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Reporting from the Edge of Reality: Writing as Phantom Limb in Goretti Kyomuhendo's Fiction

By Andrew H. Armstrong¹

Traumatism as an opening to the future of the wound is the promise of a text.

Helene Cixous, *Stigmata*

Literary criticism [...] has a crucial role to play in furthering our understanding of how traumatic experience can be put into words and what kind of status such a narrative might have.

Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life-Writing*

Abstract

In this paper I have explored the ways in which Ugandan writer Goretti Kyomuhendo writes of the effects of extreme violence in the African Great Lakes Region on female subjectivities by thematizing the dynamics of oppression and submission in postcolonial Africa. I have paid particular attention to the ways that Kyomuhendo's fiction focalizes the narrators'/protagonists' acts of telling by foregrounding the imperiled female within the dangerous masculine spaces of the socially dislocated and displaced societies. The two texts I have focused on narrate extreme violence from the perspectives of displaced female protagonists, highlighting the notion of displaced subjectivity by foregrounding the female body as abject and marked – a thing to be violently 'written' on and as a site of amputation and disablement. Kyomuhendo's fiction here can be read as writing against another 'disablement' – in this case that of the female voice, silenced as a result of masculinist violence. I have argued moreover, that the writing here, the acts of narration, functions as a phantom limb enabling a 'bearing of witness' to the traumas of their protagonists.

Keywords: trauma, narrative, extreme violence, masculinist violence, phantom limb.

In Goretti Kyomuhendo's novel *Secrets No More* (1999), and the short story "Do You Remember?" (2003), the narrators perform acts of telling that focus on the narrativization of the effects of extreme violence on the female body as a result of the Rwandan genocide (the *simusiga*)¹ and social turbulence in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. The texts dramatize and thematize ways of viewing the dynamics of oppression and submission in postcolonial Africa as this affects the lives of women in particular by foregrounding imperiled female bodies within dangerous masculine spaces. In showing how literary criticism may play a crucial role in helping our understanding of extreme violence and traumatic experiences, I have paid particular attention in this paper to the ways that Kyomuhendo writes, in what may be termed 'literary language', intimate

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bodily violence against women and the resultant trauma and attempts at recovery. By linking narratives of suffering and displacement by their female protagonists, to wider socio-historical concerns, often linking story and testimony, the narrators perform the task of creating a phantom limb that enables a 'bearing of witness' to the traumas of their protagonists. By so doing, the narrators negate silence as a perpetrator/accomplice of pain and opt instead to speak through the wounds of traumatic memory/recall, giving force to the realization that survival is often in the act of speaking/writing. The two texts therefore focalize extreme violence from the perspectives of displaced female protagonists, highlighting the notion of displaced subjectivity by focusing on the female body as abject and marked – a thing to be violently 'written' on and as a site of amputation and disablement. The two stories told, in the language of Hélène Cixous, "share the trace of a wound" and are "caused by a blow [...] the transfiguration of a spilling of blood" (Stigmata xi). In fact, as Kathryn Robson has shown in her discussion of trauma in post-1968 French women life-writing: "Narratives of trauma [...] emerge from the wound, from between injury and healing, a time when the effects of trauma remain as powerful and as insistent as ever" (28). Kyomuhendo's fiction, as a narrative of trauma, emerges from the "wounds" of her female protagonists, and may be read as an attempt to "transfigure" such a spilling of blood in cases of extreme violence. But she also writes against another 'disablement' – in this case that of the female voice, silenced as a result of masculinist violence. Margaret Daymond has pointed out in her afterword to Kyomuhendo's recent novel *Waiting* (2007), that

In its effort to create a public space, a site of utterance from which the various experiences and views of women can be presented and received with respect, FEMRITE [of which Kyomuhendo is a member] has chosen a political task demanding courage and resilience. By insisting that women can speak with authority and should be listened to, its members are calling into question the patriarchal assumption that power in society should be held only by men [...] Novels published under the FEMRITE imprint are changing the image of women in Ugandan fiction and society as they explore issues from the point of view of women characters and establish the agency of women (*Waiting* 118- 120).

As part of the current generation of Ugandan writers, Kyomuhendo creates fictions that may be seen, in the words of Tirop Simatei (2001), "as supplementing the search for a just society through a foregrounding of women's struggle for freedom from both oppressive patriarchal and political structures" (131).² This "feminist agency" according to Simatei, "is in fact a facet of the overall struggle for humane socio-political order in Africa [which] has often been marginalised in other representations of the complex process of nation formation" (131-132). Hence, writing as phantom limb, is a political move by the writer here to bear witness to the suffering of women in instances of war, extreme violence and social turbulence with a view towards survival and possible healing of the wounds and trauma of such violence. The 'suffering' represented by Kyomuhendo in her fiction often includes rape, domestic abuse, and sexual exploitation. But she also depicts her women as more than mere passive victims of such violence. Sometimes, as in the case with Marina in *Secrets No More*, women may be shown as

shrewd manipulators of the difficult situations in which they find themselves. For, as Simatei has rightly observed,

a feminism that sees the oppression of women only as a function of male politics and goes ahead to celebrate some kind of feminist separatism, or posits women as hapless victims of patriarchy denies them agency. It overlooks at the same time the complex ways in which works by women writers relate gender to hegemonic politics [...] [S]uch texts, even in their enc centring of women reveal the female subject as acting within this complex political grid that goes beyond the mere thematisation of gender difference and relations (132-133)

By inserting her female protagonists within the decidedly masculinist politics of the *Bildungsroman* form, with its emphasis on the development of individual consciousness linked to wider socio-political concerns, and then showing the constant disruptions of the young girls' stories (the suspension of the *bildung*), Kyomuhendo both participates in and writes against the simple novelization of women's lives in situations of extreme violence. To explain this point; she participates in telling stories of the suffering of traumatized and dislocated young women as a result of the civil war and genocide in Rwanda in her realist recasting of events surrounding these phenomena. She however, writes against such simple re-telling of the events through her inclusion of traumatic memory, elliptical re-telling and forgetting. Kyomuhendo's fiction here highlights the ethical paradox at the core of writing about such extreme violence; whether to write or to keep silent. Her writing then, emphasizes the 'role' of narrative as a highly cognitive instrument as examined by Michael Hanne in his text *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change* (1995). Hanne has indicated, following thinkers such as Frederic Jameson and Hayden White, that narration may well be "the most fundamental of all human psychological operations" (8). In fact, Hanne has observed that "our psychological dependence on storytelling is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that most mental disorders, from amnesia to phobias, and from obsessional compulsions to schizophrenia, can be interpreted as breakdowns in the individual's capacity to construct and appropriately weave together the whole repertoire of internal narratives" (9). Thus, in examining writing as phantom limb, I have recognized the relationship between literature and cultural memory or the whole business of narrative memory. Consequently, I have concurred with Susan Brison's view that "narrative memory is [...] an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that diffuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self" (40). In other words, writing as phantom limb, involves the legitimization of traumatic memory through integration into narrative (Bal viii), where narrative acts as witness, memorialization and source of possible healing. Drawing on Mieke Bal's distinction between "narrative memory" as "social construction," and thus narratable, and "traumatic memory" as "inflexible and invariable" and "addressed to nobody" in other words, essentially hidden (Bal x), the point can be made that Kyomuhendo's fictions work as "narrative memory" that tell of the "traumatic memory" of persons traumatized by extreme violence. But this is only so if we acknowledge the importance of the story as a vital part of cultural memory. Or, put another way, the power

or efficacy of fiction to recall trauma and to assist in the work of healing is not transparent or even direct, but is so through the cultural processes of ‘reading’ where our reading practices are brought to bear on an interpretation of the text as “witness” or “testimony”. This is done through an act of appropriation where there is a shift from the intrinsic properties of the text to the reader’s construction of meaning. And as Cathy Caruth has iterated: “trauma [...] is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4). The wound in this instance is not merely that of the body, but of the mind, or “the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (Caruth 4).

In Kyomuhendo’s stories studied here, both her protagonists, Marina of *Secrets no More* and Maliza of “Do You Remember?” experience this breach or sense of dislocation and disidentity. Again, Robson has stated: “it is only when the seemingly unspeakable traumatic experience can be transformed into a narrative that the traumatic event can be put in the past and the survivor can begin to recreate an identity shattered by trauma” (11). In other words, trauma needs a narrative, a sense of reference, to lead the survivor/victim to healing. Thus, the language of the story of trauma “is always somehow literary” (Caruth 5), the language of narrative that both defies and seeks our understanding. Writing as phantom limb in this instance, acknowledges the power of the story or narrative not only as a highly cognitive instrument, but also, and more specifically to my discussion here, in empowering the abused while diminishing the offensive power of their abusers (Hanne 13). In short then, this study has explored and articulated the relationship between literature, violence and traumatic cultural memory.

I have examined how, in her varying styles of ‘realist’ representation,³ Kyomuhendo writes distorted realities, such as extreme violence and rape, as traumatic. She writes the female body as the site of such violence, but more importantly the site of the expression of repressed experience: the violence experienced by both her protagonists Marina and Maliza and the ways that each woman represses her experience. Drawing insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notions of the body as lived-body, I have examined and developed his thoughts on the *phantom limb* popularized in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) as a useful metaphor in my analysis of the writing of Kyomuhendo and her construction of the distorted realities of extreme violence, social dislocation and dis/ease. In this regard, I have interpreted representation itself as a *phantom limb*, where writing functions as the re-placement of that which has been cut off from the observable present. Representation here is therefore re-presentation of memory or rather, that which is present as memory re-presented in the act of writing.

To cite Merleau-Ponty on the phantom limb:

[T]he phantom limb is the presence of part of the representation of the body which should not be given, since the corresponding limb is not there. If one now gives a psychological account of the phenomena, the phantom limb becomes a memory, a positive judgement or a perception, [...] the phantom limb is the actual presence of a representation [...] [it] is the representation of an actual presence (80).

The *phantom limb* is however not a transparent, unproblematic concept – it functions within the dualistic logic of Merleau-Ponty’s text where its elusiveness and

ambivalence springs from the fact that it is neither purely physiological nor purely psychological. Merleau-Ponty has alluded to it as being “psychophysical” (75). However, there is the suggestion that it may occupy a third space; but it is difficult to define this third space as either a space in-between or one that consists of both the physiological and psychological. What we can say of the term as employed by Merleau-Ponty, is that it acts as a kind of *trace* (protention and retention) of the spaces of meaning occasioned through the interaction (negotiation) of the body and the world (*lebenswelt*). Writing as *phantom limb*, then, suggests the ambivalent and indeterminate nature of narrativity in cases of extreme violence – the ethical paradox contained in whether to write (remember – as with the work of the author here), or keep silent (conceal or repress – as is the case with the protagonists Marina in *Secrets No More* and Maliza in “Do You Remember?”).

By employing the term *phantom limb* here, I have taken a neurobiological phenomenon and employed it as a spatial metaphor and a literary device. I have appropriated the *phantom limb* to act as a kind of “rememory,” to borrow Toni Morrison’s term,⁴ as the act/art of re-remembering through the work of writing. In this sense, the act of writing and its outcome, literature, serve as a phantom for a lost presence. I have argued that this lost presence is a felt or aching presence, which is textualised (embodied?) in narrative. Here, the writer attempts to deal with collective and personal remembering through the act of writing, or in other words, building a narrative through traces or rememories. Writing as *phantom limb* then, may function as a kind of prosthesis, and in this regard, can be viewed as an appropriate example of the abject. As Allon White (1993) has remarked:

Prosthetic objects [...] occupy and occlude a disturbing middle-ground, disrupting the clear mediation of subject and object. Ontologically unstable, they can be definitively claimed neither by the body nor by the world and they thereby violate the coherence and integrity of the body-image. They are the very stuff of abjection (173).

I have argued that fictional representations of extreme violence and social and cultural delimiting function within this “disturbing middle-ground” and test both the “coherence and integrity” of language to *represent* and to give an ‘acceptable’ account of the trauma of human suffering and misery in the form of a story. Kyomuhendo’s stories then construct two “amputees” – Marina and Maliza – who have had their families and their sense of belonging cut-off from them. Their proprioceptive sense or that sense of self or “ownness” having been amputated, the two young protagonists’ recourse is to narrative or story, in recovering a sense of lost self. In their cases, the narrators of both stories perform acts of memory that enable the narratability and narrativization of the traumatic events of the young women’s lives. And, according to Mieke Bal: “this act is potentially healing because it generates narratives that ‘make sense’” (Bal x), to ‘restore’ the identity and sense of worth of the injured subjects.

Kyomuhendo’s fiction consistently dramatize the struggles of individuals against disidentification, the struggles to survive the horrible scars of extreme violence in the Great Lakes region of central Africa. She writes the violence and acts of disidentification inscribed on the bodies of victims during the mass killings in Rwanda as abjection, and as the displacement or social amputation faced by survivors, especially those living as

refugees in Uganda, and the general theme of the choices women face in these dangerous situations. Kyomuhendo demonstrates the effect of the traumatic memories of extreme violence on both the human and social bodies⁵ through the interrupted stories of two young women growing into adulthood in the face of terror. She writes the interrupted or suspended *Bildungsromans* of these young lives in a crisis-filled situation as they attempt to live ‘normally’ or be routine in a situation of crisis. However, in neither of her two narratives discussed here does she ‘enter’ the Rwanda genocide – the putative subject of the texts. Kyomuhendo instead locates her narrators/protagonists in Uganda from which vantage point they both ‘tell’ their stories of the horror enacted ‘next door’ in Rwanda, while constructing their ‘new’ narratives of survival. In this manner, she is able to tell stories of survival rather than give accounts of the horror of genocide. For her, the Rwanda genocide remains a horror that can only be spoken about or narrated tangentially, rather than attempting to ‘explain’ it. The brief accounts of actual slaughter, as in chapters three and four of *Secrets No More* or in flashbacks from the protagonists or survivor stories from eyewitnesses, are told in vignettes or snapshots. Through this approach, the author facilitates the representation of acts of violence generally seen as not representable and unspeakable. In addition, by placing her narrators in Uganda, across the border from Rwanda and a site of refugee camps for victims of displacement from the genocide, Kyomuhendo explores the trans-national and familial links that exist between countries in the African Great Lakes Region and in sub-Saharan Africa generally, which are often neglected or glossed over for the sake of more nationalist or ethnic concerns. From this, one may conclude, that Kyomuhendo’s approach in these stories contributes to the notion of what Manthia Diawara has called “an inter-regional imaginary” in this region of Africa by underscoring the transcontinental and familial networks that exist in much of sub-Saharan Africa. These networks have served to challenge the assumed notions of nation, ethnicity and group on which rigid concepts of identities are constructed and out of which genocide arises. In this way and perhaps tangentially also, she examines some of the causes of the genocide and the prevailing refugee situation in the Great Lakes Region.

In *Secrets No More*, Kyomunendo adopts the form of the *Bildungsroman* beginning with the protagonist Marina as a baby and ending with her second marriage. The narrative constructs an African subject moving between nations and nationalities, amputated from her birthplace, seeking refuge in a new desti/nation. It also constructs extreme violence such as mass killings as the inscription of a language of pain on the Rwandan social body that has left the society itself amputated and scarred for life. Two concerns have emerged from this use of the *Bildungsroman* here; firstly, the representation of a life-taking phenomenon such as extreme violence in a form that seeks to ‘express’ “the full radiance of human potentiality” (Redfield 38); and secondly, the challenge of narrating the acculturation of a traumatized self or subjectivity into “the general subjectivity of a community, and thus, finally, into the universal subjectivity of humanity” (Redfield 38). Although I have not followed Redfield’s argument that the *Bildungsroman* may be seen as a phantom genre, one that dissipates under its own referential weight, I have made the point that writing as phantom limb however, in the manner I have described above, has proved adequate in representing the narratives of trauma in Kyomuhendo’s novel.

The novel tests the coherence and integrity of language to represent the events, often oscillating between ‘story’ and ‘report’ as in the opening paragraphs of chapter one. The narrative begins with a third-person voice telling the story of the Bizimana family (Marina’s), observing that Mr. Bizimana, a Hutu, is married to a Tutsi named Mukundane. The narrator then inserts this piece of information for the reader: “Hutu men occasionally married Tutsi women, though the latter were called derogatory names like *Inyenzikazi* or *Maguruyasarwaya*” (1). The reader is then informed that Mukundane had grown up as an adopted child in a Hutu family from the age of nine “after her parents’ massacre in the 1959 uprisings” (1). Here the narrative takes on Genette’s communication function where two important socio-cultural points are made: firstly, the narrator identifies the inter-ethnic relations that shaped Rwandan life over the years in spite of efforts at ethnic specificity; secondly, the narrator, by mentioning the 1959 Revolution so early in the narrative, links the story to be told to a major historical event in recent Rwandan history. This is the predominant narrative mode in the novel, particularly in the early establishing chapters, where Kyomuhendo links personal character narratives to the larger national history, or encases national and social history within personal storytelling. At the end of chapter one, having presented the Bizimana family to the reader and the circumstances prior to and leading to Marina’s birth, the narrative voice inserts a piece of ‘history’ concerning Tutsi refugees living in Uganda and the formation of the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity as “the official opposition in the diaspora”(6). At the end of chapter two, we learn of the birth of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (9), of which the Rwanda Patriotic Army (led by current President Paul Kagame) was the armed wing (10); the recruitment of the *Interahamwe* and the general ethnic divisions and climate of fear and distrust that led to the eventual genocide. Chapters three and four introduce us to the violence (the slaughter of the Bizimana family by Hutu soldiers) that leads to Marina’s exile as a refugee from Rwanda. The remainder of the novel takes place in her adopted country, Uganda, and includes the stories and perspectives of Father Marcel, the white Catholic ‘priest’ (Father Marcel is, in fact, never ordained to the priesthood, a fact unknown to his Ugandan ‘parishioners’); Sister Bernadette, the head of the orphanage where the girls stay; and George Walusimbi, with whom Marina enters into an oppressive and dangerous marriage. These fictive, interlocking stories and multiple narratives are told against the backdrop of a real social situation of violence and social dislocation in the Great Lakes region of East-Central Africa.

Employing this narrative strategy, Kyomuhendo takes the unspeakable acts of violence of the Rwanda genocide and transposes them into the conceivable mode of a story [*Geschichte*] in order to narrate the events, as in this example of the narration of the killings by Dee, one of the characters in the novel:

The bellies of pregnant women are slit and their husbands are made to eat the fetuses before they are bayoneted themselves. They say they don't want to make the same mistake their predecessors made in 1959 when they let the children go free. The same children have re-organised themselves and come to fight the government [...] the men pay the murderers money so they can kill their loved ones, wives and kids, decently. If you don't pay, your wife is slain right in front of you in the

most ghastly manner. The murderers pierce her with a sharp object through the vagina until she dies. But if you pay, well, she is only gang-raped first, then shot once through the head (*Secrets* 135).

Kyomuhendo graphically narrates the horrifying nature of the killing of women during the Rwanda genocide, and presents the female body as a site of horrifying mutilation, disembodiment and disembowelment – abjection and structural horror, the removal of body parts, as in the faceless young woman in Amma Darko’s novel *Faceless* and the mutilated dead in Moses Isegawa’s *Snakepit*. The manner in which the women are killed in the above passage indicates that Kyomuhendo sees a particular gendered motive behind the killing of women in this genocide in addition to the ethnic factor of being Tutsi. Were the women killed in this manner because they were Tutsis? Were they killed because they were women, or perhaps because they were Tutsi women? Although on ratio more men were killed than women, what is evident from reports is that there was a systematic gender-based violence against women, who often were victims of severe torture and ‘special’ forms of slaughter as in the testimony of Dee in the above passage. The matter of gender features prominently in the analysis of the ways women are mutilated and killed in wars and social turbulence across the globe. Very often, women are seen as “soft targets” and as objects of exchange between men, objects of rape and other forms of physical mutilation – here, the vehicle for destroying their husbands.

Rape involves the violent battering and humiliation of the female body, as in the example of the rape of Marina’s mother in *Secrets No More*. In this instance moreover, the rape is part of the tactic of humiliating her husband through the theatricality of the torture and horror enacted. The rape here, and in the example above, is part of the death-game played by the perpetrators of violence against their victims. In these death-games, the perpetrator-players aim for the humiliation of the victims as a vital part of the slaughter: in the instance of Marina’s parents, the husband is forced to watch helplessly, the sexual violation of his wife as the final scene before he is killed:

Like a possessed man, he [Colonel Renzaho] began pounding at her. He slowed down briefly and looked in Bizimana’s direction. ‘Once you tell us where those guns are, I will stop doing this to your wife,’ he said breathlessly. But Bizimana’s eyes were swollen – shut against the horrible scene in front of him. With renewed energy, the Colonel resumed the pounding. Mukundane curled her fingers into claws and lashed out at him. Marina heard him curse under his breath but he did not slow down. Mukundane screamed out as the Colonel seemed to tear at her insides (*Secrets* 17).

The violence of the language to describe the rape – the Colonel “pounding” at Mukundane, and “tear[ing] at her insides” – shows “the horrible scene[s]” associated with this act of extreme violence. In this instance, the rape of Tutsi women by Hutu perpetrators highlights the use of rape as a weapon of war and suppression. Here rape is conceived as a fundamental way of *thingifying* subjects, or making them abject by introducing (injecting) abjection, in the form of sperm and blood into the woman’s body, thus “transforming her into an abject-self rejected by the family, excluded by the

community and quite often also the object of a self-hate, sometimes to the point of suicide” (Diken and Laustsen 111). This form of creating abjects, as Diken and Laustsen have further pointed out, has been made possible by employing rape as:

The mark of sovereignty stamped directly on the body [...] a bio-political strategy using (or better, abusing) the distinction between the self and the body [...] this bio-political strategy, like other forms of sovereignty, operates through the creation of an ‘inclusive exclusion’. The woman and the community in question are inscribed within the enemy realm of power as those excluded (111).

While the rape of Mukundane, Marina’s mother, may be linked with this kind of terror, “this bio-political strategy (as the Tutsi wife of a powerful Hutu, she is ‘marked’ as enemy at two levels, ethnicity and gender), the rapes of Marina here and Maliza in the short story are more ‘intimate’ betrayals by persons they trusted and relied on for support.⁶ In addition, Marina’s rape not only reenacts her mother’s, but also heightens her awareness of that rape and opened the wound of a past she appeared to have locked away. In this instance she has undergone or suffered a double wound. These rapes further underscore the dangerous situations in which women live in conditions of social breakdown where even the protective cells of ‘family’ and ‘community’ threaten their existence. In such situations, women live under the constant spectre of pain.

In both stories, pain became the theme that wrote the narratives of death that emerged from the events of the killings. Dee’s testimony above is an example of this. In addition, Marina’s place as woman in the novel is delineated through pain rather than through her gender. Having experienced the pain of witnessing the death of her parents at the hands of the soldiers, the rape of her mother, through the betrayal by her trusted nanny Chantal, Marina later experiences the pain of her own rape and betrayal by her ‘trusted’ friend Matayo. The rape by Matayo is another example of the intimate tyranny I mentioned earlier, in the sense that Matayo is the only person with whom she, up to that point, had shared the intimate and painful “secret” of her parents’ slaughter, including the rape of her mother:

Marina blew her nose, not knowing where and how to start. It had been a year now since she had been at the orphanage; such a long time, yet in a way it seemed just like yesterday when she had stood in their sitting room in Rwanda staring at her family lying dead.

‘My parents, brother and sister were all killed,’ she began. At first, they were inane disjointed words that just spilled from her lips, but after a few sentences, she gained confidence and spoke more firmly. She told Matayo everything she could remember and he did not once interrupt her. When she had finished, she felt like a heavy load had been lifted from her shoulder (*Secrets* 48).

From this scene of trust and intimacy, the narrative moves, in a few pages, to the representation of the rape scene. What begins as an intimate scene with Marina soothingly caressing Matayo's painful shin, turns into one of terror:

Her fingers felt soft on Matayo's bare skin and they had a soothing effect on him. He did not want her to stop. Matayo closed his eyes and something seemed to snap in his head. He felt his body go on fire and a blinding urge to make love to Marina took hold of him. The wine he had taken, coupled with the long day's excitement had taken their toll. He was like a person in a trance and some devil seemed to have entered him and was now responsible for his feelings. His manhood began to harden.

He grabbed Marina and clasped her to his chest then pressed her body to his aroused manhood [...] She tried to struggle out of his arms, but he was too strong for her. He pinned her to the ground, then with one arm, he began unzipping his trousers. In one swift movement, Matayo has removed the trousers and was trying to part Marina's thighs using his legs [...] Matayo was holding his elongated stiff manhood in one hand, while he used the other hand to keep Marina pinned to the ground. He began forcing himself inside her. Marina's feeble resistance only managed to ignite Matayo the more. Marina felt an excruciating pain tear through her body as Matayo entered her. He pumped at her and probed inside her with his enormous manhood. (*Secrets* 56-57).

Even though the rape here is narrated as springing from an individual sexual urge (the 'need' within Matayo to "make love" to Marina), it is nevertheless part of the violence perpetrated against women in situations where their womanhood is endangered. Abasi Kiyimba (2008) has made the observation on Matayo's rape of Marina by stating that, unlike the rape of Mukundane by Colonel Renzaho, which can be seen as the use of rape as "a tool of organised and systematic torture and humiliation," that of Marina by Matayo is a "response to a spontaneous sexual urge under the influence of alcohol" (Kiyimba). Kiyimba has moreover, suggested that the latter rape, when looked at "in the broader framework of patriarchy as a system" is "a symbolic demonstration of the extent of female vulnerability" (Kiyimba).

It is ironic but not surprising that the one memory Marina has during the act is that of her mother "spread-eagled on the floor and the Colonel on top of her [...] [along with] the agony-filled sounds her mother had made" (*Secrets* 56). Matayo's raping of Marina is an intimate betrayal of a trust that had pained the young woman to repose in him in the first place. It is essentially pain or rather, the feeling of relief from pain that causes Marina to confide such terrible memories in Matayo. This betrayal destroys any sense of self-worth that the young woman may have built in her stay in the orphanage, and further emphasises her body as being marked by pain. Similarly, in "Do You Remember" Maliza's rape by Barnabas takes place within the 'intimacy' of trust and protective 'friendship.' It is another intimate betrayal:

The night my father and mother and the twins – no, one twin – went away, Barnabas came to where I slept. His penis already stood erect. He wanted to penetrate me. He said he wanted to squeeze my tits and chew at them. He said he wanted to pour his semen inside my womanhood [...] I asked Barnabas if we should tell father and mother about the night he came to me. But Barnabas said no. We had to keep it as our secret. Why? Because it was not exactly right. He had done it because of the physical urge. I loved Barnabas very much. Whenever he came to where I slept, I felt very excited. I loved to see his muscles in the arms and legs move up and down when he was on top of me. I loved the way he held me afterwards (“Do You Remember” 178 – 179).

What is immediately noticeable about this passage is the casual, matter-of-fact language in which the rape is represented. There is the absence of violent language as in the two other cases given above. The young girl seems almost to have ‘accepted’ what has been done to her. Barnabas is after all, her protector in the dangerous world of the refugee camp where they live. She trusts him and looks up to him. However, notwithstanding the apparent casualness of the language here, Kyomuhendo skillfully and tellingly (even frighteningly) narrates the ways in which men exploit their positions of dominance (and domination) in their control of the bodies and minds of women. In situations of extreme violence and social dislocation, men may resort to various strategies of domination in their abuse of patriarchal ‘authority’. For example, we note that Barnabas cannot tell his parents about his sexual relations with Maliza because “it was not exactly right.” Note too patriarchy’s use of silence (silencing) and surreptitious speech in maintaining male dominance over the female; especially in a situation where the young woman’s sexuality and her life, are endangered by the abuse of power. We learn about this endangerment from Maliza herself as she comments on the actions of the men supplying food under the World Food Programme:

[I]t was easier for girls my age to obtain bigger food rations from the World Food Programme men who gave out food, because they liked to fondle our tits in the process [...] One day, Barnabas fought one of these men who tried to fondle my tits. Barnabas came on quite heavily on him and beat him up real bad. He was so jealous! I felt good but this meant we did not get any food for that day (“Do You Remember” 177).

The violence in the camp, as in the general society, is represented as having been created by dangerous masculinist politics – the abuse of power by men, at both the political and domestic levels. The father in this story, is always away from home, either fighting for the government, the rebels, or later, fighting as a mercenary in a nearby country resembling The Sudan. Kyomuhendo represents the violence in the Great Lakes Region of Africa as the outcome of dangerous masculinities, and sponsored by such masculinities, and as a daily threat to the very existence of women and their offspring.

In “Do You Remember?” therefore, Kyomuhendo probes the nature of masculinist violence on women and its effects on female subjectivity. Told from the first person perspective of the young woman, the “I” narrative is sandwiched between two

third person vignettes. It is given the form of a linear narrative as it begins and ends with the temporal markers “*Morning burst upon them*” (175) and “*Dusk fell upon them*” (181). The movement through time is in fact over a number of years and the story is often in flashback through painful memory, even convenient forgetting, with the elliptical and convoluted narrative of remembering. Employing the trope of the blurred, partially erased memory of the child, the story recasts the horror of the Rwanda civil war and genocide and the violence in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. In this short story, the coherent authorial narration witnessed in *Secrets No More* has given way to a fragmented view of events, where time and place lose shape and dimensions in a realm of dreamlike, surrealist narrative. Kyomuhendo does not mention Rwanda directly in her narrative; the only reference to a place is the village of Kagoge among the Gulu of northern Uganda.⁷ References to a place resembling Rwanda and the genocidal violence are given by the woman at the fleamarket in response to Maliza’s query as to why she does not speak the Gulu language:

She answered that she was not actually from Gulu. She had only fled here because her country, a beautiful country with rich volcanic soils and green hills, was at war. [...] That people were killing each other, husbands killing their own wives, mothers their own children. People who spoke the same language and danced to the same drumbeats. People who had the same smooth, narrow and rounded noses, like the neck of a calabash. Like mine. “So why were they fighting each other then?” I asked her. She did not seem to know the answer at all. I thought she was trying to dodge the question (180).

The “beautiful country with rich volcanic soils and green hills” clearly stands for Rwanda. The mention of “people who spoke the same language and danced to the same drumbeats” refers to what we know of the Rwanda people as a common cultural community, *Banyarwanda*, possessing a common language, *Kinyarwanda*. In this passage we see what may be referred to as an expression of desire for national belonging from a self-consciously displaced person negotiating her sense of belonging within nationalist terms. The narrative here does not underline such cross-cultural niceties as multiple sites of belonging for the exiled or migrant subject, but rather, the no-man’s land that the violently displaced person often finds herself in. Violently ejected from their country, both Maliza and the market woman in this story (and Marina in *Secrets No More*) experience the sense of loss of self or wandering that accompanies such traumatic displacement. The beautiful country of green hills thus becomes part of the painful cultural memory of these dispossessed subjects who seek some form of reconnection to a common cultural community through narrative refiguration.

Kyomuhendo’s construction of Maliza’s story through her fragmented memory re-enacts an aspect of the violence in the years leading into the genocide. Maliza’s own memory of her country is a near blank. Her only memory is of being flung over the shoulders of a soldier carrying an AK-47 and being carried away to a different place. But the third person observation that opens the story is a reference to what we know of the Rwanda situation:

Maliza and the soldier. And the six bodies lying carelessly in the compound. Arms, legs and heads, crudely severed from their owners with Stone Age weaponry, whispering silent messages to their onlookers. Peace and tranquility reign in the green hills beyond, nurturing gardens of banana plantations (“Do You Remember” 175).

What we have here is the painful recall of an older ‘voice’, looking back and ‘speaking’ through the wound on the violence witnessed as a young child. The reader should notice the cruel anatomization of the body – the scattered body parts giving evidence to spilt blood, extreme violence. But note should also be made of the truncated, fragmented nature of the narrative, symbolic of trauma narrative, told in gaps and gasps. A comparison can be made here with Monica Arac De Nyeko’s short story “Strange Fruit,” which is structured around the painful memories of a young mother, Lakidi, in the Gulu District of Northern Uganda, as she tries to cope with the loss of her abducted husband (taken by the rebel soldiers) and her own imperiled situation within a violent masculine space. The protagonist Lakidi, in her first person narrative, struggles to articulate the traumatic experience of seeing her husband, Mwaka, abducted and taken away by the soldiers of the rebel army:

I stayed with the feeling that Mwaka had gone to work and the evening sunset would bring him home to me. [...] Mwaka was wearing his sapphire blue and red striped Acoli Farmers Cooperation uniform. That image of him stuck in my mind like a portrait. When I see him often in my dreams, the merge of blue and red seems calm and tranquil, but I cannot embrace its beauty and let it envelop me. It is always too remote for me to reach [...] Words got lost in my mouth, like a child’s burble, uttered and gone. My heart started to soak in a maze of unspeakable gloom (De Nyeko)

The example above, dramatizes the traumatized woman, suffering the loss or the separation of a limb. Lakidi has suffered a form of amputation; in this case, the abduction of a husband whom she loved and was close to. Mwaka, of the “sweet and fruity” mango breath, was the love of her life. His abduction is therefore like the removal of a limb. Lakidi’s attempt to “tell” her story, often in painful, truncated gasps, articulates Caruth’s view that trauma is beyond words, difficult to speak. Yet, Lakidi’s story, told through the wound, spoken from a place “too remote [...] to reach” is another example of the story, as prosthesis, functioning as phantom limb. The gaps in the narratives of both women however, may have to do not only with the problem of telling or struggling to remember (or forget), but also with what it may be ethical to tell. “Do You Remember?” is itself the story of a telling, the story of a young woman struggling to come to terms (narratively) with her painful past:

If only I could remember everything that happened before the raid, I would say to you today, Now ‘Sit down and let me tell you a story’. The story of my life. Or, what could have been the story of my life. For example, I could remember that day the soldier dug me out from the heaps

of dead bodies, flung me on his shoulders and carried me to his home [...] I could also remember some other things before then. Before the day of the raid (175).

The opening paragraphs of the story emphasize two factors that are vital to traumatic memory and telling: the need to remember or call to mind (recall), and the need to tell or narrativize. And both these have been realized in the narrative in Maliza's struggle to remember and to give narrative shape to her "story."

It is fairly obvious, judging from the timeframe of the narrative, spanning over twelve years, (depending on Maliza's memory), that this first reference is not to the 1994 genocide, but rather perhaps to any of the series of raids and acts of horror during the 1980s. Going on the facts that the soldier 'finds' Maliza when she is around five, and that Maliza refers to her own age as seventeen later in the story with another two years or so after finally returning to the "green hills", the time frame is over twelve years. In this regard Kyomuhendo has remained 'faithful' to the history of violence and the refugee situation in the region and Rwanda in particular. There were, in fact, a number of migrations by Rwandans to Uganda and the surrounding countries before the 1994 slaughter. On the other hand, the flea market woman's account above would seem to be pointing to the actual 1994 genocide.

In the case of the market-woman's account of the killings in the short story as in Dee's account of the genocide in the novel, these people seeking refuge in nearby Uganda have told their stories as survivor-narratives, in absentia. To speak of such horror as the killings witnessed by Dee and the market-woman, it is necessary to put some distance between the act or event and its narration. In reading Kyomuhendo's fictionalisation of the events of the genocide, we have encountered, what Ricoeur calls "fiction's capacity for provoking an illusion of presence, but one controlled by critical distance, [for], fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator. Eyes to see and to weep" (187, 188). By moving her narrative of the genocide away from Rwanda into nearby Uganda, Kyomuhendo distances the act of witness from its source through the "retrodiction" of the stories of Dee and the market-woman. This illustrates what Ato Quayson, speaking in another context, has termed "the traumatic moment leaking into history." The moment or event of trauma:

[W]hen it occurs does not remain stable referentially. [...] The way it operates [...] is that the intensity or the scale of the stimuli that occur in the traumatic event often exceed the capacity for the individual psyche to process at that point. So what happens is that it is subsequent to the event – sometimes years, sometimes weeks afterwards – that the elements of the traumatic event come to take shape (Qtd. in "Old Words").

The moment of leakage for Marina for example, occurs when she hears Dee's account of the killings back in Rwanda. This narrative triggers her own memory of the "secret" of the killings she witnessed, a "secret" she had locked away within her. The actual events which Marina witnessed were themselves too harrowing and traumatic to be "processed" at the time of occurrence, they "take shape", and this slowly, over a period of years and through a number of stimuli. Similarly, the moment of revelation for Maliza in the short

story comes when the flea-market woman alerts her as to her 'true' identity. However, Maliza is prevented from moving beyond her blocked memory, her amnesia, by the psychological damage caused by Barnabas's sexual molestation of her body:

She [the market woman] said that she remembered me, or at least someone who looked like me, with the same long legs, protruding hips and brown skin. From another place, another village. But, for me, everything before the raid was a blur. So I could not say anything about it. I needed to remember first. And now all I remembered was Barnabas ("Do You Remember" 179).

The rape is another interruption of the young woman's narrative, a disruption to the already difficult process of self-representation. Such a process however, can only take place through the mechanisms of narrativisation (in this case, a narrativisation assisted by the narrative of the market woman, emphasising no doubt, the importance of female solidarity in the imperiled situations in which women are placed in times of social dislocation and violence) thus challenging the whole idea of the representational capacity of language and the rationality of the subject-as-teller, to tell or show a coherent story of the events. Writing as phantom limb in this context therefore, is more than merely "memorial writing that tries impossibly to fill in the void [...] left, to restore the absence that it fatally marks" (Bongie 230). It is rather, an attempt to employ the "referential mobility and uncertainty" of language to "embrace the difficult (one might even say revolutionary) possibilities of growth and development" (Bongie 230) offered in Kyomuhendo's writing.

As I indicated at the start of this paper, Kyomuhendo's representation of this unspeakable violence is itself an act of abjection where writing has become a means of "expelling" the revolting violence that occurred. Writing in this case may be seen as a transgressive act because of its attempt to represent the 'unrepresentable.' In addition, it has objectified the events, creating a distance that has made it 'possible' to 'speak' about such 'unspeakable' acts. Representation here has not been merely a reflexive after-the-event construction, but more, a constitution of events that looks forward to a better life - writing as phantom limb. Literature has become the signifier of a violence itself signified by orgiastic and planned mass slaughter in which foetuses were cut from the bellies of pregnant women, husbands killed their own wives, parents their children, teachers their students and priests their parishioners.

As a literature of excoriation, Kyomuhendo's novel and short story have 'revealed', as in a broken mirror, the horrifying and traumatic nature of extreme violence employing a declarative, realist mode of representation. Here, we have moved beyond the mere aesthetic or formalist to the ethical, politico-cultural and even "destinal value" of writing – the "usefulness" of writing in refashioning futures (Cixous xv). Nevertheless, here, representation has been carried to the extreme of realism, where the violence has been refracted through the scarred memory of the young woman, where the story has been told in stutters and spurts as if in delirium, on the edge of normality. Given the commitment to writing the survival of women in a context of extreme violence and social dislocation, Kyomuhendo would surely agree with Robson that "to write trauma [...] means 'writing wounds' [and] by extension, reading trauma [...] means finding strategies

to read such wounds” (15). The fiction of Kyomuhendo in this instance perhaps looks toward what Hélène Cixous terms: “A virgin way of listening and making the always newold language speak” (xxi). This is the language of the phantom limb.

Footnotes

¹ *Simusiga*, which means “an event that leaves no survivors,” is the Rwandan survivors’ term for the 1994 genocide. See Lisa McNee, “Monénembo’s L’Aîné des orphelins and the Rwandan Genocide,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 6.2 (June 2004) <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb04-2/mcnee04.html>.

² This generation includes such writers as Monica Arac De Nyeko, whose short story “Jambula Tree” is the 2008 Caine Prize winner for African short fiction, Jackee Budesta Batanda, whose short story, “Remember Atita” was “Highly Commended” in the Caine Prize for African Writing for 2004, and Doreen Baingana, who has recently published *Tropical Fish: Tales from Entebbe*. All these texts may be seen as addressing the concerns mentioned here.

³ Realist representation indicates a formal arrangement which places its emphasis on providing a “reflection” or “picture” of reality.

⁴ See Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987.

⁵ By social body, I mean the society as an organism that acts and develops, and can also suffer and die.

⁶ Of note here also is the rape of Lakidi in Arac De Nyeko’s short story “Strange Fruit”, where the young woman is raped by the soldiers of the government troops who are searching for her husband, Mwaka, who was abducted and ‘conscripted’ into the rebel army. Lakidi’s rape may be seen as part of the “bio-political strategy” of subjugating the ‘enemy’.

⁷ The setting in the Gulu district is significant as this is one of the areas in the ‘neglected’ northern area of Uganda affected by war, rape, torture and the spread of HIV/AIDS. See “Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda” *Human Rights Watch Report* 15.12A (2003).

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