

Misunderstanding Africa: The West's Misrepresentation of Africa.  
An Insufficient Notion of Evil Seen Through the Lens of the Rwanda  
Genocide and Child Slavery in Ghana

by

Paul Bork

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

William Simmons, Chair  
Julie Murphy Erfani  
Akua Anokye

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## ABSTRACT

Africa is misrepresented and mis-imagined in the western media. Because of this, notions and beliefs about atrocities that take place on the continent lack context, leaving people to think that Africa is a place of misery, darkness and despair; a monolithic land where evil resides. The image of Africa as the "heart of darkness" was conjured following the Joseph Conrad novel and the idea of Africa as the "Dark Continent" still pervades Western thought. This is an inadequate understanding of Africa, and lacks the context to comprehend why many of the atrocities in Africa occur. I will explore two atrocities in Africa, the 1994 Rwanda Genocide and child slavery on Lake Volta in Ghana. I believe that both these examples reflect how the label of evil is insufficient to describe the circumstances around each atrocity. In order to understand such events we must understand the part that colonialism and poverty play in the disruption of pan-African culture. The "evils" of these two phenomenon, are in many cases the result of the Western world's past involvement in Africa and are remnants and extensions of the disruption caused.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my effort and work to two people, first, to my wife Linda for all of her love and support and second, to my Papa, Harry Marshall. His support of me and love for higher education have influenced and inspired me to never stop learning.

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## PREFACE

For many Americans, what goes on beyond their own borders is out of sight and out of mind. The concerns of global problems may not directly affect them and feeble attempts are taken to remain informed; a few hours a week with individuals like Katie Couric or the World section of the *New York Times* is enough to keep them in the know. What seems to be a pretty standard trend however, is that when the stories broadcasted or printed through the usual media outlets pertain to the happenings in Africa, the narrative seems to be the same, the subjects appear as “an undifferentiated mass of pathetic victims” (Berkeley, 2001) painting the picture of Africa as a monolithic realm of despair, savagery, war and turmoil. The viewers of these stories, often times, take them for ultimate truth informing their only understanding of the continent. For example, during the preceding months of my departure to spend a year in Rwanda as a teacher, I frequently received comments and questions from individuals such as, “are you scared?” “Didn’t something really bad happen there?” or “isn’t that really dangerous?” This is not to say Africa, as the second largest continent, should not share in its tribulations or disasters, rather it should be expected just like any landmass of complex civilizations. What is disheartening and ultimately naïve is to assume, the state of Africa that Americans are presented with, is not a “unitary landscape of unremitting despair” (Berkeley, 2001). The atrocities, war,

and turmoil the peoples of Africa face, continent wide, are not carried out by some untapped reservoir of evil.

Cases of chaos abound worldwide; plenty have occurred and some are currently happening, on African soil. “Popular” examples that get a good deal of attention are the use of child soldiers, sex trafficking, blood diamonds, and conflict(s) in Sudan. Another example that is recently getting more attention and will be discussed in the third chapter of this thesis is the trafficking and use of child slaves on Lake Volta in Eastern Ghana. One of the most prime examples of horror however, an event that surely hasn’t helped Africa’s image, was the 1994 Rwanda Genocide. Here was, undoubtedly one of the worst massacres of the modern world, in which, roughly 800,000 civilians were murdered by their neighbors, friends, family and government.<sup>1</sup>

There is no capacity for understanding how and why this could happen, especially no easy way for the general American population to comprehend such horror. The only explanation in the minds of many is the idea of evil. “Evil” seems to be the only appropriate word to describe the Rwanda genocide, or any genocide rather, but when evil is given as a reason, rather than a condition or phenomenon, explanations and understanding become inadequate. When there appears to be only one

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<sup>1</sup> The number 800,000 is a ‘popular’ number used by most when discussing the genocide, however, it is contested by some suggesting the number killed was much higher surpassing one million with others suggesting it could have been less. See Mamdani (2001), Rucyahana (2007) and Des Forges (1999).

negative and static narrative of a mass of civilizations, portrayed as one, “evil” gets tossed around recklessly, and its use ultimately meaningless. African’s have no more of a predisposition to “evil” than any other human society, yet the American medias proclivities for addressing Africa’s plight tends to be unilaterally biased and misrepresented. Western films on Africa use themes of brutality and horror to paint a picture of the continent. The award winning film *Blood Diamond* does this by highlighting the importance of the film’s white characters while portraying the black characters as savage and brutal. The author Keith Richburg has written about the Rwanda genocide as an event that only un-evolved human beings could make happen.

In this paper I will discuss evil and its application as well as the idea of the banality of evil. Banal evil is meant to be any action by an individual where there is a lack of any critical thought or when an individual has no other course of action. Concepts of evil can vary however, it is human beings that commit acts others perceive as evil and human beings are no more evil in Africa than in the Western or Eastern world. In many cases elements like propaganda create fear and lead individuals to commit atrocities outsiders view as evil. It is important to analyze the perception of Africa as evil or “dark” because when we are provided context we can see that the West is not only complicit in the events that take place but that we are not that different.



The media is not the only culprit either, as I will discuss later, ignorance about Africa and its peoples and places exists and even those in the highest levels of government can suffer from it. A recent example of this occurred on a grand scale in 2008, when Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin did not understand that Africa was a continent and not a country and asked her aides "if South Africa wasn't just part of the country as opposed to a country in the continent" ([www.mirror.co.uk](http://www.mirror.co.uk)). For an average citizen in the U.S. to think South Africa is a region of the continent rather than an actual country is perhaps, understandable. For an individual hoping to be the next Vice President of the United States it is unforgivable. Palin's lack of knowledge for elementary geography may seem petty to many but is significant because it represents how Africa has little importance to the U.S.

I will refer to an "ignorance" held by the West throughout this paper and this ignorance is meant to reference notions held about Africa that are inaccurate and insufficient. Inaccurate notions about Africa are held by many people in the U.S. and have been cultivated through the media's mis-imaging and misrepresentation of Africa. Those suffering this ignorance can also include many individuals who have paid visits to Africa and possess extensive knowledge about the continent but still hold wild and illogical notions. Berkeley (2001) has written an essay as a counter weight to some of those writings. The authors of these writings should know better than to provide their readers with faulty theories of the African

continent. For instance, Berkeley writes in response to Robert D. Kaplan, who assumes the civil war in Liberia arose from “new-age primitivism” out of “superstitions” that allegedly blossom in the rain forest. Berkeley adds, that through his own travel throughout Africa, he has “found no evidence of ‘new age primitivism’ or ‘superstitions’ that could explain mass murder (82). It is my attempt to investigate the notions held by the Western world that Africa is a ‘mysterious’ place full of ‘tribal’ chaos related to the ‘evil’ of the Rwanda Genocide and the child slavery practiced in Ghana and to what extent do the writings of Hannah Arendt, such as banal evil, work and labor reflect the realities of the two crisis?

## CHAPTER 1

### MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISREPRESENTING AFRICA

One could ask what difference is made whether the general populace has an accurate view of Africa, considering most people in the U.S. will never step foot on its land. It makes sense to think that ordinary citizens' knowledge of Africa is unnecessary, seeing that he or she will never be making decisions directly affecting the countries, their peoples and their policies. It does however, become problematic when these views and understanding of a foreign place are held by a group of people who do make decisions. Development worker and politicians have a responsibility to understand the realities, differences and cultures of a place, their daily actions influence. When America for example, represented as a country by its leaders, confuses two starkly different cultures, places and peoples simply because they share soil and skin color, our ignorance shines through and can have disastrous implications.

### SOMALIA VS RWANDA

During the months that led to the Rwandan genocide, the American government refused to take action(s) to assist Rwanda as did the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) because of the previous October debacle in Mogadishu, Somalia where a number of Army Special Forces were killed. Six months before the start of the Rwanda genocide U.S. soldiers in Somalia were sent in to help bail out

Pakistani peacekeepers from inside Mogadishu who had been attacked by a faction led by the warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. A subsequent manhunt for Aideed, led by the U.S. Rangers and Delta special forces, ultimately ended with the infamous “Black Hawk Down” incident in which 18 U.S Army Rangers were killed and one soldier's body stripped down and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu for the world to see (Power, 2002). This did not sit well with the American audience nor U.S. politicians. Igniting the fear that if, American's were to send troops to stop conflict in Rwanda, the next images seen would be those of American military members being dragged through the streets of Kigali, in another botched military operation.

To preface, Rwanda was a place of no strategic interest to the United States with zero valuable resources; translated, Rwandese<sup>2</sup> were not worth saving. Instead, the Clinton Administration took a weak stance trying to avoid another “Somalia Incident”, assuming a second Mogadishu would ensue if the U.S. were to intervene in Rwanda. Rwanda Genocide literature is swamped with examples and conversations amongst White House officials about the memory of what happened in Somalia when taking action in Rwanda was put on the table. America is immensely unfamiliar with military involvement in Africa, the assumption is, if one

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis I will utilize “Rwandese” when referring to the people of Rwanda. The CIA World Factbook has the noun of Rwanda's nationality as “Rwandan”, however, many of my Rwandese friends and colleagues were adamant about being referred to as such.

mission failed in Africa another mission must. I would suggest most Americans could not identify Rwanda or Somalia on a map, let alone understand the differences of their political and ethnic conflicts. The president and his advisors however, should not boast the same ignorance.

Just looking at some of the basic differences between Rwanda and Somalia is enough evidence to see there are no grounds for assuming duplicate events. Rwanda is a small country roughly the size of Maryland, Somalia is almost the size of Texas ([www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)). Rwanda is a landlocked country, in which the ethnic complexities are intertwined with three of its four neighboring countries. For example, many Tutsi were forced to flee north to Uganda in previous decades leaving a large population of displaced persons wanting to return home. The number of exiled Rwandan Tutsi since 1959 had grown to about a million people, making it “the largest and oldest unresolved African refugee problem” (Gourevitch, 1998). Burundi had the same polarized ethnicities (Hutu and Tutsi) and The Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) ended up as a refuge for many genocide perpetrators; the remnants of which are still fighting today in another devastating conflict affecting millions.

Somalia is a Sunni Muslim country, has miles of coastline and its conflict had little to do with its neighbors, the fighting of which, was concentrated in the capital Mogadishu rather than throughout the entire country. Additionally, the Somalia conflict was not one rooted in ethnicity or a racialized “other”. Though, there were clans and sub-clans fighting

each other, these were led by warlords, not fascist ideologues trying to purify society and establish their own, exclusive public realm. This was seen by how clans that may otherwise oppose one another at one time were willing to join rival sub clans when there was a threat to the larger clan; a sort of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' mentality resulting in Somali militiamen injecting themselves into the fight against the U.S. Army Rangers (Bowden, 2000). Unlike the Somali population, Rwandese were not facing starvation on catastrophic levels; Tutsi and moderate Hutu were facing elimination from fellow countrymen.

The difference between each country's fighting forces was drastically different as well. Somalia was littered with makeshift rebel armies and multiple disorganized militias. Rwanda on the other hand had a national army led by Colonel Theoneste Bagasora. The army was systematic and specific in whom they targeted as enemies, precise and efficient in arming non-military personnel and previously armed by a number of foreign countries. Rwanda had an ideology of an "other" injected into its society for years prior to the genocide and was simply waiting for a culminating event to ignite the holocaust.

Because of the enormous geographic and socio-economic differences, one could not come to a logical conclusion that intervening in Rwanda would produce the same results. Whereas, for instance, were the "Black Hawk Down" incident to have happened in a country like Burundi, followed by a call for assistance to Rwanda, one could make a stronger

argument that entering Rwanda would be too risky based on the numerous similarities between the two countries. Alternatively, the two conflicts were lumped into one, Rwanda was betrayed, and American audiences were left with another idea that what happens in Africa is gruesome and widespread. The belief of a second “Somalia Incident” was a thoughtless one, a belief that along with America’s indifference to non-strategic nations led to the complicity of evil through inaction.

## HOLLYWOOD VS AFRICA

One of the best examples of the West’s ignorance towards Africa is the representation of Africa through in Hollywood. Though Hollywood is anything but academic or journalistic, there is no denying that its films, themes, stories and characters have a significant influence on American audiences. If we minimize the perpetual fountain of films Hollywood spits out to the films with a significant representation of Africa its peoples and its troubles, there is a much more manageable group of films to analyze. I will take a detailed look at one film in particular because I believe its themes and elements can be attributed to many of the other films.

A small batch of these “African” productions from the past decade, that have had a great influence on Americans<sup>3</sup> include the films: *Lord of War*, *Blood Diamond*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Tears of the*

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<sup>3</sup> This is based on these films having some of the largest budgets for American films about Africa.

*Sun*. These films highlight some of the largest pan African issues such as arms dealing (*Lord of War*), the Rwanda Genocide (*Hotel Rwanda*), the Somalia Army Ranger incident (*Black Hawk Down*), Liberia and Sierra Leones' child soldiers and conflict diamonds (*Blood Diamond*) and Muslim-Christian ethnic conflicts in Nigeria (*Tears of the Sun*). These films showcase some of the U.S.'s biggest movie talent including: Leonardo Dicaprio, Bruce Willis, Nicholas Cage, and Don Cheadle, to name a few. Hollywood spares no expense when it comes to budgets for its blockbuster hits; spending \$321.5 Million just on these five films, the biggest budget estimated at \$100 million spent on *Blood Diamond* ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)). Hollywood is noticeably under no obligation to bring what may or may not be 'true' to its audiences. It is not uncommon though, for people to base their understandings of issues regarding the world on what they saw in the movie. 'They made a movie about it' as a familiar phrase goes.

McCormick (2006) overviews a number of the previously mentioned films and critiques the difference between movies representing the African continent from when he was a boy, which were typically adventure films through the savanna, Tarzan or John Wayne like stories. Today's films concern Africa's war ravaged countries, starving masses and endless atrocities. Despite the American movie industry having little credibility in chronicling African realities, as McCormick (2006) notes, the films do "hold up a stark and unflattering mirror to the colonial and neo-colonial footprint



these adventurers have left upon the continent and its people” (42). I would contend however, that Hollywood conveys Africa as an “other”, recycling the view of Africa as the “Dark Continent” full of savagery. Additionally Hollywood does not make attempts to show that many of Africa’s troubles are remnants of the disruption caused by colonialism.

Cameron (1994) pointing out the stereotypical characters in African films by American and British filmmakers identifies *White Queen*, *The White Hunter*, *The Good African* and the *Dangerous African*. These archetypes as Mafe (2011) points out in her essay on the British film, *The Constant Gardner* and the American film *Blood Diamond*, bring out an atmosphere of racism and sexism that the films attempt to rise above however, the *White Queen* ends up remaining “sacred and yet secondary; the black man remains the sole representative of Other subjectivity, although his subjectivity is noticeably eroded”. Additionally, the black African woman is almost non-existent and imaged only as a screaming or silenced victim, refugee, or prostitute whereas the white male is the only character with the means of having any influence (70). This furthers the idea that Africans cannot handle modern society without the assistance of the “white man”.

The film *Blood Diamond* was an attempt to illustrate the civil war in Sierra Leone and the fueling of the conflict by diamonds being mined in the area. The film fails to provide any integrity in providing a historical account of what took place in the late 1990’s during the Sierra Leone

conflict. Mafe (2011) says, “The film fails to contextualize the civil war through an in-depth look at the humanity and history of the Sierra Leonean characters.” For instance, the films Sierra Leonean characters are inauthentic in their use as representatives of their country, whereas the more accurately represented white characters are true to their nature. The main character Solomon Vandy, played by Djimon Hounsou is a Beninese-American, who likewise plays the role of Cameron’s “Good African”. Captain Poison, the films antagonist, representing Cameron’s “Bad African”, is English, the character M’ed is Ugandan American, and the small role of the teacher Benjamin Kampany is Jamaican-American (85). The white characters are Maddy Bowen – the White Queen - an American journalist, played by the American Jennifer Connelly. Colonel Coetzee is Afrikaner, played by Arnold Vosloo who is an Afrikaner. The only white character who is less authentic is the films star Danny Archer, the “White Hero”, played by Leonardo DiCaprio who is American playing a Zimbabwean however, his Afrikaner accent was perfected for the role in order to make his character more realistic (86), something that was not done for the Sierra Leonean characters. The message given in *Blood Diamond* is that the white characters “authenticity” is important whereas the black Africans authenticity is not (86). Additionally, The movie was filmed in Mozambique, East Africa<sup>4</sup> in order to provide the more

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise the film *Tears of the Sun* starring Bruce Willis as the White Hero, was filmed in Hawaii. The movie is supposed to take place in the

“cinematic” and “exotic” Africa that American audiences are familiar with resulting in how, Mafe (2011) notes, “the film arguably undermines its own claims to realism.” The significance here is that the film does not preserve the authenticity when portraying Africa. All that matters is whether or not the audience is captured by the stories overall theme of misery. There is no attempt to give the audience an idea of what Sierra Leone and Liberia are like other than places where horror abounds.

In his article, Sobania (2001) discusses how for the past one hundred years the Maasai culture in East Africa and Zulu in Southern Africa are depicted as an “Other” through popular characterizations of Africa (313) including American cinema as well as popular travel and photography books. In this particular case the two cultures are replaced with depictions of Africa and its peoples as a “‘type’ different and exotic” (333). I suggest the Maasai/Zulu example is one side of the coin depicting the ‘historical’ image of Africa where tribal warriors still roam the savanna, where as the other side, like the film *Blood Diamond* or *Hotel Rwanda*, are depictions of an un-evolved people, unable to control modern society. Echoed in the media outside of Hollywood, this theme has found its way into the mind of individuals who might not fit into the category of Americans with a minimal African understanding. Keith B. Richburg, a *Washington Post* correspondent wrote a book in which, his concluding

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rain forests of Nigeria but filmmakers apparently thought the Pacific Islands were a good enough substitute and audiences would never know.

remarks about what he witnessed in Rwanda during the genocide stated, “I realized, fully evolved human beings in the twentieth century don’t do things like that. Not for any reason, not tribe, not religion, not territory” (91).

Prior to my departure for Rwanda, as mentioned before, I received a slew of comments and questions spotlighting individual’s notions with respect to my moving to Africa. An additional comment I received on multiple occasions, leaving me aghast, was, “have you seen Hotel Rwanda?” The first time I received this utterance I was somewhat speechless by such naïveté, however, when I got the same response an additional number of times I was even more intrigued by how one film could provide so many people with their full understanding of another civilization<sup>5</sup>. There is, understandably, a limitation to this anecdote, in that maybe, I know a lot of people who are ignorant about Africa, however, I think it is fairly representative of the average population. I give this example however, to show how Hollywood provides some American’s with their understanding of history and momentous events when the picture painted is not very accurate or precise. Once I arrived in Rwanda and had spent a number of months making friends and eventually becoming

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<sup>5</sup> While writing this paper I was reading one of my books in public when a young gentleman asked what I was reading. A short conversation and nutshell explanation of my paper having much to do with the Rwanda genocide, resulted in the gentleman asking why Rwanda. I told him I used to live and teach there and I found the genocide to be a fascinating event. His response was “have you ever seen Hotel Rwanda?” I was taken aback for a moment and realized the conversation had just hit a proverbial wall.

comfortable discussing the genocide with Rwandese, my recollection of the “Hotel Rwanda” question came to mind. I noticed, during Genocide Remembrance Month (April), many of my students and local schools would have viewings of genocide films. Our school in particular viewed the films *Sometimes In April*, *Beyond the Gates* and *Shake Hands with the Devil*.<sup>6</sup> Because *Hotel Rwanda* was such a big production in the U.S. and one of the only resources many Americans apparently utilize for their information on the genocide, I asked why it was not being viewed. A number of ensuing conversations revealed that many Rwandese do not like the film for a number of reasons. Unlike the films *Sometimes in April*, *Beyond the Gates* and *Shake Hands with the Devil*, *Hotel Rwanda* was filmed outside of the country in South Africa, and used non-Rwandese actors – similar to the in-authenticity of *Blood Diamond* and *Tears of the Sun*.<sup>7</sup> For a country trying to achieve a strong sense of national unity and build reconciliation, it is understandable to see that the films in-authentic nature is not something Rwandese would appreciate. A number of conversations with colleagues, students and friends also revealed that during the genocide, Paul Russesabagina, who is portrayed by Don

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<sup>6</sup> There are two films titled *Shake Hands with the Devil*, one is a documentary on General Romeo Dallaires first return to Rwanda, ten years after the genocide. The other is a drama based upon Romeo Dallaire’s experience during the genocide. Our school watched the documentary.

<sup>7</sup> An interesting study might to be a survey of people in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria of their opinions on *Blood Diamond* and *Tears of the Sun*.

Cheadle in the film, was not as virtuous of an individual as presented in the movie. One late night conversation with my friend and Rwandese journalist for the local paper chronicled instances of the hotel manager taking money from the richer families taking shelter in the hotel and providing them with rooms to themselves. The poorer masses were then crammed into closets, basement and small enclosures. If this were indeed to be true, there could be many factors involved that complicate the situation<sup>8</sup>; the genocide was undoubtedly three months of chaos throughout the entire country. However, the collective disregard for the film amongst so many Rwandese gives credence to the insinuation of Russesabagina as well as the films lack of authenticity.

Sources like the American film industry are so influential and widespread; they have been injected into the home of every American leaving little reflection regarding the accuracy of what is produced.

Resulting in comments like “have you seen Hotel Rwanda?” despite the

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<sup>8</sup> It is also important to provide some alternative context to the demonization of Paul Russesabagina, common knowledge in Rwanda indicates that Russesabagina did and does not support the current president Paul Kagame, who is a national hero in post-genocide Rwanda. This creates a good deal of tension and has resulted in his being somewhat exiled from the country. To add to the complexity of the situation, in 2010 the Rwanda Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga, accused Russeabagina of sending money to Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) (New York Times, October 28, 2010). The FDLR is a rebel army operating in the Congo and comprised of many perpetrators of the Genocide. Ngogo has accused Russesabagina of financing terrorist activities and has asked the assistance of the U.S. to provide financial information from San Antonio where Russesabagina has a home (New York Times, October 28, 2010).

fact the genocide happened 15 years ago. Additionally, the Rwanda genocide has become one of the prominent fixtures of modern African society. Lemarchand (2009) notes that, the idea of the Rwanda genocide being the atrocity having taken the heaviest toll on the Great Lakes region of Central Africa is “one of the most persistent and persistently misleading ideas about the region”, where Eastern Congo has had four times as many people killed due to conflict from 1998-2006 than the Rwanda Genocide (4). It is important to underscore that much of the fighting, in Eastern Congo, is a remnant of the Rwanda Genocide, however, the point is clear that atrocities in Africa are made known and popular through, the agency of media, leaving the audiences with insufficient knowledge of the continents realities.

It should be said that I realize there is some hypocrisy in the thesis of my paper. In attempting to point out the mis-imaging, misrepresentation and fixation of horror in Africa presented by the western media, I am myself providing two examples of human rights issues in Africa rather than providing positive stories and events that take place on the continent. As I contend that Africa is only seen in a negative light I am providing context to two examples of Africa that are negative examples. The reality is that Africa is a continent with a lot of conflict, civil war and human rights abuses. For instance, the news consistently coming out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is less than sanguine to say the least. Rape, mass murder, and war are the static narratives because they are what aid

workers, politicians, journalists and even tourists have to report. There is a truth to atrocities that happen and currently exist throughout the continent. The atrocities however, do not account for the entire continent's persona and what is more is that there does not seem to be much in the way of media exposure for Africa unless it has an element of tragedy to it. The tragedies I am highlighting need more context in understanding before people mindlessly agree with the painted picture of Africa as negative. For when people in the west have a better understanding of how people act in Africa they might realize that they are not that different from each other and given the context might realize they themselves could act the same way if put in the situation.

I believe that much of this negativity has to do with the idea of Africa as the "Heart of Darkness", where we have accepted the label as if it were a prophecy. Joseph Conrad's classic tale of Marlow's journey into the deep forest of the Congo has become the quintessential portrait of Africa. Though it is inherently racist and provides no voice for the African as Chinua Achebe famously wrote 3 decades ago in his review of the book. *The Heart of Darkness* for Achebe (1977), "projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality." However, "the Heart of Darkness" has still been widely used to reference Africa since then and the message continually being reinforced with every new gruesome story of death and violence.



Maier-Katkin and Maier-Katkin (2004) contend that though Achebe is correct that Conrad's work is a poor book about Africa, "it is a very good book about European Imperialism, and more generally about the problem of evil." Additionally, they write that the banality of evil manifested through the complicity of inaction to stop atrocities by despotic regimes is encouraged and facilitated by "normal people in everyday occupations, such as Marlow" (600). The problem of evil in the *Heart of Darkness* resonates with the problem of evil in Rwanda and Ghana because the idea "that evil is banal does not diminish its overall impact, nor the harm it causes" (600). I believe the ignorance on the part of individuals and bureaucracies alike is one of the seeds to the banality of evil. This is seen in the actions (or inaction) of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* as well as the role of the West during the Rwanda Genocide; "acknowledging to oneself the existence of an evil, but nevertheless participating in a conspiracy of silence and concealment that allows it to flourish" is the core of *mens rea* and one of the faces of banal evil (600).

Edmond Burke famously stated, "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil, is for good men to do nothing" and this sentiment has been widely attributed to the Rwanda genocide. The West was aware of what was happening in Rwanda and failed to react to the evil. This inaction was an evil in itself but not a diabolical one rather a thoughtless and selfish evil, it was a banal evil. Ignorance may not have been the sole cause of inaction but it most certainly played its part. This ignorance is preserved

by each new story and movie about atrocities in Africa and creates a catch-22; for international news is necessary but when the only narrative is a devastating story, people think the only story is a devastating one. Leaving the West to regard a place like Africa as unimportant and an “other”.

## CHAPTER 2

### COLONIZATION, THE HUMAN CONDITION AND THE IDENTITY OF FEAR AND HATRED

Arendt writes extensively in *The Human Condition* on labor and work as two activities that make up the *vita activa*, defined as “human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something, [is] always rooted in a world of men and of manmade things which it never leaves or altogether transcends” (HC, 22). The first side of the coin is labor, in which the laborer coincides with the body and its biological activity along with “nature’s prescribed cycle” (HC, 106). *Animal laborans* are those who labor in the private realm dislocated from the body politic.

The other side, work, as Parekh (2008) writes in reference to *The Human Condition*, “is the means by which we produce the artificial world that we share in common with others” (30). Arendt believed work is done in the public realm where the products - both tangible and social - are produced to shape the forum for life to be lived; work in this realm is the fabrication of life or as Arendt termed *homo faber*. Utilizing this theory I will provide arguments that many of the perpetrators of the Rwanda genocide acted in a fashion as *homo faber* but was a corrupted form of work.

Notably, Arendt wrote about the ideas of work and labor, partly as a critique of Marx, my interest in her theory is not in her critique of Marx or how labor and work affect production, economics or markets, but rather how these ideas correlate with the phenomenon of the Rwanda Genocide

and child slavery in Ghana. Additionally, my aim is to show that much of the “evil” of the Rwanda genocide was a thoughtless evil induced by fear that was cultivated through the disruption of Rwanda’s historical culture by colonialists. The horror of the Rwanda genocide was not a demonic possession of its people but a calculated effort by a few elite extremists to manipulate the general populace by playing upon threats posed by an “other”.

The Rwanda Genocide may not have had the largest death toll when compared to other genocides; however, it was surely one of the most systematic. The killing was contained in the tiny landlocked country<sup>9</sup> and was carried out by a triad of perpetrators. The genocidaires were the Rwanda National Army, the Hutu extremist militia called the *Interhamwe*, which translated means, “those who work together” (Mamdani, 2001) and every day citizens: teachers killed students, doctors killed their patients, neighbors killed their neighbors, and families killed families. Crude farm instruments, most commonly the machete, were used for the majority of the killings. As Hatzfeld (2003) notes about a massacre that took place on the hills of Nyamata between April 11 and May 14,

“About fifty thousand Tutsis, out of a population of around fifty-nine thousand, were massacred by machete, murdered every day of the

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<sup>9</sup> This is until the mass exodus of civilians poured into the Democratic Republic of the Congo where, many of the perpetrators and killers continued murdering people in the refugee camps of Goma. As for the initial 100 days of slaughter though, the conflict did not spill over into neighboring countries.

week, from nine-thirty in the morning until four in the afternoon, by Hutu neighbors and militiamen” (9).

So what caused average men and women to kill their fellow denizens - in most cases, countrymen and women who they had known their whole lives? Arendt's famous and widely criticized thesis on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, "the banality of evil" has become a popular and frequently used theory for explaining the Rwandan genocide; like the thoughtlessness of Eichmann, I believe some of the murder that took place during 1994 to be a thoughtless and banal evil that infected much of the population. From the language and terminology of post-genocide testimony given by survivors and perpetrators alike we will see that many believed they were doing communal work by killing their fellow countrymen. Since 1994, the past decade and a half has given birth to an unending list of stories and events of survivors; a smaller portion has been devoted to the stories of the perpetrators. The statements of those who did the killing, though, can provide keen insight and a richer understanding to how people act in chaos, what drives people to commit some of the most horrendous crimes imaginable and the impact fear and misinformation can have on a people. What is additionally significant is the history of colonialism in the region of Rwanda and the impact colonization had in establishing and supporting a polarization of the two groups of Rwandese, Hutu and Tutsi. Because of the colonization that took place, the long standing traditions and systems within pre-colonial Rwanda were changed and utilized to manipulate the

local people, benefit the colonialists and create a division of 'otherness' between the two groups, Hutu and Tutsi.

The killing that took place from “nine-thirty in the morning, until four in the afternoon” gives us our first example of how work and labor, as Arendt noted, “meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life” (HC, 84). The daily grind of working the fields, from morning until night, was replaced during the genocide with a new work, killing the enemy. During and after the genocide, many of the genocidaires referred to the killings as “work”; after this “work” took over the common work done in the fields, it became the new occupation for thousands of farmers and average Rwandese citizens. It evolved into more than just terminology and into a lifestyle. “In the beginning the Tutsis were many and frightened and not very active- that made our *work*<sup>10</sup> easier” (61), “The workday didn’t last as long as in the fields” (62). It was necessary (in their minds) to eliminate the enemy because of the threat that many believed the Tutsi posed. With the previous century of colonization, social instability and hate propaganda came a myriad of myths and fears that led to the belief that in order to have a public realm free from the enemy, then the enemy must be eliminated.

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<sup>10</sup> My emphasis added.

It is important to first point out that despite the fact that most of Rwanda's victims were of Tutsi ethnicity, the genocide cannot simply be diminished to only a Hutu against Tutsi conflict (Newbury & Newbury, 1999). Reducing the conflict as a simple, Hutu versus Tutsi one is "unconvincing" and what Lemarchand (2009) calls the "reductionist trap". The history of the two ethnicities is a complex and long one. Much of the dichotomy between the two groups, during the time of the genocide, was based upon myths established by colonial governments and originally conceived by the explorer John Hanning Speke.

The region of Rwanda, once called '*Ruanda-Urundi*' was taken over by foreign control in 1899. In 1858 the British explorer Hanning Speke was the first to reach the area when he began analyzing and comparing the physical characteristics between Hutus and Tutsis. When Speke arrived in the region, there was clearly an established society. Obviously he did not coin the names Hutu and Tutsi what is more though, is he did not fully understand the nuances and differences between the two. Speke believed the Tutsi to be a superior race to the Hutu and Twa, additionally believing Tutsi to be descendants of Ham, the son of Noah, having migrated from Ethiopia sometime in the past.

Termed the Hamitic Hypothesis, it was a widespread belief held by colonizers throughout Africa, that Negro civilizations throughout sub-Saharan Africa must have gotten their start from some sort of Caucasian influence. It was an inherently racist belief that the black civilizations could

not have developed into functional and ordered societies on their own (Mamdani, 2001). Here is where the story of the Hutu and Tutsi origins becomes useful and significant. The Tutsi held the established monarchy and the peasants were known as the Hutu. With the Hamitic Hypothesis already ingrained in Speke he needed a way of explaining the superiority of one group over the other.

The genesis of the Hutu and Tutsi, according to their own history, begins with the first, mythological king Nkuba who lived in heaven with his wife, Nyagasani. The two had three children, Kigwa and Tutsi, their sons, and Nyampundu their daughter. The Three children fell from heaven and Kigwa married his sister Nyampundu. Later, Tutsi married their daughter. This established the two clans, the Abanyiginya clan, descendants of Kigwa and Nyampundu, and the Abeega clan, descendants of Tutsi and his niece/wife. The Mwami or king of the historical monarchy in the Rwanda region was chosen from one of these two royal clans (79).

The social difference between the clans began when Kigwa's three sons – Gatwa, Gahutu, and Gatutsi went to ask *Imana* (God) to give them the social faculties they were lacking. First was Gatutsi who was given anger. Second was Gahutu and when he arrived all that was left for him was disobedience and labor. Lastly, for Gatwa the only faculty remaining was gluttony. After the three sons accepted their faculties, their father Kigwa decided to test them. He gave them all a calabash of milk and told



them to watch over it for the night<sup>11</sup>. The next day, Gatwa had gluttonously drunk all of his milk, Gahutu had clumsily spilled his and Gatutsi had kept his safe. So Kigwa bestowed the kingship upon Gatutsi and commanded him to watch and rule over the greedy Gatwa and the klutzy peasant Gahutu; and through this mythology, the Tutsi monarchy began (Mamadani, 2001).

Whether or not Speke knew of this mythology is irrelevant. Through the lens of many Europeans during colonialism, the Negro in Africa was a brutish savage so any origin explanations given by a native would not have been considered as accurate. Through the imperialistic, arrogant and racist ethos of colonialism, ludicrous notions like the Hamitic Hypothesis would have to suffice. Roughly 40 years later when Germany took control over the region, the colonizers accepted the idea of Hamitic migration and manipulated the established monarchy - led by the *Mwami* (king) – as well as Tutsis into positions of authority and power, thus relegating the Hutu to levels of subjugation (Kellow and Steeves, 1998). When Germany lost control over the region in 1916 after World War I, the Belgians took over and continued the policies of Tutsi dominance in society, emphasizing a difference and polarity in ethnicity (113). The official census of 1933-34

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<sup>11</sup> In Rwanda basket weaving is a very large part of the culture. Though I did not see many calabashes being used, I did see baskets that were so tightly woven they could hold liquids such as milk. I found this to be an interesting and impressive accomplishment. The baskets are also used in post-genocide society to bring about healing through reconciliation efforts where survivors and perpetrators weave baskets together.

presented the first time where people were officially given ethnic identities and recognized politically and socially by identity cards. These identity cards became one of the most pivotal tools in identifying whom to kill 60 years later during the genocide. As Mamdani (2001) notes, it was “the colonial state in the decade from the mid-1920’s to the mid-1930’s that constructed Hutu as *indigenous* Bantu and Tutsi as *alien* Hamites”. This began the perception of Tutsi as the *settler* and the Hutu as *native*; the significance being that genocide against a settler is rationalized through questioning the very legitimacy of the *alien settler*. In turn this makes it easy for the *alien* to be set apart as an enemy and consequently give the *native* an easy conscience in its attempt to exterminate the “other” (13).

As we have already seen with Rwandan mythology, Hutu and Tutsi are anything but simple categories of ethnic identity. The nature between the two ethnicities over the course of history was continually changing, rather than being solely based on bloodlines or familial practices. There was centuries of intermarrying as well as shared language and religion.

At one point in the history of the two ethnicities, a Hutu and Tutsi could virtually change places over night and represented a class system as opposed to an ethnicity. For example, someone who owned ten cows would be a Tutsi, and someone with nine or less was a Hutu. The death or loss of a cow or the birth of a calf could propel or sink one to a different

class instantly (Mamdani, 2001)<sup>12</sup>. The “10 cow rule” is contested by some based upon empirical evidence that the numbers of cows and Tutsi recorded during the 1933-34 census does not equate the correct numbers in order for Tutsi ethnicity to be based solely on how many cows one owned (98). In the previously discussed Rwandan mythology there is a strong parallel to the story of Kigwa’s three sons who were given milk; Gatutsi was given kingship and Gahutu and Gatwa were made to be peasants. Though this is an interesting and important point it does not provide enough evidence to fully understand the history of the two ethnicities.

As Newbury and Newbury (2002) note, there are two common views about Rwanda’s historical ethnicity; the primordialist point of view and the instrumentalist point of view. The primordialist theory is that ethnicity alone explains conflict between two groups. It assumes that both groups have an unchanging biological and cultural past, in which both ethnic groups have been pitted against each other from the beginning.

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<sup>12</sup> I first read this detail on a board describing Rwanda history in the Rwanda National Museum in Butare, Rwanda, which sparked my interest in learning more about the Hutu/Tutsi origins and gave birth to my desire to write this thesis. This view also makes additional sense when one sees the huge importance of cows in Rwanda today. Anytime there is a big celebration or wedding, cows are either given as a dowry or slaughtered for a feast. After final exams in the school I taught, there would be a bull killed in honor of the students who performed well and I always remember the school being abuzz due to their excitement to eat meat. Another example of the importance of cows came from one of my colleagues in Rwanda who saw a raffle at a bar with the grand prize being a cow. The more beer bottle tops one collected the better the chance to win the bull.

The instrumentalist point of view is that, prior to colonialism, there was only one society in Rwanda without any important distinction between the two ethnicities and that ethnic identities are determined by external factors such as colonial policies. What makes the Rwanda situation more complex is that neither of the two views about Rwanda's ethnic past, - primordialist or instrumentalist - can fully represent Rwanda's historical ethnicity (Newbury and Newbury, 1999). It is difficult for foreigners today to comprehend the historical complexities of the two groups and can be assumed that the colonizers would have had just as much difficulty differentiating the true characteristics of Hutu and Tutsi. For the colonizers it would be simpler to reduce the two groups into two counterparts rather than preserve their ethnic accuracy; colonialism itself is an inherently racist and imperialist ideology, so authentic cultural structures between the Hutu and Tutsi would not have mattered to the colonizers. Lemarchand (2009) notices that the Belgian colonizers never recognized much of the nuances between the two groups and contributed greatly to the polarity between the two ethnicities in their attempts to make the complexities more "legible" (9). For Newbury and Newbury (1999), "it is politics that makes ethnicity significant (or, indeed, insignificant), not ethnicity which invariably defines politics" (313).

In his essay on the theory of anger amongst cultural groups Arjun Appadurai (2006) believes that the largest scale of violence amongst ethnic groups emerges when there is a 'fear of small numbers'. Appadurai notes,

“Large-scale exercises in counting and naming populations in the modern period and worries about peoplehood, entitlements, and geographical mobility created situations where large numbers of people turned immoderately suspicious about the ‘real’ identities of their ethnic neighbors. That is, they begin to suspect that everyday contrastive labels with which they live (what [he] has called benign relations) conceal dangerous collective identities which can be handled only by ethnocide or some form of extreme social death for the ethnic other” (88).

This makes a strong case for what happened in Rwanda with the 1933-34 census that counted Tutsi and officially named them. The census also established the Tutsi as a minority, making them an “ethnic other” instead of a group that identifies as small part of the larger whole. Over the next three decades, with the help of colonizers who made large steps to solidify the new established groups as two separate races, the memory that both Hutu and Tutsi had a functioning cultural system in place before foreigners had arrived began to fade. For instance, prior to 1900 the “Hutu” did not identify “the Tutsi” as an “Other” in the political sense, instead it was “a

locus of personal identity” (Newbury and Newbury, 1999). Eventually, the majority began to fear the small group of Tutsi as a threat.

In 1959-1961 the Hutu Revolution took place and the Hutu took over power after the exit of Belgian colonizers. The change in power, as Newbury and Newbury (1999) state, “was clearly a political struggle against the oppression of a ‘dual colonialism’ formed of Belgian colonial power and Tutsi delegates of the central court” (296). With the death of the *Mwami* came an end to the longstanding Tutsi monarchy. The Hutu Revolution’s objective “was to drive from power those seen as oppressors” (297). What resulted however was a reversal in oppressive regimes, the exodus of millions of Tutsi refugees and the mass killings of tens of thousands of Rwandese. Both groups legitimately lay claim to eras of oppression by the other group at different times in their history, but as we have already seen the factual differences between the two ethnicities is complicated and has been called into question by many on both sides over the past decades (297).

One thing is certain however, the tension between Hutu and Tutsi was developed and exacerbated by the 60 years of colonialism in the region. The small group of individuals who designed and planned the genocide were aware of this and able to use it in their favor. They perpetuated the historical myths and played upon the fears of two ethnicities in order to garner the support of one group to carry out mass

murder against the other. How they were able to influence and instigate this was done through a calculated effort via mass communication and spurious hate rhetoric.

### INCITING FEAR AND HATRED

The Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTL) was what might be considered the fuel for the genocidal fire that spread throughout Rwanda. This and the fear that Tutsi would re-establish the monarchy are two bases the designers of the genocide utilized to carry out their horrible crimes. The hate rhetoric was used to brainwash people for years prior to the genocide. Along with the memory of colonial oppression, the hostility in Rwanda was burning and ready to explode. For Appadurai (2006), “one group begins to feel that the very existence of the other group is a danger to its own survival. State propaganda, economic fear, and migratory turbulence feed directly into this shift” (89). In Rwanda, the only thing needed was a spark and the right language in order to sustain the efforts and elimination of the “other”.

On April 6, the day before the genocide sparked, RTL began using the term *work* in reference to killing in its broadcast<sup>13</sup>. Being a

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<sup>13</sup> This fact is strong evidence that President Juvenal Habyarimana’s plane was shot down by individuals in his own administration. Those responsible have never been discovered and there are multiple theories that Paul Kagame, the head of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and current President of Rwanda was responsible. It is important to recognize that the terminology of “work” being broadcast the day before as well as the

communal society, the terminology resonated immediately with the Rwandese citizens. The reference of communal work, something that was echoed in the nature of the *interhamwe* (those who work together) was not new, but had historical meaning to many who were familiar with the Rwanda revolution in 1959, which used the same vocabulary (Kellow and Steeves, 1998) and is often considered the first Rwanda genocide.

It is important to discuss the enormous influence that radio can have on a people, especially on the people of Rwanda in 1994. Additionally, recognizing that the media's influence is not limited only to societies in developing worlds, but that what we consider the developed world can suffer the same susceptibilities. A prime example is the effect of collective reaction and is most famous from the broadcast of Orson Wells's "War of the Worlds" in 1938 by a group of actors in New York City. The actors broadcast a version of the science fiction novel from the Columbia Broadcasting System with six million Americans tuning in to the story. It resulted in "severe fright or panic" by a million people (109) who had tuned in believing the broadcast to be a real Martian invasion. This event may have taken place in America seventy years ago, however, it provides us with one of the firsts tests and theories of what can happen when an uninformed audience hinges their belief upon a media outlet.

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immediate installment of road blocks around Kigali indicates that it was a well planned assassination and exactly what was needed for the architects of the genocide to put their plans in motion.



In Africa, the emergence of radios came with the development of colonial and postcolonial societies. Prior to this much of African mass communication was oral, spoken by a sage or someone charged with addressing the village in a public square. While radios began showing up in the cities they eventually made their way from the urban areas out to the villages creating competition for these sages. Development efforts by international aid agencies provided much of Rwanda with radios and by the 1990's there was one radio for every 13 Rwandese (115).

RTLM frequently used a kill or be killed frame in its broadcasts about the Tutsi (120). To the outside world what was being broadcast in Rwanda would have been thought to be so preposterous no one would ever give it any credence. For instance, there were fabricated reports of "Tutsis as gathering guns, killing Hutu families and burning down their houses, then hiding in a church preparing for another attack". The reports got even more extreme and outlandish when the broadcasts explained that no Hutu bodies were found because the Tutsis would dissect Hutus alive, extract the organs and then eat the bodies (121). If a million people in what is and was a highly advanced country, with a plethora of media sources could become fearful of Mars attacking the planet, then its understandable that there would be a collective reaction of panic and chaos to a people with less ability to confirm the state of affairs in their country. A group of people who share ethnic hostilities towards others huddled around one radio, listening to reports that threaten their existence, is a good way to

perpetuate an atmosphere of suspicion, hatred, and terror.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, typical rural areas – like much of Rwanda - have lower literacy and education rates than metropolitan areas as well as less access to alternate forms of media. Much like the state sponsored, anti-Semitic rhetoric prior and during the Holocaust, RTLM spewed misinformation about what was happening in Rwanda, instilling fear into the masses with little to no way for Rwandese to verify the facts.

## THE NEW WORK

Rwanda is not the only area of Central Africa that has had a Hutu or Tutsi lineage. The two groups migrated over the centuries to current Rwanda and Burundi. The resettling, ecology and how long the two groups stayed in places over the course of history have an impact on what Hutu and Tutsi identities are; identities which defy the simplistic categorization of dual ethnic groups (Lemarchand, 2009). Once the fear and panic spread and people began wielding machetes against their neighbors - beginning the “work” - the killing was difficult. Aid workers in

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<sup>14</sup> When I was in Rwanda, I was struck with a vision of what it might have been like to witness people listening to these broadcasts during the genocide. Even today with much more access to alternate forms of media, cell phones, Internet cafes, and higher literacy rates, the radio is still an extremely popular and common form of news and entertainment. Street kids with no shoes or tattered clothes roam around with portable radios, every city bus in the country blasts radio programming from morning until night, alimentations, bars or small shops selling basic goods all come with either a TV or radio playing music and news. I was able to catch a glimpse of what it would be like, if every day people were receiving only one jaded message of the country and how quickly it could consume the population.

Rwanda during the genocide noticed that eventually the killers became desensitized to the violence and blood. Killing, for many, was like taking a drink instantly making him or her want to take another, continually becoming more and more intoxicated on death and gore (PBS, Ghosts of Rwanda 2004). For others, the first kill was so psychologically disturbing that they needed to lessen the impact on their minds and kill again in order to make it more normal, eventually becoming part of the individual killer (PBS, 2004) and ultimately a normal “work” day.

Fulgence Bunani, a perpetrator of the genocide said of the killings, “We always finished our jobs properly” (Hatzfeld, 2003). For him, the first time he killed, “it was a mama, and I felt too sick even in the poor light to finish her off” (21). The sick feeling though, was not enough for Fulgence to cease; rather, he eventually became accustomed to the “work” that became his daily life. Prior to the genocide, Fulgence was a farmer, and according to him, “agriculture is our real profession, not killing”. Along with countless others, he would neglect his “real profession” and instead go out “hunting”, something he felt was more unpleasant than tending to his crops, yet remaining faithful to his new work form - killing Tutsi (62).

This idea of “communal work” was continually used and broadcast through the media, and resonated with the community because of its historical significance. It had been used in the Hutu Revolution as well as in 1990 after the Rwanda Patriotic Front invaded part of the country. Massacres began to take place in parts of Rwanda after this invasion and

in some communes such as Kibilira, the massacre that took place was carried out when local officials were given instructions to “clear the bush” which meant killing the Tutsi men and “pull out the roots” which referred to killing women and children (Mamdani, 2001). Moreover this “communal work” where Hutu peasants would gather together with their machetes eventually became known as *Umuganda*<sup>15</sup> (194). It is Hannah Arendt’s theories of work that I believe speak to the conditions of men like Fulgence and their “communal work.”

Arendt believed in two separate realms, the public and the private. The private realm is where labor was done. In the private realm, labor is natural and based upon the individual. The individual is a slave to the never-ending cycle of producing only what is needed to sustain life. Arendt believed this was the closest to an animal existence that a human being could have, thus terming the action as *animal laborans*.

The public realm was where “work” was done. This is where the fabrication of lasting products creates the social walls and institutions where humans may interact with one another. It is what separates us from

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<sup>15</sup> Today in post genocide Rwanda there is still a strong atmosphere of communal work and a monthly event called *Umuganda*. On the last Saturday of each month, Rwandese are required to participate in *Umuganda*. The city is essentially shut down from morning until noon for citizens to take time and clean up their neighborhoods. On a typical *Umuganda* morning the roads will be deserted with police check points set up for those truant of their duties. Additionally shops are closed up, the market is empty and there are people doing the oddest chores around the neighborhood. I once saw a woman sweeping the dirt road, spreading the dirt around making no lasting impact from the chore.

animals and makes us human. The public realm creates the plurality of society where we work together rather than become isolated as individuals only working for ourselves. She termed this *homo faber* and through it we control the world we build rather than remain subject to it like the natural world. We change it by the building of physical and cultural walls that make the communal society operate. Arendt believed the action of *animal laborans* and consuming all that is produced without any lasting durability, threatens the existence of the public realm. The public realm where speech and action take place allow for a political community and without it we are rendered less human which is what opens the door for humans to commit the most inhumane atrocities the world has seen. Her theory is relevant to today because human beings have a tendency to commit horrible crimes against others in the name of virtue or necessity. "The inability of ordinary people to distinguish between right and wrong may lead them to enthusiastically do what is wrong believing it is right" (Maier-Katkin and Maier-Katkin, 2004).

Arendt's theory of the human condition does not fit entirely but certain elements of work can be extrapolated in order to further our thinking about the actions of the Rwandese people in 1994. During the genocide the populace moved from "work", where production creates the public realm for all and "constitutes the human artifice" (HC, 136) to a corrupted form of work. The general populace of Rwanda is 90% agriculturalist (CIA World Factbook Rwanda). These farmers were

influenced to take up weapons and kill the enemy for the common good – or what they assumed was the common good – for their own kind (Hutu). The activities of murder were not that of *animal laborans* because the actions were not taken in the private realm. The ethos of the killing was that it was done both literally in public, since the country was covered in dead bodies for months and theoretically; the call to kill was a public one, broadcasted and organized communally. One could make the argument that some of the killing had to do with protecting the private realm but ultimately it was individuals working together to protect their social existence, not individuals laboring in isolation. The very killing by average Rwandese citizens was done out of a communal work, it was the public realm in which they were acting. The threat of the Tutsi re-establishing the monarchy would have been a threat to their ability to function and participate in the political community; but the work of *homo faber* is to produce lasting structures, both physical and cultural so that all may take part. One could think of this “work” as destruction of the public realm in order to build a new and “pure” public realm free of any *alien settler*. So, the “work” done from nine to five each day during Rwanda’s holocaust was not the work of *homo faber* but a corrupted form of work.

Work, as Parekh (2008) notes, “is the means by which we produce the artificial world that we share in common with others [and] always has an element of violence since it must necessarily do violence to nature in order to achieve its products”. This idea is that in order to achieve its

products, violence must be done to nature, viewing work as a means to an end. The risk of course, is that this view of the world held by the worker will end up turning everything into a means to an end (30). Here is where work became corrupted. The relationship this has with the perpetrators of the Rwanda genocide is that their “work” became a means to an end, the end being the elimination of the ‘other’ or Tutsi and moderate Hutu.

Though the perpetrators were not producing any tangible product, which is the conventional meaning Arendt had in mind for her theory, the work was to tear down the social and cultural realm in order to get rid of its impurity. Eliminating the “Tutsi Other” did two things. First, it eliminated the threat to the public realm that many average citizens believed in and secondly, it purged the *alien settler* from the *native’s* land in order to create their own public realm. In order for this to happen though, complicity amongst the population was needed. Thus the manipulation of the social realm through media and propaganda and the idea of working together for what many believed to be the common good; or as Mamdani (2001) noted, “With clearing the land of those branded alien... the genocide would ultimately be presented as a community project” (194).

Furthermore, Fulgence and many other perpetrators during the genocide would spend time looting and stealing from their victims. In fact, one of the duties charged to many women or those less able to pick up a machete, was to collect the belongings of Tutsis in order to do their part (Hatzfeld, 2003). As one perpetrator Ignace stated, “pillaging is more

worthwhile than harvesting, because it profits everyone equally” (64). During the genocide, many killers who neglected their plots had neighbors providing enormous amounts of food for those out killing “more food than you could fit in your pot” as Fulgence described (63). Or as another perpetrator noted, “No one was going to their fields anymore. Why dig in the dirt when we were harvesting without working, eating our fill without growing a thing?” (60). This sense of community amongst the killers further highlights how the elimination of the *alien settler* was carried out through a distorted form of communal work in order to “protect” the public realm.

It is important to look at another side of the killing that took place during the genocide and understand that there was a rational fear amongst many of the perpetrators. Not all of the murder was done from the standpoint of active killing for the common good but rather a literal kill or be killed fear. Many Rwandese believed the rhetoric spewing from the radio that led people to believe Tutsi would kill them if they didn't take action first. There was another reason so many people took up the corrupted form of work and it was due to fear of the “authorities”. The authorities during the Rwanda genocide were the Army, local and national politicians, and the *interhamwe*. One perpetrator noted, “We feared the authorities' anger more than the blood we spilled” (73). The *interhamwe* were groups of young men, trained by the national army for years prior to the genocide. Originating out of soccer clubs that were sponsored by



extremist Hutu politicians, thousands of young men who had no prospect of jobs, training or schooling due to economic collapse in the 1980's were just what the architects of the genocide needed for recruitment (Gourevitch, 1998). They were energetic, resentful youth, full of angst and willing to take orders. These paramilitary groups would eventually be one of the strongest elements in carrying out the genocide. These young men were easy to manipulate, easy to brainwash and after being indoctrinated with hate and misinformation, willing to carry out horrible acts. The architects of the genocide – who were mostly Hutu extremist politicians, military and journalists - gave the *interhamwe* responsibility and a place of importance. This allowed for the *interhamwe* to intimidate and instill fear over the general populace resulting in common farmers willing to neglect their farms and daily lifestyle in exchange for killing. Otherwise, there was a chance the individual who refused to kill could be killed himself for being a sympathizer.

Once the genocide began, the *interhamwe* wasted no time in asserting its presence and control over the general population. The first day, they were sent out by district leaders to make sure that all had heard the orders to assemble; “This is how the hunt began” as one perpetrator explained (Hatzfeld, 2003). The orders were simple, everyone was to begin the work, to “kill, and fast, that’s all”. Elie Mizinge, a fifty year old man at the time of the genocide said, “[Interhamwe] repeated, ‘just kill, that is the main thing’” (131).

What is important about this example of what drove some people to kill is that it creates a caveat to Arendt's theory and my application of her "work" to the evil "work". In this context those who killed out of an immediate self-preservation do not fall into the group charged with an attempt to destroy the public realm to create a pure public realm through the communal work. Therefore, her theory cannot be applied to this situation. For instance, in his book, Uwem Akpan (2008) writes a gut-wrenching and powerful story of a Tutsi woman who requests her husband to kill her in order to spare the children. The angry mob arrives to the home and taunts the husband that if he does not kill his wife he is a Tutsi sympathizer – and ultimately there is no room in the *new* public realm for him. The husband is not represented as someone who believes in the ideology of eliminating the Tutsi and partaking in the communal "work". Rather, he realizes the greater good in his dilemma - that of his children's survival - and the imminent death of his wife. In Akpan's (2008) story, after the husband kills his wife in front of the mob, he leaves with them suggesting that he now is part of the mob moving on to the next house to continue the work; as if being sucked into the chaos was an unavoidable reality for someone in Rwanda during the genocide. What we don't know is whether or not he will eventually embrace the ideology or continue to kill only out of his need to survive.

## THE BANALITY OF IT ALL

Attempts to define evil go back as long as our understanding of right and wrong. Wrapping our heads around something as awful as the Rwanda genocide is understandably, un-understandable. The horror of the genocide resides in the vaults of our memory so vividly; we have termed the Rwanda genocide as the “Triumph of Evil” and by doing so sustained the notions of evil as diabolical and demonic. However, I do not believe the Rwanda genocide was carried out by a demonic evil and I believe that it is eventually possible to comprehend how an event like this could happen. As seen by the evidence in this chapter the general colonialists and political extremists manipulated the Rwandese population to believe those who had shared a long history together were in fact not part of the same humanity. They were manipulated by their leaders of the government to believe if they did not kill, they would be killed; either by the Tutsi in their attempts to take over power or by the radical and extremists militias who would term them sympathizers. The general population was fed lies and fear and prepared for years to begin a new work; one that would replace their daily life with a new goal of purifying the country and keeping them safe. For so many, this phenomenon was an irrational and thoughtless one. There was a lack of critical thought and judgment amongst many perpetrators of the genocide. Additionally, the circumstance many of them found themselves in left them with little other options than to kill their countrymen.

There is a famous quote from a non-conventional source that makes sense of how we arrive to the pain and horror of events like genocide. The *Star Wars* character Yoda, is famous for the wisdom he imparts to his young pupil stating, “Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.” Though his thought is influenced by Taoist philosophy, its relevance to our world today is striking and poignant and even more so to the thoughtlessness of the Rwanda genocide. Those who were willing to kill their neighbors, no longer thought of their neighbors as neighbors but as alien settlers (Mamdani, 2001). Through colonialism the Europeans tore apart the long standing and working establishment of Hutu and Tutsi culture, the two groups came to see each other as different and an “other”. This laid the foundation for fear. Despite the long history of shared culture the groups were able to forget their similarities and instead focus on the differences; those differences became a threat. For many of the Hutu, they feared the Tutsi. That fear led to the anger that they would not be able to live their lives freely and be subjected to an oppressive monarchy. The anger led to a hatred of the Tutsi; vilifying them, demonizing them and believing their existence was superfluous and no longer necessary to share. This hatred boiled for long enough for the suffering to begin. Once this suffering began many non-violent, everyday people were turned into horrifying murderers either from the lack of critical thought or the fear of being killed themselves. Either way, the capacity for mass murder emerged from a banality of evil.

## CHAPTER 3

### CHILD SLAVERY IN GHANA

Moving our attention away from the Rwanda genocide there is an emerging human rights issue currently taking place. Despite many who are unaware of its existence, modern day slavery is becoming more recognized and global efforts have been undertaken to end it. The number of slaves throughout the world is a difficult one to estimate due to the illicit nature of the practice. There is a fairly large disparity between educated guesses from roughly 12 million slaves as the International Labor Organization (ILO) claims and 27 million as suggested by Kevin Bales who is one of the leading scholars in the field. Which estimate is more accurate is of less concern, the practice exists nonetheless and efforts to understand it can be difficult. Many forms of slavery abound and defining what is and what is not slavery has become complicated for activists, lawmakers and scholars. As Miers (2000) notes, "the term slavery has been applied, however, to a whole range of differing institutions, some more exploitative than others [and] attempts to find a universally applicable definition have failed."

The aim of this chapter is not to analyze slavery as a whole but to look at a specific group of slaves and in particular the practice of child slavery in the fishing villages of Lake Volta in Ghana. My goal is to provide context to the situation of these child slaves and their slaveholders. Slavery the institution is a horrible practice. When it comes to children as

slaves it is even more horrendous. The reaction is to vilify everyone involved and to assume that only purely evil individuals could enslave children. I contend that the actions of many of these slaveholders, like the actions of many of the perpetrators in the Rwanda genocide, are not a demonic or diabolical evil but are actions stemming from the impact of poverty and as a result are not a diabolical evil but rather a thoughtless or banal evil. The result of poverty is a need to survive and for many, survival means enslaving children. I am not advocating the innocence of these slaveholders but that the demonization of them is insufficient and lacking context. They do not have a will to do evil toward children, but commit evil toward children due to the situation of poverty they live in. Additionally, the situations of these slaveholders can be highlighted through the theoretical lens of “labor” provided by Hannah Arendt. I will show that her theory on labor is insufficient in explaining the actions of these slaveholders.

## THE HISTORY AND CONDITION

Ghana has a long history of slavery. Present day Ghana has preserved many of the slave castles from the early days of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade as a reminder of the horror of the practice. Slave castles in Cape Coast, and Princess Town give the visitors a chilling idea of the horrible conditions and treatment of African people during the awful practice. One can see the last bath for slaves at Assin Manso where slaves would take their final bath after walking for months through the

forest in chains and stocks. From here slaves would eventually make their way to the many slave forts along the sea. The slave castle in Cape Coast tells the story of a slave's final moment before being taken from his/her homeland to other parts of the world. The "Door of No Return" separates the castle's dungeons from the slave ships and today still provides a chilling realization of slavery for its visitors. Sadly, slavery in Ghana is still existent however, it has taken on a new image and its roots are in the development or rather under development of rural Ghana today.

In 1957, Ghana became the first colonized country in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain its independence. After gaining its freedom from Britain the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah set out to make Ghana into an economically stable country. One of the ways in which he set out to do this was by creating the Akosombo hydroelectric project (HEP) by damming off the Volta River system, thus creating Lake Volta, (Gyau-Boakye, 2001) the world's largest artificial lake (CIA worldfactbook). With the formation of the lake and its ability to generate power, the lake also provided new benefits for the area including: water for crops, transportation, tourism and a fishing market for communities too far from the country's coast (17). Nkrumah's idea for the HEP was rooted in good intentions but the development of the lake had immediate social repercussions for much of the communities living in the area. The creating of Lake Volta required the resettlement of 80,000 people in 700 communities to a new area of 52 new resettlement villages (25). The resettlement initiative had many

problems for the families it moved. It did not take into account resettling large families into adequate housing, the living dynamics of polygamous families, or the complexities of different tribes and cultures being compressed from the 700 communities to 52 villages (25). For Gyau-Boakye (2001), “This made the development of a socially cohesive and integrated community having viable institutional infrastructure difficult to achieve.” What is more is that the relocation of life resulted in changing occupational patterns for many communities. Farming communities all of a sudden had to become fishing communities and fishing communities became farming ones (25). It is reasonable to assume that many of these new fishing communities did not understand everything about their new trade since it had not been their practiced occupation. The poor infrastructure from the resettlement and the condensing of hundreds of communities into less than a fraction of their original size surely played a large role in the regions poverty. More importantly, with farmers thrown into the fishing trade overnight, it is also no surprise that over the past fifty years the lake has been overfished resulting in a drop in fish supply for the community and added economic strain to an already poor country (Bales, 2005).

At what point children were first used as slave labor on the lake may not be known.<sup>16</sup> What we do know is that on Lake Volta children are

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<sup>16</sup> From my discussions with James Kofi Annan the Executive Director of the organization Challenging Heights - a non-governmental organization



currently used for slave labor in the fishing industry. For Dessy and Pallage (2005), “there is now a widespread agreement that poverty is a major determinant of child labour”. Considering that Africa is one of the poorest continents in the world it makes sense that compared to Asia child labor is more widespread in Africa, relatively speaking (Canagarajah and Skyt Nielsen, 2001). It is important to remember that the terms “child labor” and “child slavery” are examples of Miers (2000), aforementioned inability to find universal definitions due to the broad range of institutions and differing elements of exploitation. For our purposes, since this is not a debate about legal definitions of what constitutes slavery, we will assume the children on Lake Volta are involved in child labor exploitative enough to constitute child slavery.

Many of these children arrive to the fishing villages through a variety of ways. Some are born into the communities others come by human trafficking practices and sales transactions between either traffickers and slaveholders or slaveholders and family members. In their paper, Dessey and Pallage (2005) discuss how children are pressured to help their families with income due to poverty and that parents make decisions for their children that can end up putting their child in positions

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rescuing and supporting children and families affected by child slavery on Lake Volta – he was trafficked into slavery as a child as young as the age of six over 20 years ago. So the practice has been around as long ago as the early 1990’s. How long before that however, would be an fascinating research project for someone interested in a more in depth look at the history of child slavery in the Volta region.

of child labor or slavery. Additionally, in poor communities children are less likely to be in school leaving them more likely to spend time helping with domestic chores or providing meager forms of income for the family. If a child cannot provide enough income to support him or herself as a member of the family the child may become a burden for the family. In the case of Ghana, many traffickers know that in poor communities the burden of children on parents can be too much. With the added likelihood that the parents are uneducated or unaware of the issue of child slavery, the traffickers are successful in exploiting the situation and convincing the parents to hand over their child under false pretenses. Often times, the parents believe their child will go with the trafficker to work and learn a trade, be given an education as well as an income in return (Miers, 2000). What they do not know is that these children will ultimately end up as slaves facing horrible abuses and conditions. To better contextualize child slavery in the fishing communities of Lake Volta it is best to present the situation through the narrative of one of the lakes victims.

On Adakope beach, Godwin starts fishing at 2 in the morning and works until 8 at night. He has no idea what his last name is or his age and his only sense of time is that he has celebrated Christmas three times. When talking about the abuses he and the other children face by the hands of their masters he states, “they are crying because they are being

beaten". Since Godwin – like many boys – has small fingers he is required to untie the tangled nets, according to him it is the duty he hates the most (Ratner, 2005).

Due to the flooding of the Volta River for the creation of the lake, there now lies an underwater forest in which many of the nets become tangled. The boys are required to swim to the lakes depths in order to untie these nets. Often times the children like Godwin get caught in the nets themselves. There have been some instances where the fisherman have actually tied weights to the children to help them drop to the bottom quicker and it is not uncommon for a child's body to wash up on the shore of a village (Bales, 2005). Stories like Godwin's are abundant among different journalists and NGO's working in the field. However, due to the illicit nature of trafficking and slavery, finding numbers, educated estimates and raw data on children like Godwin are difficult to come by. Likewise, the destination and source communities for child slaves are difficult to trace and find numbers on. All of this makes efforts to fight and understand the practice along with the slaveholders all the more difficult. The only estimate I have seen regarding numbers of child slaves in Lake Volta fishing villages is around 7,000 (Anlo, 2010). With what we do know however, we can make attempts to understand what drives the slaveholders to act in the way they do.

## POVERTY AND ITS IMPACT ON SLAVES

Many scholars agree that one of the factors driving slavery throughout the developing world is poverty. Ghana is no exception and the levels of poverty especially in the rural areas leave families to act in a desperate manner; the average Ghanaian makes around \$670 a year (Anlo, 2010). Many of the fishermen themselves live in the same impoverished communities as the rest of the rural population of the Volta region. As mentioned previously parents are often times the ones who sell their children to these slaveholders. Though many parents may not know what conditions and abuses await their children, they will nonetheless sell them in order to get an “advance” on labor because of the starvation levels they face (Bales, 2009).

One interesting detail regarding the level of desperation facing these communities in Ghana can be seen by looking at the price for a child slave on Lake Volta. The number to purchase a child ranges from US \$20 (Anlo, 2010) to \$28 (Bales, 2009) to \$40 (Annan, 2010). Furthermore, the fishermen who purchase these children at such a low price use them simply as another tool for their profession. Their catches of fish are relatively small and one of their largest expenses is the net itself. In order for the government to form the lake it was necessary to flood an entire region of Ghana - about 8500 km<sup>2</sup>, or roughly 3% of Ghana’s total surface area (Gyau-Boakye, 2001) – the land that was once home to 80,000

people is now an underwater forest<sup>17</sup>. A few problems occur from this forest. One of the biggest problems is that the nets get caught on the trees and foliage below the surface needing to be physically untangled. The fishermen use the children to do this because of their small fingers. Sometimes these nets will end up getting torn by the trees rendering them useless. Leaving fishermen with the cost of buying a new net. The price for a new net is around \$200 (Annan, 2010). This is an enormous price for someone who is unable to afford legitimate labor and pays \$20 to buy a child. This example is good evidence of one of the many reasons why slaveholders use the children. They have a very specific purpose for them, in the same way a net or wrench or other tool has a precise utility. The price tag of \$20 dollars then does not necessarily equate to the price of the child but the price for a tool to untangle the nets. The fishermen know if they cannot untangle their nets then they cannot operate their business and may not be able to survive. This entire phenomenon is exacerbated by the lack of education amongst children and adults alike. If families are so poor they need to sell children in order to survive, sending a child to

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<sup>17</sup> A new issue that is emerging is the harvesting of this underwater forest. The Government of Ghana has just recently given a Canadian logging company the approval to begin work on the underwater forest (Odoi-Larbi, 2009). There is an estimated \$2.8 billion's worth of timber below the surface that could provide a substantial boost to the regions economy. However, the dilemma that is created is that the underwater forest provides a natural habitat for fish and could further deplete the fish population of an already dwindling volume of fish. Additionally, the children stay afloat when they are stranded in the lake's waters by using the tree stumps that poke up above the waters surface.

school would be out of the question. Now that we have seen the impact poverty has not only on the children and their families but the slaveholders as well we can begin to look at the idea of labor and the “evil” of these slaveholders.

## SLAVE LABOR

“Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide merely to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it; the life of an exploiter or slaveholder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human” (HC, 176). This provocative quote allows for us to look at the slaveholders in Ghana in a more nuanced fashion. For Arendt slaveholders are men of action, and though today we see this action as illegal, immoral and harmful, Arendt would argue that slaveholders free themselves from necessity; “to labor meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life” (HC, 84). Though we cannot say that Arendt would approve of the actions of the slaveholders in Ghana, she would certainly have to rethink her stance on slavery as labor enabling the slave master to enjoy the good life or take part in the public realm. This was the view of the ancient Greeks who influenced much of Arendt’s thought –

“because men were dominated by the necessities of life, they could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force” (HC, 84).

For Arendt, it is when there is no speech or action that life is no longer lived among men and cease to be human (HC, 176). So the life of slaveholder may be unjust but as Arendt sees it, is still human because of the action involved of taking the slave thus creating freedom for himself or herself. What Arendt does not take into account however, is that in the situation of child slavery on Lake Volta, these slave masters have taken slaves and still remain un-free. They are themselves slaves to something else, in this case the lake and above all the poverty that they are unable to escape. Here slavery does not provide freedom for the slaveholder to enjoy the “good life”. Arendt equates the action of labor as *animal laborans* or an animal like behavior in which only what is necessary for sustaining life is produced. By laboring, individuals are not taking part in the public realm and the public realm for Arendt is the place that distinguishes us from animals. This is where her theory falls short for our purposes. The reality of these slaveholders challenges the notion of evil and the way we the West thinks about conflict, disaster and human rights abuses in places like Ghana. Since the subjects in the case do not fall in line with traditional slaveholders deeming them savage or un-evolved is

insufficient. Now that there is some context provided for the phenomenon of child slavery on Lake Volta in Ghana, we can begin to look at the “evil” of these slaveholders’ actions.

The slaveholders in Ghana are not seeking out children because of their hatred for youth but because they are the only instrument available for their survival. Either they lack the critical thought to see their actions as harmful or they ignore their moral compass because their survival is more important. The latter is the equivalent to the example of the husband during the Rwanda genocide who killed out of a need to survive, not out of diabolically evil nature. Either way their “evil” is not diabolical but thoughtless.

It is important to briefly discuss the distinction between the evil of historical slavery and evil of modern day slavery in Ghana. The use of slaves from Africa during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was based upon racist ideology. People with black skin were considered less than human and because of this white supremacy, the practice of stealing Africans away from their homeland and forced into a life of torture was justified. When huge amounts of wealth were amassed by slavery the practice became even more vindicated. The difference between the historical form of slavery and what we see on the shores of Lake Volta however, is that these children are not enslaved because slave masters believe them to be less than human and therefore a justified practice. The children are seen as a tool or means to help them escape the poverty they live in and the



only method of their survival. This was not the reality of the white plantation owner in the American South. They lived a life of luxury and the less than human status of a slave, allowed abuses toward them inconsequential. The suffering of African slaves allowed plantation owners the freedom to enjoy the “good life”. It is not my goal to define the evil of these plantation owners but to show that their justification for the practice was based in racism. In Ghana, the slave masters actions are embedded in the poverty instead of an ideology of racial superiority.

Yet, the West’s focus on Africa seems to be one that espouses its people and conflicts with a horrible form of evil. Painting the picture that West is free from this horror and should be reminded that that state of the nation could be worse, it could be like Africa. This notion is obviously counter to the reality, for the evil of slavery in the American South was on a massive scale for centuries. The destruction of culture in the Belgian Congo is thought to be one of the worst genocides of all time<sup>18</sup>; genocide committed by the West. The disregard for human life for the sake of a profit margin is evil. The evil the West attempts to highlight in its distorted version of Africa is best seen in the actions of the West in Africa; not just the actions of African’s in Africa. Still, the narrative of Africa as the “Dark Continent” pervades Western thought.

This record of stereotypical Africa – the Dark Continent – as discussed in the first chapter goes back to the most influential literary work

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<sup>18</sup> See Adam Hochschild’s book *King Leopolds Ghost*

on Africa, written over a century ago. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has seemed to be the staple of describing Africa and Africans as savage and un-evolved beasts. Even Arendt was no exception to this thinking. This is seen in the writings of one of Arendt's most famous works *Origins of Totalitarianism*. As Clarence Sholé Johnson (2009) notes,

Arendt offers what sounds like a riveting critique of European forays into Africa, European conquest, white racism, and exploitation of blacks. But even as she does so, and appears to be sympathetic to the African victims, Arendt betrays an air of white racism that I take to be a roundabout, if unwitting, affirmation of white superiority. This comes out in her reference to Africans as "savages" (*Origins*, 190, 191, 194); in her evaluation of Europeans degenerating to the condition of the Africans in treating the latter as animals, differing from Africans "only in the color of their skin" (194); of her conception of Africans as "human beings who apparently were as much a part of nature as wild animals" (194); and of Africans as "human beings who [were] living without the future of a purpose and the past of an accomplishment" (190) and so were "as incomprehensible to the inmates [read Europeans] of a madhouse" (190) (79).

Perhaps Arendt - despite her influential writings and brilliant mind - fell victim herself to the ignorance held by much of the West today. She continually refers to Africa as the "Dark Continent" in *Origins of*

*Totalitarianism* leaving me suspicious that she was duped by Conrad's account of Africa like so many others. The book has been listed "among the half dozen greatest short novels in the English language" (Achebe, 1977), even though the book only provides an illusion of Africa. It stands to reason that Arendt's belief that men could be free from necessity and labor by enslaving others to labor for them could only be applied to what she could see through her Western lens. Aristotle and the Greeks felt this way and it makes sense when we look at the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. But for the slave masters in Ghana, despite their effort to be free, they remain slaves themselves.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

There is a misunderstanding about Africa held by the west. It is an ignorance regarding a whole continent full of entirely different peoples, places, customs and cultures, yet, for many it is all lumped into one big monolith. Two examples of this ignorance are seen through the medias representation of Africa through film as well as the West's attitude toward intervention in African conflict. Much of the Western notion of Africa is left from Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. His book and its famous title have remained as the quintessential definition and description of Africa for over a century. It seems to be the common go to characterization of Africa. Its racist sentiment and colonial-euro point of view lacks any real representation of Africa and its peoples. It is better read as a book about evil regardless of its African setting and the darkness in us all. Even some of the greatest minds in the Western tradition like Arendt have fallen victim to the book's mis-imaging of Africa. Her continual reference to Africa as the "Dark Continent" and its people as "savages" falls in line with the media's representation of Africa today. What we can learn from this is that all of us are susceptible to thoughtlessness.

This ignorance held about Africa by the West opens the door for evil to live in different forms. One form of evil was the inaction of the West in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. We have termed the genocide as

the “triumph of evil” and from the horror stories and testimonies wonder how such evil could happen. Much like the complicity of Conrad’s character Marlow, who remains silent about the horror and evil committed by Belgians in the Congo, the West held itself back from action in 1994. This was a fearful, selfish and thoughtless evil. Some have come to the conclusion that only evil human beings or animals can carry out the events of Rwanda in 1994. Richburg (1997) believed that fully evolved humans do not carry out genocide like the one in Rwanda. Beliefs and sentiments like this are insufficient. What happened in Rwanda was horrible and tragic; the actions of so many individuals were and still are unexplainable. However, if more people knew of the history of Rwanda and what took place prior to the genocide they would have a richer understanding of the events in 1994. The context of the holocaust in Rwanda would give an individual pause before deciding only purely evil people carry out genocide. When one learns of the background and gains more contextual understanding he or she can see that the evil of Rwanda, was a fearful, selfish, thoughtless or banal evil. Just like the fear, self-interest and thoughtlessness of the West in its lack of assistance to the people of Rwanda. Just because the U.S. and its allies did not hold the proverbial machete over Rwanda, they certainly held its fate, and more importantly hold much of the responsibility for what took place.

What is seen from a deeper look into the genocide is that so many of the perpetrators worked together in a communal fashion. This is customary and a common element too much of the culture in Rwanda. What I have argued is that the work they thought of as duty – killing their enemy – was a new work or corrupted form of the work Hannah Arendt believed made us human. In attempts to build cultural and physical walls for society, the perpetrators took the very action that is supposed to be beneficial, a common and shared public realm and attempted to make a public realm where only a certain group could participate. It sets up a paradox that to preserve the public realm in order to live and sustain life, individuals thought they must destroy life. The work in order to build cultural and social wall was done by the destruction of people who make culture and society possible.

This idea is moved from East Africa to West Africa where another human rights issue is currently taking place and has been for some time. The child slavery on Lake Volta is a horrible practice. Children face horrendous abuse and conditions no child should ever endure. The men who enslave these children are demonized as evil and horrific beasts. Once again one needs more perspective and context to understand how something like this could happen. Extreme poverty in the region and economic instability play a large role. The flooding of Lake Volta in the 1960's created many problems that its communities are suffering from

today. The fishermen who hold child slaves are themselves slaves to the lake and the poverty of the region. Their demonization is an inadequate judgment. Their evil is banal.

There needs to be a disciplined and authentic report of the variety of cultures and places throughout the African continent. There needs to be a conscientious effort by those in the media and government to understand the differences between each of the countries and the cultures within Africa and to then broadcast that to the public. If Hannah Arendt were to write a report on the banality of evil today the accused would be more than just Adolf Eichmann. From the courtroom bench a judge would see a mass of individuals culpable for much of the evil in the world, government officials, Hollywood and the media, the perpetrators of genocide, the fishermen who enslave children, and standing amongst the mass of responsible parties would be the rest of us; for as Albert Einstein once said, “the world is dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.”

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