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Juvénal Ngorwanubusa, *Le Regard étranger: L'image du Burundi dans les littératures belge et française*. Bruxelles and New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2014. 216 pp. Selective bibliography. \$55.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-2-87574-162-2.

Review by Heidi Brown, Loyola University Maryland.

Le Regard étranger: L'image du Burundi dans les littératures belge et française joins a small but growing body of intellectual work examining Belgian representations of Burundi. In his article “Africains de Belgique, de l'indigène à l'immigré” (2000)^[1], Bonaventure Kagne explores how colonial stereotypes continue to affect perceptions of Burundians living in Belgium today. Pascal Lefèvre also analyzes portrayals of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi in Belgian comics in the anthology *History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels* (2008).^[2] This topic is part of a broader academic discussion on Belgian colonialism in Burundi. Recent scholarship includes Patricia Daley's *Gender and Genocide: The Search for Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region of Africa* (2008), which uses a feminist framework to examine Burundi's violent history, and René Lemarchand's *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (2009), which examines the colonial roots of violence in Burundi.^[3] Interest in Belgian colonialism as a whole has increased in recent years due to two controversial works on King Leopold II's exploitation of the Congo, including Adam Hochschild's best-seller *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (1998), as well as Peter Bate's television documentary *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (2003).^[4] Thus, the topic of Juvénal Ngorwanubusa's book—how Burundi is portrayed in Belgian and French literature—is a relevant addition to the scholarship currently being done in Francophone studies.

In *Le Regard étranger: L'image du Burundi dans les littératures belge et française*, Ngorwanubusa contends that the eight works in his corpus—*Barabara* (1947) by Pierre Ryckmans, *Eclipse sur le lac Tanganyika* (1994) by Albert Russo, *Exils africains* (2010) by Albert Russo, *Le Chant de fusillés* (1981) by Nadine Nyangoma, *SAS broie du noir* (1967) by Gérard de Villiers, *Le Reste du monde* (1987) by Anna Geramys, *L'Hiver sur le Tanganyika* (1977) by Paul Savatier, and *Mon patient Sigmund Freud* (2006) by Tobie Nathan—are narratives of crisis in which literature and violence are linked. He argues that these novels describe Burundians in binary terms, portraying subservient Hutus who suffer under the domination of elite Tutsis in power. Descriptions of landscapes and society are written to provoke an empathetic, pro-Hutu response, thereby revealing the authors' ideological standpoint that a reversal in the power structure of Burundi would be desirable. Ngorwanubusa's work is comprehensive in nature and valuable for its intellectual contributions to the field. Notwithstanding, the presentation of the corpus could be improved, the structure of the text does not always contribute to the logical flow of ideas, and his treatment of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact is erroneous.

In the first chapter, Ngorwanubusa presents the authors and their respective works. Overall similarities between the authors include coming from privileged backgrounds, witnessing key moments of history in Burundi, being pro-Hutu, viewing themselves as opponents of injustice, having humanitarian sympathies towards the presumed weak, and expressing generosity towards Burundians even as they replicate racist ideologies. Ngorwanubusa also uses his extensive knowledge of Africa to justify why various texts are set in Burundi as opposed to other countries such as Rwanda or the Congo.

Nevertheless, the description of the corpus is approximately fifty pages long, which has the disadvantage of bogging the reader down in details instead of giving a clear and concise summary of each work. Rather than retelling each narrative, it would have been more productive to analyze how the books are connected, how they diverge, or how they are situated in a larger literary context. Secondly, Ngorwanubusa calls into question the literary merits of works in his corpus without also providing a convincing justification for their inclusion. He describes *SAS broie du noir* as belonging to a genre that is “peu légitime” (p. 37), categorizes Nadine Nyangoma as “une parfaite inconnue” (p. 37), and writes: “la carrière littéraire des autres auteurs ne nous permet pas de les envisager *hic et nunc* comme étant tous de grands écrivains” (p. 37). The explanation given for their inclusion (the novels were written with an esthetic intention and are set in Burundi) is rather weak. In fact, Ngorwanubusa gives much more convincing reasons for his choice in corpus in the last chapter; it would have been helpful to have these dynamics explicitly stated from the outset. Finally, the structure of this chapter is not conducive to Ngorwanubusa’s assertion that the novels contain autobiographical elements. Because he describes all of the authors, followed by all of the texts, it is harder for the reader to connect each author’s life story to his or her respective work. For these reasons, readers are not as prepared as they could have been to approach the substance of the book.

In the second chapter, Ngorwanubusa enumerates the ways in which places and people are typically described in the novels and provides an excellent analysis of what these trends reveal. For example, descriptions of nature reflect political realities: while earlier novels describe the bucolic, virginal traits of the countryside, storylines set after the country’s independence no longer attribute these same qualities to Burundi. Portrayals of Lake Tanganyika reveal social disparities in the population: for those in power, the lake has highly charged sexual connotations, while for those who are hungry the lake is as indifferent to them as they are to it. Descriptions of restaurants, cafés, sports centers, night clubs, and cinemas reveal the racial segregation of the city, as Africans are nowhere to be seen in rich neighborhoods. Thus, each place corresponds to a determined type of inhabitant. Stereotypical characters found in this corpus include a Hutu military officer, a rich white storekeeper, a poor Hutu farmer from a shantytown, and a young, female refugee from Rwanda. Ngorwanubusa asserts that it is only after independence that Burundians cease to be portrayed as an undifferentiated mass and begin to be described as Hutus and Tutsis. He shows that representations of Hutus are meant to inspire sympathy, comprehension, pity, or revolt against authority; although they are idealized, they are also portrayed as incapable of passing ideas into action and as being severely limited in making long-term plans. Tutsis, on the other hand, are envied for their beauty and height, yet are demonized as the most vile, arrogant, crafty, and unkind characters who are determined to do evil. In this corpus, he demonstrates that descriptions become confused with normative social order, and presupposed inequalities between the two groups are presented as self-evident.

This chapter is valuable for the trends in literature that it exposes, particularly because Ngorwanubusa analyzes what these descriptions reveal about Burundian society and those observing it. His writing is clear and informative, numerous examples are used from the texts to illustrate his points, and subheadings make it easy to follow the entirety of his argument.

In the third chapter, Ngorwanubusa shows how literature and violence are inextricably linked. He enumerates various motivations for violence that stem from mythical, pseudo-historic, and conjectural reasons. For example, inequality is inscribed in the myth of origins, where Tutsis are given an absolute power perceived as a divine inheritance, while Hutus are assigned a permanently inferior role in society. One type of violence examined is verbal, which encompasses a rhetoric of banalization expressed through black humor, cynicism, voyeurism, word play, and lengthy descriptions of violence. Another type of violence analyzed is that of passion: sex and death become inseparable as massacres are linked to the violence of erotic bodies, horror and excess create sexual need, and women help men forget the violence around them. Although there are multiple causes for the violence portrayed, and its

consequences are numerous, the mechanism for violence remains invariable: provocation, then rebellion, followed by repression. In this literary corpus, Europeans coming to Burundi are struck with the horrors they were previously warned about, only seeing what they were preconditioned to expect. However, violent events do not concern them directly for fear of condemnation from the international community. Their common reactions to violence in Burundi include participating in a conspiracy of silence, forgetting what they witnessed, refusing to dramatize the situation (there will always be injustice in the world), or returning to Europe to avoid the situation entirely.

This chapter is valuable because it analyzes the systemic nature of violence in Burundi, showing that it is perhaps the one thing that Burundians have most in common. Ngorwanubusa goes beneath the surface to elucidate the reasons used to perpetuate violence, the different forms that this violence takes, as well as the meanings that are attached to violence. The text flows well and the content provides a solid background for Ngorwanubusa's final arguments on ideology.

The fourth chapter examines the connections between myth, history, fiction, and ideology. It shows how the novels are rooted in autobiographical and historical reality, as well as how these works give accurate information about people, clothing, food practices, buildings, and places. However, Ngorwanubusa also demonstrates that the corpus contains numerous conjectures and simplistic visions that orient the authors' understandings and representations of history. For example, they explain Burundian society using Medieval European social structures, and perpetuate the Hamitic myth rather than conceptualizing of social division in economic terms. Finally, the chapter explores the ideologies that permeate the corpus. These include paternalistic humanitarianism, a belief that colonialism benefited Burundi through the installation of schools and hospitals, and the view that Burundi has declined since Belgium pulled out of the country. A major ideological tendency in the corpus is to scape-goat political-ethnic adversaries (Tutsis), thereby establishing their illegitimacy in power and justifying a reversal of the existing social order. This line of reasoning plays on emotions, simplifications, bad faith, and the belief that a condemnation of others equals a valorization of self. In this manner, ideological caricatures become inextricably linked to the physical caricatures portrayed in the novels.

This chapter is an interesting reflection on the intersections between historical reality, the authors' (colonized) imaginations, and the ideologies implicitly present in their discourses. It provides important connections between the novels, and convincingly demonstrates how the corpus is a coherent body of texts. Notwithstanding, the structure of this chapter--particularly in relation to the whole of the book--is not entirely logical. It would have been helpful to mention these overall trends from the beginning, rather than emphasizing the differences between the works as if their only connection is being novels set in Burundi. Likewise, it does not seem to be the most logical place to give an overview of the history of Burundi. This information might also have been better suited in the introduction, as its current placement interrupts the flow of analysis.

In addition to these structural concerns, Ngorwanubusa's assertion that there is an "intention autobiographique explicite" (p. 162) is not well justified. He writes: "D'abord, [les œuvres] adhèrent totalement au 'pacte autobiographique' dès lors que la dose de biographèmes semble prédominante et que la fiction se mêle étroitement à l'expérience personnelle des auteurs" (p. 161). This is a misrepresentation of the way that Philippe Lejeune defines the autobiographical pact in his seminal work *Pacte autobiographique*. For Lejeune, "L'autobiographie, elle, ne comporte pas de degrés, c'est tout ou rien" (p. 25).^[5] In addition, Ngorwanubusa claims that Pierre Ryckman's narrative corresponds to Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography because the name of the night porter is also that of his eighth son (p. 163). These arguments are not convincing, particularly because Ngorwanubusa has previously defined the works in his corpus as literary fiction (p. 161). He also writes: "les frontières entre la fiction et l'histoire deviennent si poreuses..." (p. 198) and "disons que, à la limite, le romancier a le droit de commettre des écarts, à travestir les faits et à mélanger les dates" (p. 178). It is not tenable to argue that these works are both novels filled with fictional elements that intentionally deviate from

reality (165) and that they adhere entirely to Lejeune's autobiographical pact. It would be more convincing for Ngorwanubusa to reduce the scope of his claim to pointing out similarities between the authors' lives and their novels.

Although the presentation of the corpus, the structure of certain chapters, and the argument concerning the autobiographical nature of the texts could be improved, *Le Regard étranger: L'image du Burundi dans les littératures belge et française* makes real contributions to the growing body of intellectual work on the Belgian colonization of Burundi, giving a comprehensive and thorough treatment of the ways in which Burundi is portrayed in Belgian and French literature. This book would be a valuable tool for those teaching, researching, or writing about Burundi as it would help them to recognize overall trends in the way that Burundi is portrayed by outsiders.

NOTES

[1] Bonaventure Kagne, "Africains de Belgique, de l'indigène à l'immigré." *Hommes et migrations* 1228 (2000): 62-67.

[2] Pascal Lefèvre, "The Congo Drawn in Belgium," in Mark McKinney ed., *History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp.166-85.

[3] Patricia Daley, *Gender and Genocide: The Search for Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

[4] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Peter Bate, *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (New York: ArtMattan Productions; Chicago: Facet Films, 2003).

[5] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975).

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