantly, she makes the grief of the victims visible for the reader, and eases the suffering of the survivors to some extent.

Another essential point that my paper brings out is to examine the approach to the catastrophe on behalf of the victims. Nichanian compares ‘history to novel’, and the outcome is easy to comprehend:

“Tens of hundreds of books wouldn’t be sufficient to chronicle the events that a village had been through. Already the goings-on are not a story. They are elements of a tragedy that extend to years, that cannot be expressed through history. However, novel is nothing but the life itself.”<sup>95</sup>

Also, there is another facet of the issue, which states the case of history: “There is only a single history and it belongs to the perpetrators. In its essence, history is the thorough and unfailing accomplice of the perpetrators.”<sup>96</sup> Mukasonga strikingly refers to the case as follows:

“Africa had no history, because Africans could neither read nor write before the missionaries opened their schools. Besides, it was the Europeans who had discovered Africa and dragged it into history. And if there had been any kings in Rwanda, it was better to forget them, for the country was now a republic.”<sup>97</sup>

The Rwandan genocide is unique for it bore multi-dimensional precipitating factors. Also, the violence was beyond comprehension with thousands of piled bodies all over the country and corpses which were carried by the rivers that flow in red. It had been perceived as a natural field of conflict and killings by the world. Mukasonga’s novel attempts to change this view. She manages to demonstrate the true political aspect of the genocide as well as the grief of the victim-survivor to initiate unity among the peoples. To do so, she uses literature to re-form the collective

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<sup>95</sup> Nichanian, *Edebiyat ve Felaket*, p.240.

<sup>96</sup> *idib*, p.199.

<sup>97</sup> Mukasonga, *Our Lady of the Nile*, p.42.

memory of her nation and engage the Western community to the Rwandan reality. ‘And the rain fell on the cattle, on the Tutsi, on the Hutu, on the Batwa.’ As this quote implies, life treats all races equally, and we may infer that this is the essential point that Mukasonga brings forth in the last instance.

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