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Re-Membering in Stormy Time: Véronique Tadjo's 'The
Shadow of Imana', Tarfia Faizullah's 'Seam,' and a Chance in
the Fight for the Oppressed Past

by

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Abstract:

This thesis sees two texts, Véronique Tadjo's *The Shadow of Imana* and Tarfia Faizullah's *Seam*, as conversational openings into discourses concerned with memory, community, trauma, nationhood and temporality within the field of contemporary African Literary criticism. As a thesis in the discipline of Literary Studies, it is engaged too in conversations surrounding form, subjectivity, representation, language and poetics.

This thesis attempts to read some elements within the scope of what is broadly termed 'memory studies' alongside these texts, wondering in which ways that lens might illuminate these works, and in turn how these texts might complicate that scope. In particular, this research believes in the potential for productive and meaningful engagement with pasts that remain present in order to establish routes into a more desirable future.

Tadjo's text arises out of the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide, while Faizullah's poetry collection is intimately organised around the Bangladeshi War of Liberation. Both these events were horrific, and continue to play out and impact the lives of individuals and nations long after their supposed endpoint. This thesis will argue, in allyship with thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Avery Gordon, that all critical subjects have a responsibility to such pasts, to acknowledge their workings in the present, and the mechanisms in which they continue to structure various national and global futures.

The complex temporality of such rupturing violence calls into question simpler temporal trajectories that plot the future as progress. The first chapter muses on the potential of remembering oneself into a community, whether that is one that is prescribed for the subject by normative discourses or not. The second chapter, working closely with Walter Benjamin's theories on excavation, wonders where these memories, or these pasts, might be sought out in the midst of traumatic silence. The third chapter considers the design of the nation, how it both depends upon and rejects particular modes of storytelling, and how that ambivalence can be harnessed and driven towards a more just and desirable future.

Introduction & Literature Review

This thesis seeks to work from within two exciting contemporary texts and produce a relevant and bold account of the ways in which memory, in all its forms, can help produce a more desirable future.

Rooted in the imaginative potential of re-membering in this contemporary moment, with all of its global deaths, I claim that the past and its warnings, its troubles, its ghosts and distress, can be dwelt in and explored from the present. What I mean here is not that the past can be brought into the present with memory, but that rather it can be *found* through excavation in the present, even with all the systems that attempt to repress it. This understanding thinks of time not as sequence, but as something more tense and deep, something like a storm – clouds clambering through, over, around, beside each other, simultaneous and changing, shot through and illuminated by the lightning of other times. Memory might, for this research project, be an attention to that lightning. Dwelling in this stormy time might allow us to revive futures that those oppressive pasts seek to dispel as possibilities. This is a project, then, about the futures that *do exist* in this present, in this past-present, and that demand intense imaginative and political labour to set in place. We need those futures. To access them is to seek and welcome the oppressed pasts hidden by oppression in the present. Alongside and with the thinkers contemplated herein, this thesis hopes to think about the present differently through memory, and believes in the work of human subjects who desire better futures.

I have two purposes in this introduction: paradigmatic and pragmatic. The initial portion of this introduction, through a review of literature, identifies the theoretical framework and fundamental positions that I take up in, prior to, and as a result of, the textual workings of this project. Following this is an outline of chapters, which will flag important texts and queries in this research project as they occur in reading order.

The two main points of enquiry in this research project probe the intersections of time and memory as well as the resultant possibilities. I am concerned with answering what it means to remember and forget in the two texts analysed here. Linked to this, I investigate how a more complex temporal paradigm enables us to imagine what is possible in memory. The two central texts analysed are Véronique Tadjo's *The Shadow of Imana*, and Tarfia Faizullah's *Seam*.

These questions of memory and time gesture towards further questions of responsibility, belonging and identity.

A warning is issued: “we must never cut off the way back” (Tadjo 38).

But what is there, in the *back*, behind us, differentiated from where we are now? How do we reach the past, or, how does it reach us? What are the consequences, the limitations and possibilities, when it does so? What are we refusing to cut off when we pay heed to Tadjo’s warning?

This literature review is the entry point into a thesis concerned exactly with these questions. In it, I take up the position that as an analyst and a human being I have a responsibility to the past, to its people and its events. This thesis will engage with the questions raised by those responsibilities. But we begin at the most obvious seam of past and present (and future) – memory.

This literature review, indeed this entire project, is deeply concerned with memory. A large portion of the literature under review here questions, hypothesises, advises and wonders about memory and its modes, its functions, its potentials, its literary values and its essences.

As a study working from and through works of literature, this review will begin with a brief description of the primary literary texts that will be read alongside more scholarly thinkers on memory.

Once these primary texts have been established, this section will offer a brief overview of the existing scholarly material on said texts.

Thereafter, the review will map modes of memory i.e. modes of remembering and modes of forgetting, as well as how they might and do work.

Finally, a nod in the direction of supplementary works of fiction. These texts have illuminated and enlightened my thinking throughout this process.

Travel/Writing

Memory involves movement, the destabilisation of the present in order to welcome the past into this moment. For the authors below, geographical movement was also a necessity, as the past and its figures lived elsewhere.

It is no coincidence that both of my primary literary texts involved the geographic movement of the authors in order for their writing to occur. These texts are both invested in and investigating events that didn’t happen to the authors personally – happenings that they

did not witness – but that nonetheless pulled deeply toward them for various reasons.

Despite their spatio-temporal absence in the moment of the event(s), both Tadjó and Faizullah have been deeply affected and effected by their subject matter. In fact, it is the nature of the interaction in their texts that prompted the question: how do we remember that which did not happen to us? And should we do so?

Tadjó's text *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* is one of the outputs of a project entitled *Rwanda: Writing as a Duty to Memory* which placed a number of writers and artists in residence in Rwanda some years after the genocide of 1994 to produce work about their time there. As the title of the project suggests, a central tenet of the considerations for these writers was the concept of memory. This was one of the first opportunities that African writers had to offer their voices on this genocide in Africa. This book is of significant importance for this project and more generally.

The English-language text that this thesis works with is translated from the original French, entitled *L'Ombre d'Imana: voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (2000), by Véronique Wakerley. While the question of translation is not a central concern for this thesis, it is important to note that the process of translation is a transformative one, in which something of the original may be lost (Coetzee 88). Working with the English translation means working with a disrupted form, in which meaning is necessarily altered. Such disruption is “inevitable, for there is never enough closeness of fit between languages for formal features of a work to be mapped across from one language to another without shifts of value” (Coetzee 88). It is interesting that given the mosaic form of the text, this translation from French to English is yet another translation layered with an accumulation of translations. The original work also produced criticism in French which does not make up a part of this literature review.

The Shadow of Imana writes Tadjó's multiple trips to Rwanda, reflecting on interactions and fictionalising characters and events before, during, and after the genocide. It is an assemblage of voices, part memoir, part investigative piece, part fictionalised travel journal. In this text, Tadjó evokes people alive and dead, perpetrator and victim, citizen and visitor, telling the story of her experience of Rwanda through a kaleidoscope of perspectives.

In her dedication, as I discuss in the first chapter on *Imana*, Tadjó invokes a collective and that collective remains an important theme throughout. Very early on, she is struck by how commonplace Kigali seems, as “the city seems to have forgotten everything” – however, she is quick to dispel the possibility, gesturing towards a misrepresentation of history, that the

occupants were behaving “*as if* the past were only a bad memory” (Tadjo 9, my emphasis). There is a fascinating knot here, in that as much as Tadjo hopes to encounter a Rwanda as it is, rather than a Rwanda which is only ‘genocide-plus’, she is shocked to find elements of and goings-on in the nation which are commonplace, everyday and ordinary. This ordinariness strikes discordantly because of the ingrained spectacular representational expectation of genocide. Rwanda and the Rwandan Genocide, the two often synonymous in ‘Rwanda as genocide-plus’, had “flashed across the world and had left an indelible horror in every heart” (Tadjo 3). Part of the journey for Tadjo is because of this knot – Rwanda and its people cannot, by virtue of basic humanist principles, be defined always and already by one event; but there is also a suspicion that after an event such as genocide there may be no room for anything ordinary or commonplace. What Tadjo carries is the burden of representational violence. She expects to find only genocide, but is surprised by the normalcy she encounters. Genocide is always the opposite of ordinary – it is spectacular, physical, visceral and materially present – the absence of all of these is jarring. In this way Tadjo’s journey is slightly incoherent – she continually aspires to encounter, re-member and write a Rwanda as it is now without lapsing into a Rwanda as forever genocide-plus. Her incoherence is marked by instances such as these above where very genuine surprise is articulated. Thus, this text is not a *bildungsroman*, in which Tadjo grows into someone with a comprehensive view of the truth of Rwanda, but it is rather a circling and unresolved journey in which she, with the chorus of voices that make up the narrative, wonders what Rwanda might mean, and what it might mean to re-member oneself into it today. She does encounter the genocide, and the manner in which it constantly moves in the present, but she also encounters many people and instances that are complex and simple, that are living and alive, in the manner of any grouping of humans in the world. The presence of the genocide is often muted, repressed, or simply *less to do with* what is happening than it is at other moments. To say that it is absent is false, a misreading, but to say that it is the only presence is equally erroneous. This knot, this struggle, is one of the ways in which the text opens Rwanda to a reader prepared to do the emotional and imaginative work of witness and engagement.

This much is clear: for Tadjo the past is much more than a memory. It is not something that only exists in the tortured minds of those who lived through, in and around it. It is a presence in the present. The past does not go away as easily as its categorisation -- distinct from present and future -- would have us believe. Throughout the course of her travels and reflections, Tadjo mingles her more journalistic impressions with fictionalised characters. She binds historically accurate conversation and imagined dialogue, continually

invoking a community of memory which she believes all of humankind is implicated in and responsible for.

In Rwanda, the “dead are screaming still” and Tadjó attempts to listen, and tries to imagine ways in which her readers and others might listen too, so that the stories of those still screaming might be heard and their tragic histories not repeated (12).

Faizullah’s collection of poems, *Seam*, is a unified piece of art, rather than an assemblage of disparate, singular poems. Their organising feature is the historical event of the Bangladeshi War of Liberation, and therein, the systematic rape of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi women by Pakistani military. Although, perhaps, it might be more accurate, though counter-intuitive, to say that it is the historical event of the systematic rape of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi women by Pakistani military that organises *Seam*, and, therein, the Bangladeshi war for independence. Or perhaps the war for independence occurred *alongside* the systematic mass-rapes. The war existed as much to allow and legitimise this sexual violence and violation as it did for Bangladeshi independence.

Faizullah was born and grew up in Texas, USA, where her parents moved in exile from the country of their birth, Bangladesh. She, too, travels to a place that is no longer (easily) her own, to Bangladesh, to return not only to a place but to a time, to 1971 and 1972, to interview female war survivors and to write about them, her, and what it means to undertake such a project.

“Why call any of it back?” (Faizullah 1971 iv) It becomes more and more apparent throughout the collection that Faizullah does not have much of a choice. This ‘why’ frames her poems. Bangladesh and the terrible time of its liberation, make a demand on her. In *Seam* she heeds that summons. She is in conversation with those women, as they are in conversation with then. She is in conversation with then, as she is in conversation with those women.

Faizullah wonders about forgetting as much as she does remembering. Memory involves both, always, and for her in this collection.

These are the primary literary texts with which I hope to explore questions of memory, temporality and responsibility. Both are written by those who have offered themselves to the living past, who have acknowledged the shadows in the sunlight of the present.

Neither are novels, and the form of each is crucial in understanding the unique relationship literature can have with memory. Tadjó and Faizullah will be read alongside and

with the theorists discussed further, and it is my belief that all will have large contributions to make in fulfilling their shared project.

Existing Scholarship

To start with the least: there is little available critical scholarship available on Faizullah's work. While there do exist a few exceptionally short and sometimes ill-tempered reviews, *Seam* has not yet been the subject of sustained academic literary attention. One reason for this might be its contemporaneity, and I certainly hope that my work with Faizullah's text will part of a rush in the coming months and years. Another factor is that *Seam* is Faizullah's debut anthology, and though she is published widely in journals and reviews, this is her first collection.

The text is an important site, a protracted consideration of a historical moment that has garnered little attention in the international imaginary. For that reason alone, it is worthy of careful and critical reading. It also offers far more than that, and Faizullah is an acclaimed contemporary poet whose work asks pertinent and probing questions of its readers as well as of its author and its subjects.

Seam is a collection that encourages deep and incisive thought, in fact it requires it. It unflinchingly documents historical horrors and the (im)possibility of bearing total witness to them. Read alongside scholarship on memory, trauma and history, I am certain that *Seam* will continue to reveal insights far surpassing its current scholarly attention.

Tadjo's oeuvre has received far more attention. She is a prominent writer and artist in Africa and has spent time in multiple countries on the continent and overseas. *The Shadow of Imana* is also part of a project of some repute, and alongside other respected African authors¹, her work and the work of the project has been thoroughly discussed.

Of the two pieces of scholarship that pay particular attention to *Imana*, both approach it in a manner different to the one in which I plan to. Snyman and de Beer's 2015 article 'Shadows of life, death and survival in the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide' reads *Imana* alongside two other texts² by African woman writers. All three texts are concerned with Rwanda and

¹ The authors that contributed texts alongside Tadjo are as follows: Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi, The Book of Bones*; Nocky Djedanoum, *Nyamirambo!*; Monique Ilboudo, *Murekatete*; Venuste Kayimahe, *France-Rwanda, les coulisses du genocide*; Koulsy Lamko, *La Phallene des collines*; Tierno Monenembo, *L'Aine des orphelins*; Meja Mwangi, 'La Grande tristesse' (unpublished); Vianney Rurangwa, *Le Genocide des Tutsi*; Abdourahman Ali Waber, *Terminus: textes pour le Rwanda*.

² The two other texts analysed in the article are, again, Monique Ilboudo's *Murekatete* and also Esther Mujawayo's *SurVivante*.

the identity of being a survivor. In particular, the article is interested in the representation of rape during the genocide and the experience of life for a rape(d) survivor thereafter.

As such, Tadjó's book is mostly elided so as to allow focus on a particular scene in the text. This scene elucidates much of what Snyman and de Beer suggest, which is that the role of a listener is an important one in the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory.

The article argues that this particular scene in *Imana* is an example of how narrative memory can assist in a re-integration of the self for a survivor. It posits that the trauma of rape, which was previously both *indicible* (unspeakable) and *invivable* (impossible to live – a type of death), can be transformed into a type of memory that can be controlled and owned, allowing the self as cohesive to emerge once more (de Beer, Snyman 115).

Snyman and de Beer are interested purely in traumatic memory and the manner in which that can be worked through. They turn to literature to examine the representations of such work. While this article gives a comprehensive summation of the nature of traumatic memory, for its purposes only one element of *Imana* was utilised. Tadjó's text is concerned with traumatic memory, but also with questions of the past and memory more generally. These concerns too should be granted consideration.

Witnessing is another crucial component of Pramod K Nayar's reflection on *Imana*, which is entitled 'Affective Travel: Terror and the Human Rights Narrative in Tadjó's 'The Shadow of Imana''. Nayar believes that Tadjó's identity as an African woman in a third-world space is important as it disrupts the trope of travel writing wherein a white/Western person travels into exotic lands to view the indigenous subject as the other/object (36). He understands *Imana* as a narrative of witnessing and mourning and believes it to be "explicitly about human rights" (37).

Nayar reflects on Tadjó's construction of Rwanda as a genocidal space, and crucially understands her work to be forward-looking, even whilst in mourning, to be ultimately engaged in a project of future-looking human rights

The narratives within Tadjó's account shift between two crucial poles, of collective grief and individual suffering. Together they constitute a subject. However, it is because this subject in mourning also seeks a change, and the freedom to change, the course of his/her life, that the speaking voice becomes a subject 'in' human rights discourse. Thus, the shift is from a subject in mourning to the subject of human rights (42).

While Nayar makes a strong argument for his reading of Tadjó's work as explicitly to do with Human Rights, it seems to me that that is not all that the text is dealing with explicitly.

Nayar's piece negates the role of an integration of the past, a reckoning with history and a movement in memory in *Imana*. He does insightfully read Tadjó's conception of Human Rights and the future-bound subject, but depicts a linear/progressive shift that is out of joint with Tadjó's concept of time and the subject.

Tadjó has written academically on the subject of memory and trauma, and her thoughts in 'Genocide: The Changing Landscape of memory in Kigali' are pertinent for reading *Imana*, *Seam*, and many other texts concerned with similar themes.

The article begins with a comprehensive contextualisation and historical placing of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It is clear from this account that Tadjó remains cognisant of the manner in which the past and the present so often collide. She insists, against initial media reports (emerging mostly in the West) that the genocide was not "an unpredictable outburst of violence" but that, instead, it had a particular and important history. In other words, the Rwandan stage had long been set for such horror (379).

In a spirit that imbues Faizullah's work and this reading of their texts, Tadjó travelled to Rwanda sure that "it was my duty not to confine myself to the borders of my national identity" (382). Here she insists on a collective responsibility and duty broader than an oft-imposed and passively-accepted national consciousness.

Tadjó travelled to Rwanda to write about the genocide after it had occurred, and indeed she discovered that "the legacy of the genocide lives on" (383). This statement runs a little more in line with her expectations of what would Rwanda would be like. Initially she encounters normalcy and is surprised. Now she is confronted with the persistence of the genocide, and I do not believe this contradicts her earlier surprise. The fact that the genocide's persistence is often unspoken, painful and reserved rather than spectacular and visceral forces a conversation about history, temporality and futures that is more nuanced and productive than an overwhelmed viewership of the spectacle of the genocide's representation. Tadjó asks her readers not to be viewers, but to be listening witnesses.

As is often suggested in *Imana* and more explicitly in Boubacar Boris Diop's title from the same project *Murambi, the Book of Bones*, literature and writing are important in working against the history that encouraged the genocide. Tadjó writes in this article that

literature provides a positive imagination for new ways of being, that it allows people to embrace difference and the Other, and that it breaks down barriers between individual and collective, in terms of both suffering and memory (383).

Tadjo is concerned about the manner in which memory of the genocide is being institutionalized, and who has the power to influence collective memory. She cautions that “memorials involve a choice between what will be remembered and what will be forgotten, and they can hide as much as they reveal” (387).

Undoubtedly, memory, in both forgetting and remembering, is a complicated and important process. The next section will attempt to more clearly map types of memory and the intersections between them.

Mapping Memory

Memory as a catch-all term is misleading. It is a category that contains multitudes, some with such noticeable difference as to make the category obsolete in any critical engagement. When one discusses memory, there are always at least two things being discussed, both remembering and forgetting. Societies and individuals engage in remembering or forgetting for different reasons, sometimes with their agency and desire and sometimes without.

This section will review scholarly work on types of memory, tracing the field from its earliest proponents to some of the polyphonic contemporary literature. I begin with the category perhaps most notable for the way it breaks with colloquial conceptions of memory: traumatic memory.

Cathy Caruth edited a book called *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* and in the preface states the paradox of traumatic recall, that is, the traumatic event actively pushes memory away (viii). The memory she refers to is narrative memory, as trauma is not easily translated into a testimony in socially-legitimised language³. She rallies against traditional criteria of truth and falsehood, claiming that traumatic memory requires a new form of listening and engagement to recognize the truth of those memories. For her, this is an urgent task. I believe Faizullah and Tadjo agree with this urgency and are, in fact, engaged in the praxis of imagining new ways of engagement and listening.

³ This refers to language that has legal and social power – language engendered by traditional concepts of reason, clarity and coherence.

Caruth points to the developing theme of this review: the past in the present, when she says that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” and “the traumatized [...] carry an impossible history with them” (4,5). In traumatic memory the linearity of time is challenged by a temporality that defies such a trajectory. Caruth defines trauma by this slipperiness, saying that it uniquely and precisely refuses to be simply located and insistently appears “outside of the boundaries of any single time or place” (9).

So, then, both Faizullah and Tadjoo, though they engage outside the spatio-temporal moment of the event, can remain witnesses to traumatic *memory*, and further than that, as will be demonstrated later, they re-member themselves into the communities they write from.

Caruth reminds one throughout the book that traumatic memory is difficult, and its history is difficult. It requires nuance, patience and care to assemble its fragments. Caruth’s insistence on this caring and patient impulse is invigorating for this project, which seeks to, alongside and through the texts it discusses, produce a mode of listening for truths that are slippery, evasive, perhaps even messy but not any less important for all of this. There is a certain risk taken by Tadjoo and Faizullah, in their attempts to access what lies outside normative criteria for truth. This requires new narratives of the nation, and original forms to take on what has been elided and forgotten in the institutions that determine official national memory. Their close attention to traumatic memory recognises the “urgency of creating new ways of listening and recognizing the truth of memories that would, under traditional criteria, be considered to be false” (Caruth viii).

There is no certainty that the ways of listening Tadjoo and Faizullah attempt are sustainable or even necessarily constitutive of a practice that can be more broadly reproduced. However, I believe that the attempt made to move outside zones of objective truth and into new narratives of memory and experience need to be engaged with in a generous spirit.

One of the chapters in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* is entitled ‘The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma’. Its authors, Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, provide a comprehensive psychological history of the theory of memory. They delineate the study of the ways in which events are assimilated into the brain and thus become memory. Broadly, ordinary events enter the human brain into established modes of understanding, where they integrate and coalesce with other similar experiences and feelings. They claim it is widely accepted that “memory is an active and constructive process and that

remembering depends on existing mental schemes” (van der Kolk, van der Hart 170). This is a crucial point for their chapter and for the understanding of memory.

Ordinary memory does not allow for a one-to-one recreation of the event in the past. Events become memory through integration into other similar events through complex mental schema that assimilate and associate certain experiences. Memory is flexible. Memory is fluid. Simply, “almost all memories are malleable by constant reworking and recategorization” (van der Kolk, van der Hart 172). The manner in which memory is similar to literature surfaces here, and will be returned to later.

Of course, van der Kolk and van der Hart state that *almost all* memories are malleable. Traumatic memory is not. It does not assimilate into the established mental schema. In fact, it eludes them completely. The traumatic event is outside the realm of understanding. In its return, when it forces its way, by a process known in psychology as *intrusion*, into the psyche of the traumatized self in the present, it refuses “to be organized on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks” (172).

Much more work has been done on traumatic memory (see Herman, Wilson, Janet), but this review turns its attention now to collective memory. The transition is well-placed and useful here as, in the work of Tadjó and Faizullah, it becomes important to think of traumatic memory on a somewhat collective scale, perhaps even toward a national scale.

The term ‘collective memory’ is largely traceable to two 20th century thinkers: Emile Durkheim and his student, Maurice Halbwachs. Whilst Nicolas Russell argues that the concept of a group memory or a memory originating in the collective existed in Western Civilisation long before Halbwachs⁴, the term itself, collective memory, is distinctly Halbwachsian.

Halbwachs two books, *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, and later *The Legendary Topography of the Holy Land*, clearly detail and categorise his ideas of memory. His work is

⁴ Nicolas Russell makes a compelling historical case to show that the concepts of memory and immortality were closely linked in Antique Greece. There are some ways in which memory functions similarly today – Tadjó remembers the dead in her text so that their spirit and lessons may live on beyond their mortality. The oft-repeated phrase ‘Never Forget’ functions similarly, to remember is to keep alive, and to keep alive is to prevent similar violence as “prevention demands memories” (Amadiume, An-Na’im 16). These are examples of the ‘active past’ described by Halbwachs, that is preserved through social groups and institutions.

crucial as it rejected the commonly held view of the time that understood memory to be the subjective realm of the individual. Halbwachs stated that individuals cannot coherently remember outside of their simultaneous social groupings. Whilst individuals maintain a personal perspective their memory is not independent from the group's reconstruction. In other words, memory is social and has largely to do with how people remember together through social identity constructs. This is why 'collective memory' is central in Halbwachs' work - he viewed it as central to human existence.

Halbwachs is important for my research because his ideas of collective memory begin a conversation as to how individuals might remember events that they did not directly experience. He views collective memory as the *active* past that shapes human identity and distinct from autobiographical memory, historical memory and history.

Pierre Nora is another crucial figure in the genealogy of collective memory theory. His work draws on Halbwachs' seminal ideas as he, too, emphasises group identity and lived experience. However, Nora writes from a much later temporal location and argues that a constituting factor of globalized modernity is that human lives are now more divorced from their pasts than ever before. Whereas previously, and here he uses various peasant societies as examples, groups lived *milieus de memoire* (worlds of living), in which the past and the present overlapped and fed into one another in a manner that was neither noticed nor important, now groups are forced to cultivate *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) to maintain contact with the specificity of their past, a specificity that no longer factors in the lived daily experience of the entropic globalized world.

Nora's article *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire* details how the process of historicisation threatens to destroy memory completely as, now, "memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition" (8). The contemporary world, Nora argues, favours history over memory, and groups have to work extremely hard to cultivate and maintain the collective memory that once grounded cultural life. Modernity insists that the past is "radically other" and has instituted "the materialization of memory" in order to keep groups 'in touch' with their past (Nora 17, 14). Pierre Nora is suspicious of this process, and sees its genesis in the particularly modern

sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally.

I believe that Tadjó and Faizullah write against this demand of modernity, and insist that we are not divorced from our pasts, if we were only to look. Their texts suggest that if societies acknowledged their ghosts and offered them hospitable conversation then the future might be more welcoming for all. In some ways, Tadjó and Faizullah's writings are acts of agency against the hegemonic modernity that Nora describes. It is also true, following Caruth's earlier points about where we look for truth and what is normatively considered as reliable, factual, information, that in national monuments or sites of memory "the capacity to remember is also the capacity to elide or distort, and in other cases [...] may mean the capacity simply to forget" (Caruth 153). Tadjó and Faizullah look outside the accepted and sanctioned archives of memory. In this way they create challenged and contested sites of national and individual memory, working against Nora's modernity.

Following Halbwachs and Nora, scholars and artists continue to offer much insight into collective memory. Nora and Halbwachs, to different degrees, pay little attention to coloniality and have a large bias towards epistemologies from the Global North.

I will now turn to some of these scholars and artists and wonder alongside them if and how one might respond to the problems of memory and violence constitutive of modernity.

Wole Soyinka poses this concern as a query: how far back should memory reach? His contribution to the book *The Politics of Memory*, edited by Ifi Amadiume and Abdullah An-Na'im, entitled 'Memory, Truth and Healing' necessitates a remembering in the search for a better future.

Soyinka is acutely aware of the damages wrought onto the Global South by the colonialism and oppression that accompanied the Enlightenment, which he calls the work of destruction, after George Hardy. Soyinka suggests that collective memory is the fabric of a harmonized society, "the very warp and weft of the tapestry of history", and that memory reaches both backward and forward (22). Which is to say, to recall the past is also to gesture towards a future in which said past should be learned from, either in perpetuation or prevention, in remembrance or in reconciliation.

His thought is characteristically nuanced, as he insists that memory can reveal difficult truths not only about the periods of external oppression of Africa but also the post-independence moment of often unmitigated internal horrors⁵. For Soyinka, "it is a good thing

⁵ It is important for me to point out here that the binary suggested by the categories used by Soyinka, namely external and internal, are more for referential benefit than any practical mutual exclusivity. It would be more accurate to say that external and internal exist in a fluid third space that contains elements of both, and

that memory continues to serve as a corrective to our moral complacencies, even to the dangers of undialectical assumption of victim status” (25). Reconciliation has become an important part of the discourse in contemporary Africa, and Soyinka believes that the past, in all its uncomfortable complexity, needs to be considered and included in any movement towards a better African future:

The ignominious role of the ancient [African] rulers continues into the present, [and] serves to remind us of their complicity in the cause for which reparations are sought. Without their collaboration, with their commitment to the protection of their kind, the slave trade would have been stemmed at the source. Even if the African continent had been devastated as a consequence – well, why speculate? We only know that the continent was devastated by their choice and that their complicity, echoed today in the politics of power, clouds what should have been a clear division between victim and violator (36).

One of the things Soyinka is reminding his readers of here is the way that the past repeats itself and locates itself always in the present. Similar to what Soyinka calls ‘echoes’, Avery Gordon names ‘hauntings’ and Bhabha refers to as ‘slippages’ – these various and revealing ruptures in the rigid structures upon which hegemonic power depends – will constitute a controlling theme in the politics shimmering through this thesis.

Idowu William’s 2009 article ‘Postcolonialism, Memory and the Remaking of African Identity’ makes an inquiry into the import of defining African Identity. William concludes that it is in fact very important to have a concept of African Identity, and that such an Identity would be firmly rooted in the memory of the African.

For William, collective memory is the realm in which each person will be able to share in a general identity (425).

He cites “the power to remember” as critical to the potential for an African Identity (437). William believes that memory is possible for every human, that to be human is to be linked to a past, regardless of the content of that past – “an African can remember his/her past no matter how confused or problematic or even undefined that past may be” (437). It is unclear here whether William is referring to a personal lived past or a general social past, or to whom this past might belong, and why. This is a crucial gap in William’s argument. Kai Erikson, whose work I turn to next, addresses these queries directly. Reading them together

usually emphasise a constituting element and a supplement. For example, colonialism was a largely external project that utilised interior collaboration. He does imply this himself, establishing the binary before showing it as false.

sketches a map for a community that might belong to those who do not obviously or immediately belong to that undefined past William references. Such a community, or the belief in it, is a central motif in both Tadjo's and Faizullah's texts.

However, he is convicted in his search for an African Identity. He believes that this search can counter the depersonalization and the dehumanization of Africa and Africans in the past. He believes that "philosophy, history and literature are among the most prominent intellectual disciplines for legitimizing" a gross, inchoate image of Africa (428). This is why one reads the past; this is why one writes the past, to counter precisely these racist and prejudiced depictions of a continent and its peoples.

For William, then, though it is murky exactly how it operates, there exists a realm of an African social and collective memory, wherein the past can inform the present, and indeed the future.

Kai Erikson is more lucid on the mechanisms of collective memory. Her chapter *Notes on Trauma and Community* espouses the idea that a "shared experience becomes almost like a common culture [...] something of the sort can also happen to whole regions, even whole countries" (190). For Erikson, an experience can be shared not just by a personal witnessing or partaking, but by the effect of an event on a community. Trauma, and by extension memory, has a social dimension. She shows, importantly for the work of Tadjo and Faizullah, that in cases she studied "a number of residents who were clearly traumatized by what had happened proved to have been a long way from home when the disaster struck" (188).

One can remember and be affected by something one did not witness. This idea can be constitutive of a cultural and social memory, a shared social experience recollected, and supplements Idowu William's ideas.

An oft-evoked and crucial anecdote for this thesis is mentioned at the beginning of Avishai Margalit's book which thinks on memory and ethics, that is the story of Proust's madeleine cake. It is a story evoked in many of these texts and is a seminal moment in consideration of memory and its methods. I will return to the madeleine cake at a later stage and give particular attention to it in the second chapter on Faizullah's *Seam*.

First, to a question of methodology and interdisciplinarity. Margalit is a philosopher by category but he repeatedly draws on examples from literature in order to assist his philosophical arguments. Similarly, Avery Gordon, whose text *Ghostly Matters* is central to the considerations of this thesis, is a sociologist, though she spends the majority of her book

close reading two works of fiction. Gordon reads Luisa Valenzuela and Toni Morrison, the novelists whose work she analyses, as social theorists. For Gordon, they are best thought of as “intellectuals who use imaginative fiction both to diagnose the political dis-ease of our historical moment and to envision just what it will take to put things right” (xi). This reading privileges not the literary form (though it remains attentive to the potentials and limitations of said form) but rather the productive social critique embedded in the novelists’ work. Margalit phrases his interdisciplinarity correspondingly when he writes that “an example from a work of fiction can make my point just as well as an example taken from a work of history” (x).

There are two points to be made here. The first is that Margalit tests the boundaries between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ and finds them to be ultimately unhelpful. This is in a large part due to the second point, the concept of construction – which Margalit believes applies to both history and literature. Both of these are created by *work*, there is no mere reproduction of truth without the *work* of an author and the intervening *work* of a reader. Philosophy does not need to disentangle itself from literature, nor does sociology, and when shared concerns are present each should draw on the other in order to create the most critically full reading.

To turn to the text itself, Margalit’s book is entitled *The Ethics of Memory* and asks

Are we obligated to remember people and the past? If we are, what is the nature of this obligation? Are remembering and forgetting proper subjects of moral praise or blame? Who are the “we” who may be obligated to remember: the collective “we”, or some distributive sense of “we” that puts the obligation to remember on each and every member of the collective? (7)

The questions here for Margalit are urgent and important, and resonate in South Africa particularly, as he invokes the country and its historical moment of transitional justice, in which memory, remembering, forgetting, forgiveness and reconciliation have been ingrained as concepts in the national collective consciousness. He surmises the work of memory in South Africa by writing the hope that is “the truth about the past will, by being revealed, bring reconciliation” – a hope he is uncertain will reach fruition (5).

Margalit believes that human beings are involved in two sets of relations, thick relations and thin relations. Thick relations are with those to whom we are near and dear, and those with whom we share attributes, such as friend or parent. Thin relations are grounded not in shared personal attributes, but more generally in being human, or an aspect of being human (106).

Margalit insists that memory is crucial to thick relations being good, in the philosophical sense of ‘the good’. For Margalit, “memory is the cement that holds thick relations together, and communities of memory are the obvious habitat for thick relations” (8).

These communities of memory communicate and share memories with one another – echoing Kai Erikson – allowing members of the community who were absent at the time of the event to be “plugged in to the experience” which is *built* by a community “on a division of mnemonic labour” (Margalit 51). This is yet another corroboration of the insistence on memory as built, as constructed, as *work*. With the exception of traumatic memory, the past in the present has to be, to some degree, re-constructed and made. The past asks to be granted hospitality, and to be reconfigured in the present. While this allows opportunity for manipulation of the ‘truth’ of the past by power, something Margalit is critical of, it does mean that even without direct experience of the event one can partake in, and indeed contribute to, the way the past sings in the present. It is my belief that Tadjoo and Faizullah do this in responsible and incisive fashion.

For them, as for Margalit, “even the project of remembering the gloomiest memories is a hopeful project” (82).

Margalit’s book is a resource for this thesis particularly as I consider its ethical underpinnings. The importance of finding ways to translate scholarly work on memory (such as this) into a material reality in a country (and a world) striving to achieve deep democratic freedom cannot be discounted.

Walter Benjamin and Friends

Walter Benjamin’s work on memory is often nebulous, but it has been influential in post-Marxist thought. He and others sought to revise Marxian conceptions of time, temporality and the progression of history. His essay *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, and short piece, *Excavation and Memory*, are central scholarly texts for this thesis. Other academics and critics have used Benjamin’s thought as a point of departure and have expanded upon it in important ways. I will first mention these other thinkers before turning to Benjamin himself.

David Scott, in *Omens of Adversity*, wishes to understand what it means for those of us who, in the contemporary moment, live on in what he calls the “aftermaths” of political disaster

(2). He posits that in this present -- when the dream of the postcolonial state is in tatters, when communist utopia has faded from the realm of possibility -- time has ruptured. The present is stranded from the past and the future as anticipatory no longer exists. For Scott, this is the nexus of the present, which he sees as “endlessly extending” and “stricken with pain and immobility”, a present haunted by futures that never came to be (6).

Scott writes through, inside and around the collapse of the revolution in Grenada, which took place between 1979 and 1983. For Scott, this is a pivotal moment, not only in Caribbean history, but in a broader history of socialist and postcolonial resistance to the capitalist movement of time. Scott’s text was published in 2013, a point in time in which much has transpired since the theoretical moment of, for example, Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*. This creates in Scott’s theory a different line of flight than much of the theory examined in this thesis, with an objective toward examining the nature and possibility for political action and change in the contemporary moment.

Benjamin figures centrally in Scott’s text. He ruminates lengthily on Benjamin’s concern with the Marxist vision of history as linear and progressive, a position Jacques Derrida furthered in *Specters of Marx*. Derrida criticised the concept of “conjoined time”, finding it to be disabling due to its linear, homogenous and teleological nature (Scott 10).

Scott continues to suggest, in fairly patronising fashion, that memory and trauma are of interest *only now* that the future has “ceased to be a source of longing and anticipation” (13). Here Scott mistakes correlation for causality. He forgets that trauma was of interest in the psychoanalytic tradition, to adopt a field at random, whilst the anti-colonial and class-revolutionary projects were very much anticipating a better future.

Scott has important points to make about the immobility of the present. However, he fails to see how works like Tadjó’s and Faizullah’s might revive the future precisely by paying attention to the histories elided in the narrative of the nation.

This revival is the exact insight which Homi Bhabha offers in a chapter entitled ‘DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation’ from his seminal book *The Location of Culture*.

The Location of Culture, first published in 1994, tries to think through the moment of postcolonial gatherings in the prior homes of Empires, and what ramifications these gatherings have. He produces, through the examination of literary and theoretical texts,

concepts such as mimicry and hybridity that allow an understanding of colonial history as well as the modern nation in the moment of postcolonial diaspora.

Bhabha here shows how various literatures have opened the present up to *other histories* that are elided by the homogeneous narrative of the modern nation. When it comes to memory, Bhabha makes the salient point that those who wish to live in the modern nation (and in the contemporary hegemony of the nation-state there are few whom it benefits to live outside of it⁶) are “obliged to forget” in order to partake in the constantly-under construction national narrative (160). He insists that national memory is not historical memory, rather it “is the construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will” (160). It is my position that both Tadjoo and Faizullah refuse to allow certain narratives to be displaced and elided for the sake of this totalizing and unifying national will. I suggest that through the texts analysed herein “the nation’s totality is confronted with, and crossed by, a supplementary movement of writing” (Bhabha 154).

They write from liminal, border spaces and offer a contesting temporality, a counter-narrative of the nation. These texts reveal that the national consciousness is not a “harmonious patchwork of cultures,” rather it is designed with a centre and, crucially for Bhabha, a liminality or border that disturbs the obligation to forget, a liminality which performs a historical past in tension with the pedagogy of the national present (Bhabha 168). Tadjoo and Faizullah prevent the “national history [from looking] at itself narcissistically in the eye” (Bhabha 168).

Bhabha follows Frantz Fanon in his criticism of a nation that attempts to anchor itself in a pedagogical⁷ (here understood to mean taught and prescriptive) forgetful nation past. This causes Bhabha to ask where we (critics) might actually *find* the people, rather than some tense, deficient construction of an imagined community. He suggests we look to the borders, to the margins, to those ostensibly included in the nation but whose stories are forgotten by it.

Like Scott, Bhabha emphasises the question of temporality, and this focus is not dissimilar from foundational elements of Tadjoo and Faizullah’s text. Bhabha writes that his

⁶ See *Who Sings the Nation-State* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler.

⁷ Bhabha outlines two main concepts through which the nation and the national subject are constituted: pedagogy of the national past and performance of the national present. The people (of a nation) are the ‘objects’ of national time, which is constituted and constantly refers to a particular *forgetful* past. This is a national pedagogy. But, crucially, the people are also ‘subjects’ who perform the living present of a nation, they are the signs of vitality and contemporaneity that redeem the nation. This is the national performance. The double-movement between pedagogy and performance constitutes the temporality of the modern nation, and this movement articulates a nation “at once opened up and held together” (155).

emphasis on the temporal dimension in the inscription of these political entities – that are also potent symbolic and affective sources of cultural identity – serves to displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force. The linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes, most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity. However, the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of the ‘nation’ as a narrative strategy. As an apparatus of symbolic power, it produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or ‘cultural difference’ in the act of writing the nation. What is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is the nation as the measure of the liminality of cultural modernity (140).

Homi Bhabha is a notoriously intractable writer, but the above passage elucidates his intention in the chapter and its importance for my thesis. Similarly to Scott, Bhabha believes that a Marxist historicist account of temporality is insufficient. The ambivalence he speaks of has been outlined as the double-movement between pedagogical and performative production of the nation. Bhabha shows that cultural production emerging from and against the power of ‘the nation as sign’ displays slippages within what power likes to suggest are stable, rigid categories – for example a progressivist temporality. In their writing of the nation, Faizullah and Tadjoo dwell in these slippages, which informs their writing and their perspectives on memory and temporality, past and present and future, citizen and visitor, home and away. They “produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha 1).

It would be reckless if some portion of my work here did not pay attention to the manner in which both texts seek to write from the margins of and against the particular nation in which their stories are located. While memory is the core focus of this piece, both Rwanda and Bangladesh, and the complexity of their multiple meanings, are regularly evoked in the texts.

Every literary text has the property of multievidentiality, and this reading will emphasise certain aspects and gesture subtly toward others. That is the limitation of any literary criticism. But the nation, national memory, and the contestation of the nation as a *fixed* site of meaning must be considered in any responsible analysis of *The Shadow of Imana* and *Seam*.

Bhabha describes one of the texts he works with, *The Handsworth Songs*, as being “haunted by two moments: the arrival of the migrant population in the 1950s. and the emergence of a black British peoples in the diaspora” (156). This haunting, which for Bhabha

can engender necessary spaces of productive and counter-hegemonic practice, is a concept that is principal to Avery Gordon's scholarship.

Avery Gordon's book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* appears to me as the bravest forwarding of Benjamin's thoughts on memory. In it, Gordon takes seriously the notion of the ghost as a social figure. She shamelessly writes from a place of haunting, and embraces the position of being haunted. Haunting is the way in which the present subject is tied to past histories and Gordon is unequivocal that the past *always* haunts the present (viii). As a brief definition: "to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects" (Gordon 190).

The phrasing of that definition is important for me. The suggestion of a tethering, a link, a chain or a *seam* from the past which is woven into present-day subject formation, suggests a haunting that requires attention. A ghost needs to be listened to.

Gordon begins by emphasising the importance of a seemingly trivial statement: life is complicated. She expands this statement into a thesis of *complex personhood*, in which all people "remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others" (4).

Complexity is important. Complexity undercuts the easy assumptions of definitive categorization that defines so much of the sociological thought Gordon tries to disrupt. For Gordon, truth and fiction may very well be similar things. That is a position that this thesis takes seriously, as memory and fiction, memory and truth, fiction and memory and truth, swim together and are indiscernible in the river of time.

It is worth quoting Gordon at length on truth:

...truth is a subtle shifting entity not simply because philosophy says so or because evidentiary rules of validation are always inadequate, but because the very nature of the things whose truth is sought possesses these qualities (20).

Gordon works from within texts and moments in which "what appears to be in the past [...] is nonetheless powerfully present" (42). The literary texts chosen as the primary subjects of this thesis are in the same mould.

For Gordon, for Tadjoo and Faizullah, and indeed for myself, it is clear that "we are haunted by somethings we have been involved in, even if they appear foreign, alien, far away, doubly other" (51). Gordon requires of her reader an imaginative leap, an embracing of

a new conception of involvement, of understand and empathising and conversing with a ghost that seemingly is *doubly other* to us. The ghost, then, as social figure, may not come in the form of a personal ancestor (the idea that it might may be even more terrifying), but that does not mean that its presence is not personal. Gordon believes that the ghost, the past, has designs on us, and through our engagement with it a better future may be developed.

I turn most decisively to Gordon as she turns toward Benjamin, in her articulation of the massive potential for work that acknowledges haunting

The monad or the ghost presents itself as a sign to the thinker that there is a *chance in the fight for the oppressed past*, by which I take Benjamin to mean that the past is alive enough in the present, in the now, to warrant such an approach. Benjamin goes even further, calling on us to protect the dead from the dangers of the present as if they were proximate enough for such loving embrace [...]. This oppressed past is neither linear, a point in a sequential progression of time, nor an autonomous alternative past. In a sense, it is whatever organised violence has repressed, and in the process, formed into a past, a history, remaining nonetheless alive and accessible to encounter. [...] Indeed, to fight for an oppressed past is to make this past come alive as the lever for the work of the present: obliterating the conditions that link the violence of what seems finished with the present, ending this history and setting in place a different one (65, 66).

Walter Benjamin, then, is a crucial figure for many writers considering how the present might work with the past in order to reconfigure the terrifying prospect of a future in which the status quo rolls over in perpetuity.

Benjamin, to quote Gordon, believes that “a great deal of what can be known is tied to the search for knowing it” (69). Here, Benjamin makes methodology inseparable from the construction of knowledge. For Benjamin, memory is the medium of the past, rather than an instrument for exploring it. One must approach the past as a process of excavation. In *Excavation and Memory*, he suggests that the memory holds lesser secrets than the process of working within memory. What he means is that the recalling subject must not merely record the findings, the insight, offered at the conclusion of a search, but must pay close attention to all that was worked through to reach the insight. Benjamin tells here that memory is read for insight, that memory is the medium in which one discovers something about oneself *now*. It is not so much about the past as it was then. For Benjamin, there is no congruent relationship between the event and the memory, as if the memory of the thing were indeed the thing-in-itself. No, it matters precisely who, to borrow from Gordon, the one *being haunted* is, and the work they do with the ghost.

Recollecting with accuracy an event as close as possible to the one that occurred is not the nub of memory for Benjamin. He cares less about accuracy and more about insight -- insight as to how the past helps one understand oneself now, and how the future might rupture from the present due to such insight.

On Some Motifs in Baudelaire is perhaps the essay in which Walter Benjamin discusses memory most directly and intensively. As mentioned earlier, Proust's madeleine cake is a productive analogy.

It is alongside Proust recalling his childhood most clearly, through the smell of a madeleine cake, that Benjamin touts the impressive potential of *memoire involontaire*, or memory that is not actively sought after and intellectualised, but rather a mode of memory that allows the space for an organic and unexpected arrival of the past in the present. Benjamin suggests that an active and willed remembrance is weak, yielding little, whereas an involuntary remembrance yields all (160). Pierre Nora's distinction between *milieux de memoire* and *lieux de memoire* takes instruction from this suggestion.

Benjamin insists that the role of memory is not to convey information. He continues then to make a nebulous but intriguing distinction – when the past is figured in the present as information it is best described as 'history', when it is figured in the present as experience it is best described as 'temporality'. *Memoire involontaire* is a concept that will be deeply considered in the thesis, particularly when reading along Faizullah's *Seam*. There are also important differences that a thoughtful reading of *Seam* suggests from the *memoire involontaire* offered by Benjamin from Proust.

Memoire involontaire suggests, in an unexpected turn, that the past might be best retained in the object, rather than in the information of history. This rendering, after Proust's childhood revealing itself through the sensory engagement with baked goods and tea⁸, opens up a paradigm that *Seam* is particularly invigorated by.

There is a suggestion by Benjamin in another essay, *The Image of Proust*, that the fruit of the past is found in a process much closer to forgetting than remembering. Benjamin takes *memoire involontaire* seriously, and believes that that past which is not actively remembered, which is foregone, forgotten, returns most vividly. He underlines this point by speaking of the weaving of memory (204). This weaving is distinct from traumatic memory,

⁸ One can never say too much about the creative potential of a good cup of tea.

which forces itself into the present, instead weaving asks for the action of the agent in the present, and requires work, much as Gordon's ghosts require conversation.

To reinforce a point made in the preceding section on Benjamin, here he distinguishes between history, described as "cold knowledge", and the kind of work that fiction and literature can do:

It is not the object of the story to convey a happening *per se*, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the mark of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the mark of the potter's hand (Benjamin 161).

Memory is not just a transmitter of information. It is not the past unadapted and untouched. The working of memory in Tadjoo and Faizullah is a conversation between the past in the present, and the author. Their texts and the stories told therein, contributive to collective memory, bear the trace of the past and of their hand. This metaphor, written by Benjamin, will be utilised in understanding the ways in which the past is translated into literature and language, and how memory can be viewed as a mode of reading.

Benjamin has more to offer in this essay, and his thoughts on collective and individual pasts and their dialectic are instructive when considering the manner in which isolation from events is overcome by the intrusion of the past.

Fictional Supplements

The works of literature that make up the primary and supplementary texts in this thesis are not simply works of fiction. The other literatures reviewed herein have made it quite clear that fiction does not exist outside of a real social world, but rather operates within and in conversation with that world, responding to as much as engendering it.

I treat these novels similarly to Gordon, as offers for conversation, for winding paths of thought and experience that deserve to be responsibly and curiously followed. These texts whisper too, they show what hangs in the shadows and offer the space for hospitality to a haunted reader. Working within them, I hope to find new ways to imagine the future by acknowledging the presence of the past, and by figuring out how memory might serve a project of a reinvigorated aspirational future. *We must never cut off the way back.*

These are the authors and books I will draw on as I have conversation with Tadj, Faizullah, Gordon, Benjamin and others:

Beasts of No Nation, which is written by Uzodinwa Iweala, features the recurrence of traumatic memory in its protagonist and his best friend. The text tries to portray the sustained, seething presence of the traumatic event in a frozen present of civil war and existence as a child-soldier.

Adam Thorpe's *Nineteen Twenty-One* presents a Europe still struggling to come to terms with its immediate past, as a flabbergasted, confused and conflicted region is reflected in the struggles of one man. This man's repeated failure to represent World War One in fiction demonstrates the difficulty, and gravity, of finding ways of memory.

Butterfly Burning by Yvonne Vera lyrically captures the past and how its tensions with the present can create chaos in the lives of those who do not find ways to converse with their ghosts.

Petina Gappah's evocative novel, *The Book of Memory*, goes some way to establishing the inaccuracy, malleability and constructedness of memory. It also requires the reader to think through the role that memory plays in justice, and how a language for the past has great influence in addressing inequity in the present.

Alongside Tadj's *The Shadow of Imana* emerged Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, The Book of Bones*. It is a haunting meditation on the notions of complicity and responsibility in relation to the Rwandan genocide of 1994. His narrative unflinchingly searches out the role literature and art might play in Rwanda, for both the present and the future.

It is important at this juncture to note that the two historical events under examination here, particularly the Rwandan Genocide, have produced a large amount of creative and critical response outside the particular realm of the literary text. A number of films address similar issues to Tadj's text on Rwanda: memory, trauma and forgiveness. *Beyond the Gates* (2005), *My Neighbour, My Killer* (2009), *Kinyarwanda* (2010) and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) are a few examples. In Kigali, a monument and museum has been erected. Its mission is to educate public about the events of 1994, memorialise those who lost their lives and prevent

such violence from perpetuating. These are but a few examples of an extraordinary ecosystem of production that attempts to engage with and respond to the Rwandan Genocide.

Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates that the field of memory studies is well-furrowed, but also that there is much to learn from a synthesis of supposedly distinct modes of engagement. It is readily apparent that memory, the past and our engagement with it in the present, has a large role to play in both literary studies and the broader social world.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this thesis analyses Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana*. It begins with a paratextual reading, situating the text in the historical context that it is written from. This text asks probing questions about the nature of temporality, and the relationship between the supposedly fixed categories of past, present and future. As such, this chapter pays attention to various normative modes in which time is conceived and asks how 'The Shadow of Imana' complicates these. This leads into a discussion of the nature of memory, in remembering and forgetting, and how the work of memory is shifted due to a more complex temporal paradigm.

The second chapter engages with Faizullah's *Seam*. It opens by describing the Bangladeshi War of Liberation, central to the collection's concerns. This chapter, propelled by the poems themselves, wonders about the physical location of the past. That is to say, the question of how one might best remember is pivotal to this chapter. It considers the responsibility and role of the artist who is removed from events, through various processes, in remembering and representing them. This role is loaded with possibilities and dangers, both personally and socially, and these are teased out from Faizullah's poetry.

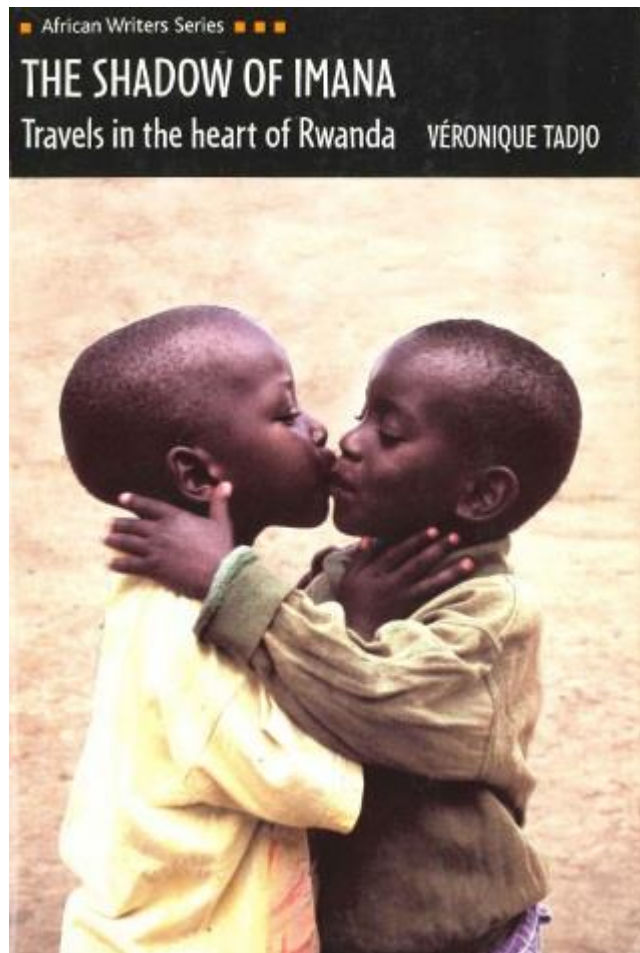
The final chapter in this thesis brings the two central texts together. *The Shadow of Imana* and *Seam* are closely read alongside chapters from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Through this reading, the concept of the nation is tested through the paradigms of literary representation, memory, difference and marginality. This chapter brings the two texts together in analytical comparison, but it also requires that the texts be brought into conversation and are read through each other. It is at this point that these texts illuminate one another.

I have decided on this structure because of its pleasing symmetry, and the fact that each text engenders different emphases in the broader fields of scholarship that are memory and temporality. It was important to me that they be allowed comprehensive response to both their particular (in Chapters One and Two) and their shared (in Chapter Three) concerns. Chapter One and Two are therefore not replications of one another but works of criticism that stand alone and open up conversations that are pursued in Chapter Three. These texts each call for nuanced response, and demand different kinds of questions from a reader.

Chapter One

Before the Start

The front cover of my copy of Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana* is an intriguing entryway into readings of the text. The 'Heinemann African Writers Series' edition, published in 2002, features a front cover dominated by a photograph. The photograph shows two young children, perhaps four or five years old, cheerfully kissing each other on the corner of the lips in what appears to be a greeting or some form of play. Both are dressed in shirts slightly too big for them, one yellow and one green. They are small. Their smallness is reinforced by a gentle high-angle shot. Neither child seems aware of the camera; they look at one another in friendship and hospitality. Their kiss is coupled with an easy embrace, tiny hands resting on the neck and shoulders of their



Front Cover of 'Imana'

counterpart. The children are assembled in a shape that resembles a cartoon-heart, which can be traced endlessly around their heads and bodies. In the heart-shaped movement around the children's bodies hundreds of years of representative archives to do with Africa are referenced, evoked and undermined.

There is little other detail in the photograph. The children are standing on what looks like a patch of bare earth, dusty and bland. What the children stand on is not without significance. A lifeless, dull patch of earth is usually symbolic of Africa. But is symbolic of an imagining of Africa that the children, happy and in communion of friendship, push against. This is not a dusty patch of Africa peopled with isolated, diseased and inchoate subjects – who are, often, at worst dehumanized and at best lifeless. In this way, Tadjó evokes a fantasy of the African continent and its subjects, and challenges the fantasy,

eventually undermining it in favour of an African future that is true to the complex subjecthood of each that aspires to change it.

The faces of the children, of which the reader can see only one side, are in significant contrast to the background pallet of the shot. One notices their fingernails, their eyelashes, and their hair. These are *just* two children, playful and companionable. Part of what the shot suggests is the ordinariness of this Rwandan trip, of this Rwanda. I pointed in the literature review toward the surprise Tadjó feels at the normalcy of life in Kigali, and this is something she struggles with throughout the text and is never quite able to resolve fully. There are definite moments of quiet, commonplace life recounted in the text. Yet, even as Tadjó attempts to articulate Rwanda as everyday and unspectacular, she cannot easily reconcile that in a lot of ways, simply, it is. Such is the power of the rigid conflation of Rwanda, its people, and the genocide of 1994 in a collective imagination. Similarly, when I first glance at the cover, I struggle to think of the Rwanda in the photograph as being a living part of Rwanda, not in contestation with the history of genocide, but rather alongside said history. This is the challenge of Rwanda – exorcising a nation from a history – and a history of representation – so violent that children can become again just children, just playing, just enjoying the sunshine and a patch of earth all their own. But nothing is ever allowed to be *just* something, especially not in Rwanda.

The photograph described is set below the full title of the text, and the name of its author. The book is entitled *The Shadow of Imana*, with the subtitle *Travels in the heart of Rwanda*. Tadjó, the author, has her name inscribed on the upper right portion of the cover. Tadjó is a prolific artist and as well as writing extensive fiction and academic texts, has also produced a body of work as a visual artist. It is therefore justifiable and important to consider the image on the cover of her text and see the visual and textual elements not as separate but as complementary to one another. The photograph on the cover provides a frame for the reading of the text presented in this chapter. There are words first, but though the photograph is below the title it is where my eye was first attracted.

I will begin this brief paratextual reading by considering the title and the photograph juxtaposed on this front cover. They both reveal little sinister, violent, or insidious in the text to come.

To begin with the title – it suggests some kind of safety, or a type of comfort. Shade can provide release from the heat of the day; it can be cool and welcoming. Many know the easy rest provided in the shadow of a tree. Indeed, Rwanda is a mountainous and cool region,

where shadows abound. Imana is a god-figure, the creator in the Banyarwandan spiritual doctrine. Imana's shadow could easily be a wonderful place to be.

The subtitle is almost invisible in its banality – it has the ring of a thousand travelogues and travel guides in all parts of the world. It evokes an essence, an arrival in and traveling through the beating heart, the centre of a place. Of course there is an explicit reference to Joseph Conrad's seemingly inescapable portrayal of the Congo in *The Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's seminal work of literary modernism founded an entire archive of literary and visual representations of Africa. These representations were constituted by a fundamental unknowability, an alterity – Africa as a place dark and inchoate. Tadjó, in her journey, as in the title, evokes and undermines this archive by repeatedly presenting a Rwanda in which the genocide is as real as the children in the photograph. The subtitle does this work by employing two metaphors: the journey and the heart.

The image of the heart, which is played out in the children described and in the dedication, invites those reading this text to think about Rwanda in a manner that privileges emotion. The heart calls for a willingness to witness, to be moved, to move in turn and to engage with the human stories Tadjó presents not as ethnographers diagnosing a social illness, but as people *listening* to other people. The other metaphor presented, that of a journey, obviously suggests movement or travel through a particular location. Alongside this, importantly, a journey speaks to a process during which the participant is likely to change, grow, be challenged and perhaps challenge in return. In some senses the reader is offered here a seat on the bus, an opportunity to travel Rwanda as companion to the author. This offer allows the reader, with imaginative exercise, to be challenged by the Rwanda represented, and perhaps to challenge some of the conclusions Tadjó draws from what she sees.

I have already described the cover photograph. The scene of children embracing and playing outside is a common one. It is played out and represented countless times the world over. Children are suggestive of three crucial ideas for Tadjó, their potent symbolism of innocence, of inheritance, and of futures: of a community, a nation, a continent and even a world. It is also an oft-repeated maxim that societies and individuals would be well-served to act with their children, and thereby the future, in mind. Such a photograph is a staple of programmes and books regarding travel to Africa, development therein, and appeals to charity for 'Africa' from more economically prosperous geographies. A picture of happy, innocent, *black* children perpetually flashes before the world's eyes. The two children on the cover invoke the shape of a heart. This fixes these two as the starting point, the focus of this text.

These two blocks as depicted, the image and the title, hardly figure a tense juxtaposition. Indeed, they seem to be supplementary and complementary. Then why do I experience such unease while I sit looking at the cover? What is it on this first encounter that piques a morbid curiosity, a sense of dread?

It must be in the one word, the single proper noun that drags up feelings few others can. Rwanda. It bears the traces of horrors that stand out even in the gruesome history of humanity.

Travels in the heart of Rwanda – these travels immediately connote an experience, an encounter, quite different from, say, *Travels in the heart of Lesotho*. ‘Rwanda’ is eerie. The word looms and leers. Rwanda is “that place where those images we had seen on television had been filmed, images that had flashed across the world and had left an indelible horror in every heart” (Tadjo 3). Rwanda and all the multiplicities it holds has been reduced to symbolise only the events of a few months in 1994.

It was in 1994 that the Rwandan Genocide took place. A long history of internecine conflict between the majority Hutu population and the minority Tutsi population culminated in the genocide, carried out largely by Hutu extremists against Tutsis and Hutu moderates. The UN reports that on the 6th April 1994, an aeroplane carrying the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down. Both Presidents died. Following this event were “several weeks of intense and systematic massacres” (UN). It is reported that 1 million people were killed and upwards of 200 000 women were raped during the period of genocide. In the face of genocide, the international community was negligent, and by 21 April only 270 UN troops remained in Rwanda (UN). Killing continued until the 4th July when the Hutu extremists were defeated. By 2000, 100 000 genocide suspects were awaiting trial in Rwanda. Millions of civilians, both perpetrators and victims, fled Rwanda after the genocide. The Rwandan Genocide is one of the most violent and horrific events in world history⁹, and “was compounded by the faltering response of the international community.” The brutality and viciousness of the Genocide far exceeds these facts, and have been represented in media since.

And so the picture of the children, after the word ‘Rwanda’, is not *just* an image of children. Photographers and editors decide where the frame begins and ends, they dictate

⁹ For an extended and far more comprehensive history of the Rwandan Genocide see Tadjo’s article ‘Genocide: The Changing Landscape of Memory in Kigali’ (2010).

what is included and excluded by the lens. We cannot see that which is not allowed by the frame. But what might live outside the frame in Rwanda? Surely only the most dreadful, the most horrific of things? Rwanda as a symbol is frozen in time, trapped in the nightmare of 1994.

One cannot even be sure that the children in the photograph are Rwandan, but that does not much matter. They are no longer just children, they are children imbued with the terrible symbolic potency of the Rwandan genocide.

It is exactly this first encounter with the word, and the way that word is read onto and weaved into the children in the photograph, that Tadjó seeks to undo in her text. On the very first page she writes that she “did not want Rwanda to remain forever a nightmare” (3). In these words, rests both an acknowledgment and a mission. She acknowledges her experience of Rwanda as a protracted nightmare in the collective human imagination since the bloody nights of 1994. Yet her mission is to reanimate Rwanda in this text, to wake from her and its nightmare. She knows that traveling in the heart of Rwanda has significance unlike travels in many other hearts. There is a past to be acknowledged and reckoned with in Rwanda, and this past congeals into an essential temporal stickiness which affects the nation and its citizens (and the continent more broadly, Tadjó argues). The importance Tadjó attributes to the work of literature and memory in Rwanda, particularly, is superlative. Through her travels and writings Tadjó seeks to contribute toward awakening Rwanda from a nightmarish genocide-drenched past-present into aspirational futures.

There is undeniable and unfathomable violence done to these children in the photograph, and many like them, by the persistent haunting of 1994. The archive mentioned previously, which leaks into nearly almost every representation, depicts Rwanda as ‘genocide plus’. Any conversation or representation about/of Rwanda begins, ends, and is beset with the trace of the genocide. It seems sometimes impossible to escape that trace when discussing Rwanda, even in an image as commonplace and happy as the one on the cover. It is not as simple as saying that these children live on in a space and time wherein historical violence looms large. They do not only signify outward, toward that history, they, the “victims of violence are themselves ‘signified upon’: they are the victims of projected fears, anxieties and dominations that do not originate within the oppressed and will not fix them in the circle of pain” (Bhabha 16). There is violence in the way that I read Rwanda onto them and them onto Rwanda. The unease, the morbid curiosity evoked as I look at those children, originates

outside of them and depends upon and thus reinforces their alterity in order to sustain those feelings.

That is why Tadjó has this mission. She does not want Rwanda to remain forever a nightmare. She does not want these children to remain forever the vessels into which the rest of the world projects its dominating anxieties. I would go so far as to say we *need* Rwanda to symbolise differently, to mean more things and different things than only the site of a nightmare.

Boubacar Boris Diop, in *Murambi, The Book of Bones* speaks to exactly the manner in which Rwanda is fixed in the global imaginary: “the word Rwanda evokes only blood and endless killings for everyone” (141). It is precisely this representation that fuels Tadjó. A singular representation is a dehumanising violence. Theirs is a shared mission.

Tadjó seeks to contribute to the release of Rwanda into its present, and into its future – symbolised by the children in the photograph – while remaining forever cognisant of the manner in which its past requests accommodation. The word she uses is *exorcise* (3). Tadjó hopes that Rwanda can be more than *only* its past, and that the children in the photograph can be children with myriad potential futures, first and foremost, once more.

To continue with this paratextual analysis for a few thoughts more, this section turns to the dedication of Tadjó’s book. The book is dedicated

*“To all of those who are gone
But who remain forever in our hearts”*

Where first it emerged visually, in the configuration of the children in the photograph, now the notion of *heart* as a frame for the novel appears textually. Tadjó has dedicated this text not to those who will read it, think about it and discuss it, but for those for whom such actions are impossible. Furthermore, while it can be understood that she is directing this dedication particularly toward those who died in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, she does not make this explicit.

This ambiguity speaks to a broader loss, one that surely reaches out, touches, and extends to every living human on earth. She evokes a collective *all of those*.

Even though she commits the book to those who cannot read it, she also intends to blur notions of their absolute distance and immobility. Those who are gone *remain*, they live still, and they are still a presence in the world left behind after the events of 1994. This

disruption of the easy binaries gone/present, departed/remaining, dead/alive is a central idea in the text. In this way she points to a renewed “past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (Bhabha 7). Tadjó’s depiction Rwanda’s past’s movement in its present is exactly this, not one rooted in sentimentality and nostalgia but rather one that speaks to her imagination of a future in which the past is a necessary component. Rwanda speaks and articulates itself beyond its fixed symbol in the world’s imaginary – that very speaking is animated by its past.

Crucially, the mechanism through which the past moves in the present is a collective one. Tadjó writes of *our hearts*, utilising the collective personal pronoun as well as the plural form. Those who remain are not unique to Tadjó, they remain with all of us, for all of us, and through all of us. A human collective is invoked in this dedication. A collective responsibility is gestured toward in this dedication. Tadjó’s understanding of collective memory is as an in-between space in which the past invigorates the present.

The past cannot be undone, but it is also a place that often should not be aspired to, especially with genocidal cases. The past cannot be undone, but the road it sets for the future can be moved away from. The past remains forever with us as we carry it in memory and forgetfulness, in story and song. Tadjó’s dedication reminds her readers of their role and inescapable implication in the continuing story of Rwanda, just as her book explores her own role in the present and future of the children in the photograph.

Before the start of the text, there is something nebulous to be said about what it might mean to carry Tadjó’s text, how it travels and the effects thereof. Because of *The Shadow of Imana* there is an assured presence of stories of Rwanda and Rwandans in the spaces that I move in while reading for this thesis. As I move from my home to university, and around the city that those spaces are located in – Johannesburg, South Africa – I carry these stories with me.

Usually Tadjó’s text is in my backpack, and as such has stopped with me and is often read at various libraries, parks, coffee-shops, bookstores and homes in South Africa. Per the dedication, then, those being recalled in the text are vivified, they remain beyond me there, in those spaces. They have travelled. I read the names of places I have never visited, I imagine faces I have never seen, and they emerge as a shadowy presence haunting the various South African spaces of my present.

“Yes, I went to Rwanda but Rwanda is also here in my country” writes Tadjó, and apart from the forced and literal movement of Rwandan citizens to South Africa and

throughout the world, her words can be abstracted – her text facilitates a world, a Rwanda, that can be accessed by a reader and analyst in South Africa – Rwanda is also here in my country (37).

Avery Gordon reminds us that “that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence” and, despite the distance in space and time, Tadjó is sure of the presence of Rwanda and its past in her life (17). Tadjó speaks *before* ever visiting Rwanda as having it “buried inside her” (3). I experienced something similar whilst carrying these texts with me these past months.

I am going to insist on the importance of what I am describing here: the carrying and reading of stories that are ostensibly situated in different geographical and temporal spaces. I think these travelings generate sites for productive analysis. When looking for those peoples or pasts that have been marginalized and excluded it is crucial to seek them out in unlikely places and times, places where their murmurs are not as overtly quietened, times where their tales are not so readily re-purposed into a hegemonic narrative. Rwanda and South Africa can easily constitute a ‘there’ and ‘here’, two separate entities in the model of the nation state. What is more interesting and politically radical is imagining the text as ‘in-between’; I believe that what Tadjó asks of her readers “can barely be approached without a method attentive to what is elusive, fantastic, contingent and often barely there” (Gordon 26).

In this project I am centrally interested in how we¹⁰ might remember things that did not happen to us, people we did not meet, and events we did not partake in – an imaginative invitation attempted by Tadjó in her text. It seems clear to me that though one may lack lived experience of a particular moment, one can remain greatly affected and effected by it. This is certainly the case for Tadjó and Rwanda.

Before the start of the text itself there are two children on the front cover whose bodies remind me of the shape of a heart. They are kissing, they are happy. Before the start there is a dedication that links all of us to all of them. There is a dedication that disputes the barrier between us and them¹¹.

¹⁰ I use the collective pronoun under advisement.

¹¹ It perhaps goes without saying, but this barrier, this emphasis on Otherness is an incredibly important one when considering the Rwandan genocide. This disruption is not merely a poetic stroke from Tadjó, it is of profound epistemological consequence.

Being in Time

The Shadow of Imana (hereafter, *Imana*) takes striking steps to undermine the formal, normative, official and fixed categorical distinctions between past, present and future. Tadjó's text, written in and by Rwanda after the genocide is very much about Rwanda before the genocide, as well as Rwanda during the genocide. *The Shadow of Imana* disturbs the singularity created by Rwanda's position as a self-contained nation – the text insists genocide is an African crisis, it is a global event. It is not just a Tutsi or a Hutu issue, nor only an issue for African citizens to address, it is a human catastrophe that impacts and has consequences for all peoples.

Throughout *Imana*, the categories past/present/future seem to slip into one another, losing efficacy, potency and usefulness. Tadjó dismisses their mutual exclusivity. *Imana* displays, in its most incisive moments, as I illustrate below, that it can be impossible to keep the past out of the present – the past breaks through the thick smog of linear time and plays pretty patterns on the earth of the present – and, in short, that attempting to address social ills by referring to the hegemonic figuring of temporality is not likely to yield positive results.

Tadjó, in particular, speaks of an in-between temporality, a past-present, and this section will look at the ways in which she establishes this third space, emerging out of a profound disruption of binary modes of locality, belonging and temporality.

The thought underlying this breakdown will be compared with other literary texts, identifying a trend in new ways that these authors demand time be considered. David Scott's work is instructive in this regard, as is the thought of Avery F Gordon. In what follows, I consider the most overt example of a "time out of joint": the persistent recurrence and invasion of traumatic memory (Scott 12). I discuss how Rwanda is figured as an important 'site/sight/cite of time', a space wherein the present becomes sticky: constituted by clamorous histories and imagined futures, where millions of subjective temporalities reveal a split in the nation itself. This analysis will lead into the next section, in which the place and importance of memory in Tadjó's text will be examined.

Yes, I went to Rwanda but Rwanda is also here in my country. The refugees are scattered all over the world, carrying within themselves the blood and fury of the abandoned dead.

And I am afraid when, in my country, I hear people talk of who belongs there and who doesn't. Inventing the idea of rejection. How is ethnic identity learned? Where does this fear of the Other come from, bringing violence in its wake?

One day, ordinary life disappears, giving way to chaos. Where were the seeds of hatred embedded? In the dark night of absolute blindness, what would I have done if I

had been caught up in the spiralling violence of the massacre? Would I have resisted betrayal? Would I have been cowardly or brave? Would I have killed or would I have let myself be killed?

Rwanda is inside me, in you, in all of us.

Rwanda is under our skin, in our blood, in our guts. In the very depths of our slumber, in our waking hearts.

It is despair and the desire to come alive again. It is death which haunts our life. It is life which overcomes death.

We must never cut off the way back. (Tadjo 37)

Through the above series of rhetorical questions, Tadjo sketches some of the ways in which she thinks about Rwanda and its place in her life. She quickly links the events of the Rwandan Genocide to the Ivory Coast. She speaks to the xenophobic sentiments, built on fragile scaffoldings of belonging, that are sweeping the contemporary world. She also asks difficult, incisive questions about how she might have responded had she been in Rwanda during the genocide. These questions evoke ambiguity and complicity, making it impossible for the reader to so easily distance and decry Rwanda and its inhumanity. She is saying here that Rwanda and the genocide have to do with all of us, and that all of us have the potential for such destruction.

I have chosen to place this extract from *Imana* at the beginning of my analysis because it illuminates a number of Tadjo's complex and crucial concerns regarding the country of Rwanda, and what that place might mean. Surely, Tadjo says, Rwanda is not locked in to its geographical location. Rwanda travels. It is made up of Rwandans, and countries and borders are always insisted upon, edited and contested by people. One of the ways, then, in which Rwanda travels is through the movement of its constituent populace. Immediately after noting the movement of Rwandans after the genocide, a diaspora of disaster, a pogrom pilgrimage, Tadjo questions the ideas of ownership, belonging and alterity.

Rwanda moves around the world in the bodies of those refugees from the horror of 1994. The dead of Rwanda move with them, inside them. And those refugees are confronted with more horror. When their home becomes the mouth of a shark and they leave the mountains of Kigali and its surroundings, Rwandans are often met with suspicion and disdain. This is the second way in which Rwanda moves.

Rwanda figures in the global imaginary as a place defined by social exclusion, ethnicity, parochialism, and unspeakable violence –

After all, Rwanda is an imaginary country. If it's so difficult to talk about in a rational way, maybe it's because it doesn't really exist. Everyone has his own Rwanda in his head and it has nothing to do with the Rwanda of others (Diop 67).

Diop speaks to this constructed Rwanda in the above extract. The Rwanda that Tadjó is attempting to free is Rwanda as it is imagined by the world, and by individuals. And Diop insists here that this matrix of imaginariums is what makes Rwanda impossible to speak about, at least rationally. His project, and Tadjó's, is to find ways to speak about the country and its people that exist, rather than those embellished constructs.

When Tadjó insists that Rwanda is *in* her country, it is these characteristics of violence and exclusion, as well as Rwandan refugee bodies, that she evokes. South Africa is constituted similarly to the Ivory Coast, Tadjó's country of birth, in that it has Rwanda in it. The gross histories of colonialism and Apartheid, as well as post-Apartheid atrocities such as the outbreaks of xenophobic violence in 2008 and 2014, or the Marikana Massacre, smack of these qualities considered to be *Rwandan* – "I am afraid when, in my country, I hear people talk of who belongs there and who doesn't" – these are words that I might have written of post-Apartheid South Africa¹², Trump's America¹³, Brexit UK¹⁴, contemporary and much of 20th century Germany¹⁵, Erdogan's Turkey¹⁶, or many other countries (Tadjó 37). These are clearly conditions not uniquely Rwandan (Tadjó 37). And yet...

While Rwanda is far from the only nation to be gripped by a discourse of social exclusion, perhaps it is far too revealing a mirror of the lack of humanity in other spaces for it (mostly in the form of refugees) to be welcomed when it arrives on their doorsteps.

The initial extract is also important for this analysis because it shows the critical role played by the interplay and interdependence of binary concepts in Tadjó's experience of and thought about Rwanda. Tadjó dismantles the accepted distance between the self/other, inside/outside, dead/alive. She insists that Rwanda is inside her. Xenophobic discourse, on the other hand, insists on the distinction between citizen and foreigner, whereas Tadjó acknowledges that Rwanda is now in the Ivory Coast, and Rwanda is part of those that live in the Ivory Coast, and indeed anywhere in the world. She touches on the closeness of the

¹² For example, see Jean Pierre Misago's 2017 article 'Xenophobic Violence in the 'Rainbow' Nation'.

¹³ For example, see Cristina Maza's 2018 article 'Refugees are Welcome in Trump's America – as Long as They are Christian'.

¹⁴ For example, see Josh Gabbatiss' 2017 article 'Brexit Strongly Linked to Xenophobia, Scientists Conclude'.

¹⁵ For example, see Sarah Wildman's 2017 article 'Meet the Far-Right Party That's Bringing Racism and Xenophobia Back to Germany'.

¹⁶ For example, see Human Rights Watch report on Turkey in 2016.

ordinary and the chaotic, and rejects any notion of superiority or self-righteousness when frankly examining the actions of genocidal perpetrators.

Imana describes how those dead and those alive, those past and those present, might not be as distant as their placement in normative discourse or accepted categorisation. The dead of Rwanda are alive. Their being alive has ramifications for binary, linear considerations of time. Memory, living through and with memory, is shown here to disrupt linear notions of temporality, as well as the binary categories dead/alive.

These dead are “under our skin, in our blood, in our guts” and they are asking something of us (Tadjo 38). The movement of Rwanda, both in its peoples and in its symbolism, into spaces and minds and *bodies* across the world is a demand, and Tadjo asks that we face it rather than reject it. It is *ours*, not theirs. Rwanda is not necessarily foreign, not obviously elsewhere, and this understanding of Rwanda as belonging to everyone requires a conception of responsibility that has largely been elided by a neo-capitalist global order made up of massive powers and insignificant, inchoate little states (easily found scattered in the Global South). One of the most memorable expressions of responsibility to a history not contained within national borders, or in other words, a collapse of the binary here/there, is made by Salman Rushdie’s stuttering character in *The Satanic Verses*, Mr ‘Whisky’ Sisodia: “The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don’t know what it means” (343).

In Tadjo’s text, Rwanda is mine, and it is yours, and it is all of ours. That is to say, Tadjo demonstrates that ours is a world haunted by the deaths there, and it is only through our living response that a repetition of the conditions of that death might be avoided in future. The dead cannot be rejected or repressed – they are active and seek engagement – this is what she intends when she writes “we must never cut off the way back”, and, as she does so, she insists that the demanding past of Rwanda, a past that sits in all of us, in all our nations, must not be abandoned and refused (Tadjo 38). If Rwanda and its past is in fact our past, if the story of Rwanda is our story, or if at the very least we are implicated in the events and their aftermaths, as Tadjo insists, questions arise. How do we, who were not there, who are not of that place in the obvious normative modes, remember and recollect? We have not experiential memory, nor post-memory, but we *do* make and remember a Rwanda, now and then, and place it as a crucial piece of our construction of Africa and of humanity. But what does, what can and what should our memory look like? And how?

Before traveling to Rwanda, Tadjo expects to encounter the dead as impactful presences in the present, and suggests our processes of memory begin there, with them.

Indeed, once she arrives she is proven correct. On her first trip to a site of a massacre Tadjó finds that “these dead are screaming still” (12). Here, Tadjó has met the dead, and they are present and visceral and audible. Something about these dead, or about the manner of their deaths, the gross inhumanity of their perishing, or indeed all of these, has broken the accepted easy linearity of time. They scream. Tadjó hears them. She wanders Rwanda, a country in its past-present, or a past not yet passed. This hearing and the practise of listening through literature contains great productive potential for Tadjó. In her attempts to “exorcise” Rwanda, she engages with and writes about these ghosts, so that they might find accommodation in a past that is currently unable to extricate itself from the present.

There is a distinction between the living and the dead, but this line is not bright, it is dull and wavering, and at times so inconspicuous as to be erased. It is at this point that Tadjó asks the most imaginative critical work from her readers. Most importantly, this distinction has *nothing* to do with a presence in the present. The difference between those dead and those alive is not a temporal distinction for Tadjó. The dead do not belong to the past in Rwanda; they exist in the present, like the living. The Rwanda that she journeys in is teeming with the dead who are present among the living, who are not settled in the past, and who make up an aspect of the future. She examines what happens when the firm walls around the present, so often wished into existence when a horrid past needs to be escaped, crumble and ghosts are ignored, the day-to-day living of an entire people, a nation, becomes precarious. This is evident when Tadjó writes that:

The dead were paying regular visits to the living and when they were with them, they would ask why they had been killed.

The town streets were filled with spirits moving around, whirling in the stifling air. They jostled the living, clambered on their backs, walked alongside them, danced around them, followed them through the crowded alleyways.

The dead would have liked to speak but no one could hear them. They would have liked to say all that they had not had time to say, all the words whose utterance they had been denied, cut from their tongues, torn from their mouths.

They were in every neighbourhood. You could feel them as they scurried past people.

The spirits were hurrying home to visit everyone they had known, in the places that they had loved and which were still their own.

And even if nothing remained but houses in ruins, they needed only a stone to rediscover the days gone by. [...]

Some of the dead were so enraged that they refused to go when the time came to quit the earth (41, 42).

Indeed, there is a definite tension in the tone of this passage. It arises from the fact that there is a presence, a deathly presence, with whom a way to converse has not yet been found. Tadjó emphasises that “the time came” but the dead would not leave – this presence in Rwanda has rejected the accepted offering of temporality, and thus have made the simple present fragile.

David Scott defines temporality as the lived experience of time passing. If we read the above Tadjó alongside Scott it becomes evident that what she complicates is historically organized time. Also known as linear time, this is an understanding in which history and time stood side by side and it was simple to track where one historical moment ended, how it led to the next, and where that next historical moment began. History’s organisation of time therefore marked not only change but also progress – time, as sorted by history, is linear, a “*succession* of cumulative instants, an endless chain of displacement of before and after” (Scott 5). Tadjó’s Rwandan time has frozen – it is stuck and there is no succession, there is no displacement. What was before may live on in what is to come. It is far harder to tell what is past, what is present, and what is future. Those categories are deeply troubled.

The frozen time Tadjó describes ruptures the Marxist notion of time claimed and propagated by independence movements, postcolonial politics and neoliberal capital (Scott 2). As well as being linear and distinctive, this historically organized time is also progressive, or aspirational. The temporal movement described here always situates the future as an inevitable improvement in comparison to the present, which in turn is constantly evolving from a dissatisfying past. In short, historically organised time is always building toward ‘a better tomorrow’ in which a past characterised by inequality and exploitation is definitively ‘left behind’.

Per linear time, the future and the past are completely separate entities. They constitute a binary. In these iterations, the past can be viewed as a tidy whole. It plays no part in constituting the future. In this understanding, time is successive linear and revolutionary.

The temporality represented in *Imana* undermines historically organised time. In the Rwanda that the text journeys through it becomes clear that this version of time no longer applies to the people who experience temporality very differently. Their experience is of a time which is *frozen*; a time which is sticky and unyielding. Their future is not utopic. Rather, it is shot through with a violent past which has left the present teeming with ghosts. Time, or the experience of being in time, has broken away from history’s categorical organisation and “the enduring temporalities of past-present-future” that informed Marxist historical reason no longer hold true (Scott 6):

So, Constance has mourned the future. The future no longer exists for her. Her days are nothing but a long anguished wait, a desire to leave for another place. The world stretches beyond the other side of those hills, far from death, far from this prison, from her captive memory, fixed, frozen in time (Tadjo 29).

Similarly, in *Butterfly Burning*, Yvonne Vera speaks of seized time, of a present and a future taken away from the people (Vera 5). These people no longer believe in the promise guaranteed by linear time. They are left to deal with the trauma of an unending present, shot through with terrible pasts. And it is precisely because the present is frozen that Tadjo urges conversation with the ghosts. That is to say, “because the present can no longer be overcome for a future of emancipation, there has to be an *accommodation* with the past” (Scott 14).

It is in the collective memory that Tadjo most convincingly locates this sticky temporality. See how she collapses the binarisation of past, present and future in the question “Who can know what slaughter, hidden behind the centuries gone by, is even now sculpting the future of a nation?” (19). In this query is the suggestion that history attempts to cover the past. This suggestion is met with certainty that though history may hide, it cannot totally dispel – what it has hidden, what it claims to be ‘past’, still has designs on the *future of a nation*.

For Tadjo, the dead are not secure in the past. Rwanda is frozen and the future is unable to adequately assail the present, which in its turn is drenched with the past. When a nation splits, reveals itself, in this fashion, when it becomes a ‘site of time’, a time sticky or *frozen*, the aspirational future guaranteed by political power is no longer bought into by the citizenry. This can have interesting effects for the grip of hegemony. All sorts of narratives usually elided by the singular national story begin to emerge. Tadjo’s text is one of these: she writes stories of raped women (67, 75), people infected with HIV during the genocide (37), someone who loved her husband’s murderer (36), garbage-hunting orphans (87) and perpetrators of genocide – even religious and trusted community members (95). This assemblage of stories presents a country far more complex and contradictory than a harmonious present would allow.

In these ways, Tadjo’s text is an untimely text, and the work of memory in *Imana* is untimely too. Jacques Derrida draws our attention to the contemporary moment as the time of untimely events. This untimeliness can be thought of as productively countering the disabling nature of Marxist conjoined time (Scott 10). A catastrophe, such as the Rwandan genocide, is an untimely event – an event that dismantles the linear, homogeneous and teleological nature

of normative temporality. The untimely induces a future that is not wed to the revolutionary or progressive aspects insisted upon by conjoined time. In this way, then, Tadjó's text is a part of the new narratives emerging from the untimely event of the Rwandan genocide which draw the reader's attention to a present wedded to the past, but one in which an accommodating and generous spirit might allow new futures to emerge. These are not futures in which the past is denied in the present, or dismissed as truly overcome, but rather futures which acknowledge the systems set in place by that past, and attempt to lay new foundations which do not repeat those systems.

Boubacar Boris Diop also gestures towards this anti-linear temporality in which the experience of being in time breaks from history. He writes that "the genocide didn't begin on the sixth of April 1994, but in 1959" (48)¹⁷. In Rwanda, time loops and stretches. That is to say, the present is a moment extended to a past some 45 years prior, all but forgotten in many accounts of the genocide.

Scott details Marxist linear time as follows: the past is the time of memory, the present is the time of conscious awareness, and the future is the time of anticipation (1). However, Scott argues that that is no longer where one exists in the contemporary moment. These notions are muddled. They have not *become* muddled, it is more accurate to say that in 'sites of time' the people are found in those spaces where historically organized time is known to, intrinsically, be muddled. Reading *Imana*, a text where the dead swirl around the living, talking to deaf ears, visiting their past homes in their present iterations, one gets a distinct sense of a time out of joint – things are not quite where they 'should', or are expected, to be. As Tadjó writes, "they refused to go when the time came to quit the earth" (42). The genocide happened in 1994, but those who died in that year did not remain there. They are dead but they are not gone, they are present now.

This critique of historically organised time posits that the contemporary moment is one in which the promises of the future were not realised for the postsocialist and postcolonial world (Scott 2). Scott suggests that this historical moment is the aftermath of political catastrophe; a moment in which promises for independent, postcolonial peoples were never fulfilled. I firmly believe that the Rwanda Tadjó moves through, an 'independent'

¹⁷ If one holds the thesis developed in this section, it is very difficult to say with any certainty when the genocide began, and indeed when it ended. As those who died continue to move amongst those who did not, the genocide lingers. Every beginning is uncertain, and looks much like every ending.

African state, existing in a time after French colonialism (itself a political catastrophe¹⁸), still enduring coloniality, can best be considered as a part of said moment (2).

Scott writes that “time, in short, has become less yielding, less promising than we have grown to expect it should be” – is this not frozen time (6)? Unyielding, sticky, unpromising. When the future contains the dead, the violated spirits of thousands, how is it not the past? How does one tell the difference?

Tadjo puts it this tension between time stuck and history moving thus:

The vast majority of people carry their pain silently in their souls and find the unbelievable strength to live daily life as it begins again; watches have had their time set right, calendars have been hung up on the walls again (10, 11).

These calendars on the wall contribute to the illusion of a time moving forward, the past receding further into the distance. But the hands on the watches circle and circle and each day is too much like the last. The pain she speaks of does not move, it is present and unyielding and there is little promise that it might definitively leave the souls of those affected, even whilst the days on the calendar and the years between the pain and the date progress. Time is stuck, whilst history moves.

Adam Thorpe’s *Nineteen Twenty-One* details a similar experience of being in time, as an untimely event lingers on in somatic configurations. His narrator says of post-WWI Europe ““We’ve still got it in the bone, the war. It went too deep. It’s still in there, inside. Right in the marrow. Even those who are getting born now, it’s in them, too”” (320). I find Thorpe’s articulation to be especially productive. He speaks of a war that went *too deep*, which structures the impact of catastrophe in a vertical manner, in a manner that renders it inescapable even for those born after its historical conclusion. This encourages us to think of the untimely event as being a part of one’s corporeal makeup – as Tadjo continues to insist – not merely as something we live alongside, or through, or after. Rather, Thorpe’s writing suggests that the untimely is a part of us, it is in our marrow as much as any of our somatic traits, as much as strength or weakness, deficiency or surplus, cancer or cure – time is in our bones. The first European War was untimely, it freezes time and constitutes itself in the bodily makeup of those born after its end. Here, what is past remains present, what is past is constitutive of the future, the traces of the war are everywhere his narrator looks. Tadjo speaks also of those with the violence of Rwanda as part of their makeup. She wonders if the

¹⁸ And catastrophic in many other ways.

untimely, living in the corporeal reality of a people regardless of its placement in the past by history, will find a way to replay itself again and again in stuck time:

Children of the genocide, they are the wound that might kill the country all over again, for their suffering is bitter and their future extends no further than the end of the street (Tadjo 87).

Here, the metaphor of a wound is used to describe the impact of tragedy. A wound is a corporeal pain, and in this imagining that evokes the body we are led to consider trauma as something that one carries with them beyond the moment of the injury, much like a wound, or a scar.

The Shadow of Imana is undoubtedly alert to the ways in which the present and the past are bound together – indeed Tadjo is attentive to the fact that they are often indistinguishable.

This alertness is an attribute which Avery Gordon promotes in the book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Gordon is unequivocal in her stance on the bleeding between the binaries of past and present:

Because the past *always* haunts the present, sociology must imaginatively engage those apparitions, those ghosts that tie present subjects to past histories (viii).

For Gordon, haunting is a presence, and a demand. She speaks of ghosts and haunting in similar terms to Tadjo: as figures that demand the time, conversation, engagement and hospitality of those still living, those present subjects she mentions. This is most clearly demonstrated in the section ‘The Wrath of the Dead’ when Tadjo writes that “We must open the door to [the dead], let them settle in, show them how we are living, remembering them through love, friendship and duty” (44).

Tadjo notes the curious, but entirely understandable, condition of present subject Rwandans in Kigali who want to assume and resume ordinary lives after the genocide. For these subjects there is an impulse to “live in Kigali *as if* the past were only a bad memory” (9, added emphasis). The phrase quoted above and the emphasis I have added shows the illusory and ultimately futile position that the past remains there, only in memory, which can be accessed and discarded at will. However, the dead are *present* and *active* – they haunt Kigali, even as Kigali seems to have forgotten everything –and in Gordon’s words: the ghosts have designs on you (48).

Boubacar Boris Diop grapples with a similar feeling in *Murambi: The Book of Bones*. In writing that “it was astounding to Cornelius to note that the events of 1994 had left no visible traces anywhere” and that “the country was intact, and people were settled into their daily lives” he suggests a distinct sense of an active forgetting, of a nation determined to separate the present from the past (Diop 49). In Rwanda daily life continues: “in downtown Kigali Cornelius was once again surprised to find people going about their daily business. Cars and motorcycles parked all over the place. Street kids offering all kinds of petty services” (Diop 75). And yet the present is shot through with the past, though the traces are not clearly visible, they are certainly existent.

This Rwanda, the Rwanda that likes to consider itself to be truly post-genocide¹⁹, the Rwanda that emphasises history rather than time, is always and constantly fighting against the eruption of trauma from its fractured collective psyche. Both Tadjó and Diop remark on how unremarkable Rwandan life is at first glance. However, it is a country awash with triggers, and the past litters the present, creating a traumatic field where mines sit in the grass, expectant and patient, sure to be stepped on. There is an interesting dichotomy that emerges in these texts: when describing the spatial configuration of the city or the country, both authors are surprised at how little present the genocide is, but when describing interactions between people, they are overwhelmed by the impact of the genocide in the psychic lives of Rwandans – “it was as if the genocide irradiated everything with its gloomy light” (Diop 42). Rwanda has moved on. Rwanda is stuck in time.

It is telling that Tadjó draws on the practice of exorcism to best describe her mission in Rwanda. The past of Rwanda needs to be engaged with, to be listened to and talked with. In Tadjó’s work the past is acknowledged here and now in all of its depth and complexity, in all its diverse constitutive elements. Tadjó feels those whom Gordon calls ghosts, her trip to Rwanda is born of that which Gordon calls haunting.

I use the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view.

¹⁹ I use the term ‘post’ to connote similarly to its deployment in the phrase ‘post-colonial’ in which it signifies both a temporal subsequence to the period of colonialism and a moment in response to that period. The qualm with the idea of post-colonialism is much the same as this paper’s issue with post-genocide: the temporal subsequence suggested is misleading and violent to those that live in the frozen, seized time much discussed herein. The solution in post-colonial theory has been to replace the phrase ‘post-colonial’ with the much more temporally astute ‘coloniality’ – a phrase that depicts the manners in which the past of colonial occupation continues to reside in the present of neo-colonial power structures.

Haunting raises spectres and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future (Gordon xvi).

Moving through Rwanda after the genocide, Tadjó is confronted with this invasion of the past in the present. The dead are screaming, and they are ignored. There seems to be no understanding of how best to exorcise them, if exorcism is at all possible – the country becomes doubly unfamiliar. In this morass of complex contradiction Tadjó is left “feeling bereft of [her] points of reference” (10). Cornelius, the protagonist in *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, experiences a similar unhomeliness on his return to his childhood home after the genocide

He knew why the house was empty. And yet, it was painful for him to admit that it was also dead to his memory. Had the dead carried off his childhood, leaving him nothing in exchange but their names? No face emerged clearly from his memory (136).

For Cornelius too, home has become unfamiliar, and his experience of being in time is altered. Perhaps this is the most difficult aspect of frozen time: the past is no longer at our command, able to be organized and narrativized on a collective (usually national) level. Memory cannot be summoned and dispensed. Cornelius’ home is no longer his possession. The dead, supposedly in the past, are active in his home in the present of the text. Now we have a past that is not the time of memory, but that has designs on us, and demands hospitality.

It is clear that Tadjó experiences a haunting throughout her travels. I believe her response to haunting makes it a productive interaction, and in a later section I will explore its consequences as well as how it translates into a haunting for the reader of *Imana*.

For the moment, however, this section will turn to the notion of trauma and traumatic memory in order to concretise that a linear conception of time is insufficient when examining the living presence of atrocities ‘passed’.

Trauma and Effect

Cathy Caruth is a renowned scholar who examines traumatic events and their psychological effects. Nearly all the stories compiled in *Imana* are representations of traumatic events, as well as the continual ways in which they work on individuals and communities. It is difficult to imagine a Rwandan story not tinged or touched by trauma – the genocide was ubiquitous.

Trauma: Explorations in Memory, edited by Cathy Caruth, is a title which could well have adorned Tadjó's text, so similar are their respective concerns.

One of the most moving and unsettling stories in Tadjó's book is that of Anastasie. She is raped by her brother Anastase, a rape happening outside the historical timeframe of the genocide. This traumatic event causes a disintegration of self. Anastasie's story ends with her death in the genocide, working for militia attempting to defend the lives of Tutsis in the area.

But Tadjó details Anastasie's physical death as her "official death", whereas her first death occurred when she was raped (66, 67). The story emerges as a chapter in *Imana* all its own, entitled 'Anastase and Anastasie'. Initially, the perspective is that of Anastase, who details his confusion as his sister no longer speaks to him, though he loves her deeply. This is a confusing and vague section for the reader. Then we read Anastasie's version of events, and the horrific truth becomes real. This delayed reveal makes Anastase's denial and posturing all the more disturbing. Aligning these 'deaths' is a powerful device in the text. The parallel Tadjó draws between familial rape, as well as the gendered nature of that act, and the genocide or 'official' death, is fascinating for a number of reasons.

The first is that Tadjó continues to resist and debunk the myth of categorical division and difference between Hutu and Tutsi, and the category of citizen and outsider more broadly. She writes a more inclusive position, and in this chapter clearly relates the action of genocide to violence *within* a family, not that of violence against foreigners.

Additionally, this chapter reminds readers that even the act of genocide is gendered. Pervasive images of war and genocide often depict a particularly masculine violence, and marginalise the experience of women in those spaces. Rape was pervasive during the genocide, and here, Tadjó suggests, even before that. Rape is a scourge, then, that cannot be only situated in the time of the genocide and characterized as "a part of that terrible time". In other words, Tadjó writes that there are deaths outside of the 'official', there is violence in Rwanda (and the world) outside of genocide, and calls on her readers to not forget that or slip into more comfortable platitudes.

Finally, the form of the chapter, beginning with the masculine perspective, is disarming. The form suggests that privileging the male version of history might obscure another side to the story, and might reinscribe faultlines of power that the telling of stories from Rwanda seeks to undo. It is only when the reader encounters Anastasie that the totality of the story 'Anastase and Anastasie' becomes clear. Consistently, Tadjó insists on multivocal and sometimes tense assemblages of story in order to access a more robust truth.

This chapter is an instance of that.

Tadjo's deliberate diction in the story of Anastasie reads congruently alongside traumatic theory, the literary language holding within it multiple psychological truths:

Anastasie would wake suddenly as dawn was breaking and be invaded by the memory of her rape. Though the sun might show its laughing face, she did not see it. She was trapped in the prison of her flesh. Her tongue felt furry, and prevented her from uttering the slightest word. Her desires had been worn away like rocks lashed by a stormy sea. She no longer recognised the inside of her body, felt a stranger to this heavy mass which was crushing her spirit. She felt exhausted even before glimpsing the beginning of the day. She would have liked to have been able to [s]hut the door to the shouts and murmurs of life, *to the grating sound of the revolving door of time.* [...]

Anastasie was welded to the darkness, eyes wide open to hostile dreams [...] her thoughts were scattered, preventing her from concentrating on anything. Instinctive terrors kept coming back to haunt her. (63, 64 my emphasis)

What is being described here is the lived experience of Anastasie's life-after-death. She has been raped by her brother and the complete disintegration of self that occurs therein and thereafter is, for Tadjo, death. The 'official' death of Anastasie attempts to organize her life historically, and pays little attention to her temporal experience beforehand. Tadjo speaks to this sanctioned, legislated death as being in some way deficient. I believe that the tale of Anastasie's two deaths is a warning against unhelpful distinctions, and an indicator to the reader that the genocide was not an event that historically organises every Rwandan life and experience, that it is a definitive and altering single event. Rather, it seems that Tadjo resists this urge to see Rwanda only as 'genocide-plus', in other words she does not allow the story of Anastasie to be easily plugged into the meta-narrative of the genocide. She asks her reader here to think more nuancedly about what might be elided, forgotten and displaced when only 'official', spectacular violence is represented and worked against. In official terms, Anastasie may be memorialised amongst many others who lost their lives in the genocide. But I am reminded here that her story is more complex than that. It is always more complex than that.

It is therefore important to consider the complex nature of Anastasie's experience of existing after being raped, and before dying in the genocide, detailed in the extract above. This may provide insight into some of the ways in which memory, and traumatic memory in particular, contributes to the sustained critique on historically organised time mounted in this chapter.

Cathy Caruth writes that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” and this is Anastasie’s condition (4). She is inhabited; she is possessed, by her rape. The full literary representation of Anastase’s rape of Anastasie can be found in the text and I have chosen, following Saidiya Hartman, not to insert it here²⁰. This event constantly invades Anastasie’s body, mind, spirit, her very notion of self, and forces her to live in a repetitious and violent time. As Scott puts it, “psychological trauma is nothing but a past that will not go away, a past that returns, unbidden, involuntarily, to haunt or unsettle or somehow mangle the present” (13). Anastasie’s story is an impossible story, one that for her was unthinkable before it occurred. This unthinkable nature is what makes the traumatic memory – an event or image that cannot be processed via normative and existing mental schema. Her rape is, quite literally, impossible to understand. van der Kolk and van der Hart emphasise the temporal aspect of traumatic memory, defining it as “in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end (which is characteristic for narrative memory)” (177).

The role of the therapist in dealing with trauma is to assist the victim in transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory. Anastasie’s rape is a memory which cannot be “organised on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioural re-enactments, nightmares, and flashbacks” (van der Kolk, van der Hart 172). Note the repeated emphasis on the physical in the passage above. Anastasie is caged in her body, the site of her trauma, and is unable to live in a temporal present as the timeless event of her rape freezes her in that moment. Recurrence of trauma is a feature too in Diop’s text on Rwanda, and a character finds herself frozen in time when “the dreadful dialogue with her friend was still going on, four years down the road” (73). This character is much like Anastasie in that she cannot own her memory and as such it continues to invade her.

Anastasie cannot own the memory of what happened to her because she, firstly, did not possess existing mental schema in which it could be organised and secondly, has, since the rape, been unable to transform the event into narrative memory and release herself into the present. She feels as if she contains the trauma. Caruth puts it eloquently: “the traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they themselves

²⁰ Hartman, in considering the inclusion or omission of another (though far more oft-referenced) scene of terrible inhumanity – that of the beating of Aunt Hester recounted by Frederick Douglass – writes that her decision to omit said representation “call[s] attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave’s [read here Black, or African] ravaged body” (3).

become the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (5). Similarly, Joseph in *Nineteen Twenty-One* retains physical symptoms of his trauma in World War One: “it was in him, the sickness of [the war]. He didn’t need to make notes. His lungs and windpipe were scribbled on with the sickness and madness of it” (Thorpe 107).

It is too little to say that traumatic memory troubles the notion of linear time. Rather, it is more accurate to say that the conception of time as linear and progressive crumbles when faced with the truth of traumatic memory. The force of trauma “lies precisely in its belatedness, in its *refusal to be simply located*, in its insistent appearance outside of the boundaries of any single time or place” (Caruth 9, my emphasis).

Again Tadjó’s journey in Rwanda has offered a stark revisiting of ideas of time. Anastasie’s rape may have happened in the past, but it happens again and again in a present that is, for her, indistinguishable from the past. I do not want to expound the general from the particular, or make the classic error of reading one woman’s story into an allegory for a nation. Each trauma is deeply personal and moves in ways that are unclear and inhospitable to usual modes of understanding. However, I am approaching Anastasie’s story as one that shines a light a little way down a dark road, a story that can be read for indications into the condition of a country in which trauma is a foundational element of the national collective consciousness. When unanimous trauma exists, in its particularities as well as its common themes, we are reading an entire country whose time is out of joint.

Sites of Time

In this project, and in the texts from which it emerges, memory, locality and temporality are inextricable. While these concepts each carry intrinsic import, it is in their intersections that I am particularly interested. I have tried to establish that the Rwanda Tadjó offers in *Imana* is one with an in-between temporality, a past-present, and one that combats the localizing binary here/there. What this does is allows me to consider memory in Rwanda, or memory about Rwanda as an act that is neither nostalgic nor removed. It is not so much memory about the past, but the work of memory in the present. Going forward, I will discuss the praxis of memory undertaken by Tadjó and attempt to articulate it as a productive re-remembering of the self amongst and in a community in the past-present. Remembering in Rwanda is not thinking back to something lost or passed, it is an act of re-integration that tells us more about ourselves now and where we might move to in future.

Memory is analogous to a scar, or an ache from an old wound – while the wound, or

the event, is sustained in a temporal moment antecedent to the present, the scar or ache is the constant refiguring of that past now. The scar, like traumatic memory, informs as much about the self now as it does the self then. A scar moves across borders, whether those be temporal or geographical, and carries its history with it. It is something new and something old, a past-present.

Immediately, this section is going to elaborate on what I have throughout this paper been describing as a ‘site of time’ – which is what I believe to be a useful manner of thinking about the Rwanda in Tadjo’s text²¹. Thomas Pynchon, in his maximalist novel *V.*, describes the Maltese city of Valletta as follows:

Nostalgia and melancholy...Hadn’t he bridged two worlds? The changes couldn’t have been all in him. It must be an alien passion in Malta where all history seemed simultaneously present, where all streets were strait with ghosts, where in a sea whose uneasy floor made and unmade islands every year this stone fish and Ghaudex and the rocks called Cumin-seed and Peppercorn had remained fixed realities since time out of mind. In London were too many distractions. History there was the record of an evolution. One-way and ongoing. Monuments, buildings, plaques were remembrances only; but in Valletta remembrances seemed almost to live (481).

The Valletta of Pynchon’s *V.* strikes me as one which might illuminate the Rwanda of Tadjo’s *Imana*. In Valletta, “all history seemed simultaneously present” and this suggestion elides any ideas of the past being found where it should. What Pynchon describes as London is a literary figuring of Marxist linear, teleological, revolutionary time. Valletta is marked as importantly different, as a place in which time works differently. Importantly, it is not the speaker who takes responsibility for this change in his understanding of time, it is not “all in him”. There is something about the location, about the site Valletta, which reveals temporality as discomfotingly complex, and less easily organised.

This extract from Pynchon describes the first iteration of the triple play on the notion I’m forwarding here: a site of time – a particular physical location wherein time has frozen, or come out of joint with history. A site upon which people move and are struck by the untimely, this is Tadjo’s Rwanda, this is Pynchon’s Valletta, a somewhere that time is revealed to be far less disciplined than is usually believed and where the ramifications for this are gargantuan. In a site of time ghosts are everywhere, haunting is commonplace, and progress to an aspirational future requires more than the ticking of clocks. In Rwanda temporality is shown to move in multiple directions, to push and pull and kick unwillingly

²¹ As well as the Bangladesh in Faizullah’s *Seam*, the main text explored in Chapter II.

against categorisation. Sites of time allow memory to mean more than a reaching back into the past. Memory might mean something politically productive for the present, it might mean a conversation with living ghosts, it might help restructure traumatic memory into the narrative variety that lets a person rest.

In Rwanda, as in Valletta (and here is the second play) I believe that the speakers come within 'sight of time'. As Sisodia reminds us in *The Satanic Verses*, no history happens only in the geography where it takes place. Pynchon in turn reminds us importantly that in London, marked only by indicators of evolution, a site where history is marked as moving swiftly along, hand-in-hand with time, there are myriad "distractions" preventing remembrances or ghosts from being engaged. He suggests that there is a truth being veiled by diversions, and that truth is that time is out of joint. In Kigali both Tadjó and Diop notice the same distractions, the same manoeuvres played out in an attempt to convince people of the comfortable notion that the past is long gone, it has been overcome. And yet, in post-genocidal Rwanda, that notion is unconvincing – "Don't trust appearances. We try and forget, but sometimes it comes welling up so powerfully. No one can do anything about it. That man escaped a massacre and...and, there!" a character in *Murambi, the Book of Bones* exclaims (51). There is too much past in the present, an excess of here in the supposedly there. Tadjó, in her travels, repeatedly comes within sight of time. In Pynchon's London, perhaps, a reason that the distractions are so successful is because so much of London's recent history happened overseas – other sites to come in sight, perhaps, but still very much to do with England and its history. The truth of this time, as muddled and multi-directional, holds those accountable even as they say they were not *there when...* the site of time rejects such Manichean distinctions. It offers a chance to witness time as frozen and slipping, and that opportunity is precisely what reading Tadjó's book takes up.

It seems to me that the mission of any ill-advised organisational attempt of temporality utilises the very idea that the site of time reveals to be false. Too often, through the "monuments, buildings, plaques" mentioned, institutions attempt to 'cite' time and point to these as "remembrances only". An emphasis on the number of days, of sunsets and sunrises, between the present and the events depicted in these is used as an appeal to linear time to indicate that those events are indeed in the past and are only to be remembered; a dead past, cold and sterile, that does not interrupt the present is pointed towards as people, communities, nations etc. struggle toward a better future. The site of time reveals this citation of hegemonic and ubiquitously employed ideas of time to be false, although this citation, of course, has great power and traction. I want to emphasise here that the citation of time

discussed above is a crucial mechanism in the maintenance, reproduction and increasing grip of repressive modes of power.

Indeed, as David Scott demonstrates, liberatory political parties the world over cite this time as a means of maintaining their power, and perhaps, buy themselves time to prepare and then enact repressive means of continued governance once the people of a nation come within sight of time as it is – confusing, swirling and less co-ordinated than these movements insist. Tadjo’s book represents a Rwanda within sight of a different time, a time perhaps much more confusing, and much less comfortable, but it is a site of time that I believe is constituted by a potentially productive haunting and the deep need for re-membering.

A site/sight/cite of time is always wrapped up in both locality and temporality. Whilst some of its main characteristics expose the limitations in normative ideas of location and time, Tadjo shows us that it also offers opportunities for productive engagement, memory and reconciliation. It is to these opportunities I will turn to now.

Memory and Life

In the preceding sections I have dedicated a sizeable portion of work to ideas of temporality and locality. This has been with the intention of concretising Tadjo’s Rwanda as a site/sight of time, as an in-between space characterised by a past-present and a here-there. In this work, I have stressed the necessity for an active engagement with the past. This has been put in Avery Gordon’s words as a methodology wherefrom a critic encounters in the text “what appears to be in the past, but is nonetheless powerfully present” (42). Tadjo’s text suggests that memory as positive anticipatory construction, as *work*, can only be most successful with the above understanding of time and place, of people and space. The work of memory done by Tadjo, its engagement with ghosts and all the complications of accepted regimes of truth that goes along with that engagement, is to my understanding a profoundly aspirational and hopeful task. As Avishai Margalit writes in *The Ethics of Memory* “even the project of remembering the gloomiest memories is a hopeful project” (82). Tadjo’s re-membering is to with life and the living, to do with possibility and optimism. I will, in this section, attempt to pick at the thread that weaves throughout *Imana* – the place and work of memory.

The countless memories of genocide in Rwanda that Tadjo details are certainly gloomy. However, this gloominess is also where the work of memory draws much of its import. Margalit suggests that the central question surrounding collective memory is “what should

humanity remember? The short answer is: striking examples of radical will and crimes against humanity” (78). Tadjó’s text is littered with both, and the genocide certainly qualifies as something that should be remembered.

If, then, there is an obligation for or a responsibility on collective humanity (invoked here by Margalit and repeatedly by Tadjó in *Imana*) to remember the Rwandan genocide – the question again becomes what that work of memory can and should be. To be clear, the term work is used to insist upon memory here as active construction. Margalit suggests that “shared memory in a modern society travels from person to person through institutions, such as archive, and through communal mnemonic devices, such as monuments and the names of streets” and he is right, but that is not the complete picture (54). What Margalit offers here is a too passive understanding of memory, or in other words, an understanding of memory in which the subject and the object are too comfortably distanced.

In contrast, Tadjó’s text shows a far more active effort to plug into a community of memory that is not obviously *hers*, through an event that she did not experience in any simple understanding of the term. *Imana* resists shared memory only by institutional representation, institutions which seek “to freeze our memories in monuments of stone” (111). In the text and the stories it re-presents, Tadjó builds her own shared memory matrix outside of these institutions and communal mnemonic devices. In turn I can access this matrix and remember the Rwanda she remembers. This construction of a community of memory is not one that begins with an obvious belonging, but rather with an active decision to respond to the obligation or responsibility to remember, or in other words, to engage hospitably with the ghosts that haunt her. Again, Margalit describes the movement of memory through time: “as a member of a certain community of memory I am related to the memory of people from a previous generation” and so on, until “we reach that generation which remembers the event in question first hand. This line of transition ends with a first-hand memory of a true event” (58). Again, Margalit insists on a passive, or chance induction into this community. Whilst memory does often move in this manner, Tadjó’s effort shows that an active and decisive human agent can plug in to this matrix, even though the impacts, meanings, affects and structures of that memory may be different. Some aspects of our lives are beyond our choice: our parentage, the nation of our birth, our mother-tongue; others are more the products of human subjecthood²²: who our friends are, whom we have children with (should we choose

²² There are obviously social contextual limitations to this point, especially in spaces (like South Africa) in which gendered bigotry and violence run rampant, but for the sake of argument consider this discussion around an abstract society in which free choice is a central aspect.

to have them), and perhaps which communities of memory we enter with care and responsibility. Tadjó's text insists that one is not simply inside or outside Rwanda, that its legacy either belongs to one or doesn't – Tadjó heeds a call many others of her positionality have dismissed as being doubly other. There is huge bravery and possibility in that choice.

Though Margalit may have limited perspectives on who is able to partake in a community of memory, I believe that his idea of the constructedness of communal memory is very useful and quite comprehensive. To this point, his description of shared memory reminds me particularly of the form in which Tadjó chooses to write her text:

A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode [...] into one version. Other people in the community who were not there at the time may then be plugged into the experience [...] through channels of description rather than by direct experience. Shared memory is *built* on a division of mnemonic labour (51 my emphasis).

Margalit describes here precisely how I experience reading and processing Tadjó's text. Tadjó's text is described as

a collective story, narrated by many voices, fragmented, associatively structured, alternating between past and present in both content and form. Many stories are incomplete, capturing a moment of the lives of individuals, providing a glimpse of the shadows of life and death which they inhabit (de Beer, Snyman 121).

It is in this way that *Imana* builds shared memory in its pages. The text is split into six chapters, which move in a loop through time as Tadjó journeys to and through Rwanda twice. Each of these chapters is made up of myriad viewpoints, anecdotes, voices and descriptions. In a number of places, Tadjó mimics the form of the travelogue invoking space and site with subheadings such as “Johannesburg”, “Nyamata Church” and “Visit to Byumba”. The text is fragmented and at times chaotic, constantly slipping from one viewpoint to another. And Tadjó subverts the travel form too, as her short sections – each typically a page or two in length – move from emphasising space to emphasising individuals and their stories. *Imana* is a constellation in which each representation depends on those which surround them for definition and supplement – every piece, every story is both centre and margin, both subject and object, both call and response. The form itself does the work of collective memory; *Imana* is a literary community of memory in which readers are invited to partake. Tadjó insists that the story of the Rwandan genocide can only be told through so many mouths. In the text authority is not easily located, the narratives slip between past and present tense

which destabilizes temporal certainty, and truth is leaking and contested. From victims to perpetrators, colonial forbears to Hutu ancestors, *Imana* remembers so as to rebuild (30).

Anna-Marie de Beer and Elisabeth Snyman make an interesting claim in their analysis of *Imana*. Their analysis approaches the text with a slightly different emphasis than mine, that of psychological theory and practice. They believe that *Imana*, formally, is an example of the process by which, with a listener, traumatic memory is transformed into narrative memory and a re-integration of the shattered self is made possible (115, 116). Their piece uses *Imana* as one of three texts that focus on the experience of female survivors of the Rwandan genocide, particularly survivors who were raped. In their examination of the text they focus on the chapter: *Anastase and Anastasie* from which I quoted at length earlier. Their piece is interesting as they pay close attention to the manner in which Tadjó describes the aftermath of the traumatic event. I believe that their analysis is accurate, though its scope is limited, in its position that Tadjó brings together the many fragmented, conflictual and so disastrous-as-to-be-fantastical memories of the genocide in to some sort of narrative form. Though Tadjó certainly responds to trauma in the text, how could she not, it seems to me that her finished piece does not have the coherence or resolution that de Beer and Snyman suggest. What is most important for this piece is to take seriously their idea of a reader as listener or witness to traumatic event. This articulation chimes sweetly with the notion of actively engaging and joining a community of memory through literature. *Imana* is certainly an invitation to the reader, and that invitation is very much at play in Tadjó's conceptualization of the potential for literature:

Literature throws a very different light on [the Rwandan Genocide] than does a history book or a journalistic piece. That's the whole purpose of literature. It's to *draw the reader and help the reader to identify with what is happening*. In a nutshell, there was an information overload about the genocide and the information was coming from the outside [...] there was a need to redress that imbalance and also to find a medium that would break the information overload, breaking indifference and making people rethink what had happened there. (Tadjó, Diop 429 my emphasis)

There is a suggestion being made here that literature is able to work with memory in a manner that is somewhat unique. And Tadjó makes a strong claim for the urgency of the literary response to the Rwandan Genocide. Her literary response is tied closely to Idowu William's articulation of an African Identity as one which counters the depersonalization and dehumanization of Africa in global imagination and representation (William 427). *Imana*, then, responds to the overload of cold knowledge disseminated with regard to the Rwandan

Genocide with an offer of an inlet for a reader to listen, to bear witness to the complex personhood repeatedly pronounced in the text. Complex personhood means “that all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognise and misrecognize themselves” (Gordon 4) and this notion is one that is as attentive to the messiness of life *lived* as I hope my method of analysis of *Imana* has been.

In an interview with Stephen Gray, Tadjó shows herself to be consciously aware of the issues she brings forth in her text, particularly in the manner she urges a reader to reconsider binaries of belonging, locality and subject/object. Tadjó says that “I’ve always understood that I do not belong to just one place” and further reinforces the above reading of the form of *Imana* by stating “if you want to tell *one* story, you have to tell *many* stories. We women are not alone, we are made of many people” (Tadjó, Gray 144, 145). Tadjó’s mode of thinking is liberatory, it frees the person who takes it up from the exclusionary notion that community is necessarily limited by locality. Her idea about the pluralism of the individual self is echoed by Toni Morrison for whom “individual memory is congealed social memory” (Gordon 197).

Which Children Are Real?

Tadjó’s method in *Imana* is neither purely instrumental nor coordinated toward a specific outcome. In the text she explores some of the ways in which aspirational futures might be attained through re-membering. And Tadjó seeks an accommodation with the ghosts, in *Imana* they are offered a sanctuary, a place to speak and engage with listeners. Her exorcism²³ is not a process that seeks to chase the ghosts of Rwanda away, but instead to offer them their right to hospitality in memory. She does this out of a concern for justice, out of an attempt to re-member old events, to make something new and productive of them. And this process is more than just recollection, it asks for something deeper, it asks for communication – for listening, for activity on the part of the reader, for a breaking down of the subject/object binary.

²³ Tadjó speaks of exorcism repeatedly, and the challenges and limitations of it in *Imana*, though I first came across it in Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, and it is in his understanding that I employ the term here – that is to say, exorcism not to rid oneself and society of ghosts, but instead to listen and accommodate them in memory so that a different future might be attainable.

Tadjo gestures toward the nebulous world-making Gordon articulates as “a knowing that is more a listening than a seeing, a practice of being attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present among us in the form of imitations, hints, suggestions and portents” (x). Yet *Imana* is a decidedly readerly text, in that any responsible engagement with it requires much from the reader. Tadjo is as confused and troubled as any of the characters whose story she tells, which is evident from the ambivalence with which she conceives of Rwanda both as constituted by genocide and so much more than that. The text journeys through a country that cannot be fully comprehended, that is complex and misidentified. For instance, the children on the cover frame the text in a heart that whispers of a future rooted in harmony and love between self and other and at the same time the writing refers to the children of the genocide as “the open wound of memory, the suppurating sore” (88). Which of these is it? Which of these are they? Tadjo travels and writes to ask this discomfiting question, not to answer it.

This text is not a guidebook on how to respond to haunting, rather it is a series of provocative questions which even the author cannot help but leave open, asking for input, knowing that it is only in shared work that the past can be accommodated and the future re-awakened.

Avery Gordon is unequivocal in her call for a new radical scholarship that takes seriously the condition of haunting and writes from that position, embracing the openings for conversations that novels such as the ones examined in this chapter might offer a reader:

It seemed to me that radical scholars and intellectuals knew a great deal about the world capitalist system and repressive states and yet insisted on distinctions – between subject and object of knowledge, between fact and fiction, between presence and absence, between past and present, between present and future, between knowing and not-knowing – whose tenuousness and manipulation seemed precisely to me in need of comprehension and articulation, being themselves modalities of the exercise of unwanted power. (xvii)

I hope to have, in this chapter, done some work in response to Gordon’s call, begun to show the similarities in the supposedly different, the self in the other, and the supplement in the base. In this analysis I have thought on how those who hope for something different in the future might contact the past in the present and thereafter “transform and assimilate the past, heal the worst wounds, repair losses, make a new history out of old events” (Mbembe 26).

Tadjo knows that the past cannot be cut off if there is any hope to reanimate the future. Perhaps it is fortunate then that the past is alive, present, and clamouring for conversation.

Chapter Two

The stakes for the work of memory in Faizullah's collection of poetry, *Seam*, are not located solely, or even mainly, in the past. Her work, and indeed, I am going to argue, the most productive considerations of memory's potential, coordinates memory in the direction of a revival of understanding and belonging for the present subject. This section builds on and moves with the efforts in the last chapter to describe a temporal understanding that is multidirectional and against a politics that relegates the past as a burden and positions the future as an inevitable utopia.

The opening poem in the collection, '1971', immediately creates contact between the present of the text and different, though not distant, temporal moments. This placement swiftly and incisively produces a past-present in which the reader is invited to move within.

Likewise, throughout *Seam*, the reader is offered entryways into a complex matrix of troubled temporality, responsibility, locality and identity. This chapter seeks to address memory directly. As such, it considers how memory and modes thereof might be constituted, and what spaces might be opened up by a literary understanding of memory. This chapter will toy with the idea of memory as a text, positioning memory as having to do with creative and political agency, whilst always and already resisting the conflation of fiction and falsehood.

A Chance in the Fight for the Oppressed Past

What this section seeks to discuss is how *Seam* and its writing of specific aspects of Bangladeshi history might (alongside and complicating some of Walter Benjamin's thought on memory) consider memory *in the present* (for indeed, when else can one remember), but more importantly position memory as crucially *about the present*.

It was in reading *Seam* that I first became aware of the terrible war that the nation of Bangladesh undertook in order to gain self-determination and liberation from what was then East Pakistan²⁴. Bangla²⁵ speaking peoples' quest for independence was the landscape upon

²⁴ The irony of Pakistan, a nation which emerged from a struggle for independence from British-controlled India, in turn violently resisting Bangladeshi independence is not lost here. Though, given the history of the oppressed turning oppressor as Frantz Fanon clearly elucidates in 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in *The Wretched of the Earth*, it is perhaps sadly unsurprising.

²⁵ Bangla is an endonym and another noun for the language Bengali. Faizullah uses Bangla as opposed to Bengali, and as it is the name given to their language by the Bangladeshi people it is the one I will use in this thesis.

which systemic rape, massacre and a monstrous civil war played out. The war was waged between Bangladeshi independence armies (later assisted by India) and West Pakistan (now Pakistan).

In being led into the history of Bangladesh, which is inextricable from the personal history of displacement and memory of Faizullah, by *Seam*, I was astounded that this was a nation, a site, of whose history I had known nothing.

I foreground my analysis of *Seam* with a summary of how Bangladesh as nation was ripped into the world – namely, the events of 1971. The war was drastically underreported – Time Magazine went so far as to call it ‘The Forgotten War’. Bangladeshi sources quoted in *Seam* believe that “two hundred thousand women were raped, and over 3 million people were killed” (1). Independent Researchers, quoted in a BBC News Magazine article, put the figure of people killed between 300,000 and 500,000 (Dummett).

The accepted beginning of the war, though we have learnt caution in detailing clear and conclusive beginnings from the conclusions of Chapter One, was in March of 1971. It was then that the Awami Party won elections in East Pakistan and attempted to move for greater independence for the region, particularly on the premise of linguistic self-determination. Change was not quickly forthcoming, and the Awami League undertook a campaign of civil disobedience during which “its supporters attacked many non-Bengali citizens” (Dummett). Due to the Awami’s hankering for independence, the military of West Pakistan sent thousands of reinforcements to the area and launched a pre-emptive strike against the Awami League and the Bangla people more generally. On the night of 25 March, “in the first of many notorious war crimes, [Pakistani] soldiers attacked Dhaka University, lining up and executing students and professors” (Dummett). Systemic massacres and rape were definitive of the war, though the rapes, as will be reflected upon shortly, are often (mis)read as a product of the war. Many mass graves in Bangladesh have, at the time of writing, yet to be uncovered.

Reporting indicates that the Awami League also massacred tens of thousands of civilians whom they believed were not dedicated to the nationalist cause. From March and over the next nine months Bangladesh was born out of incomprehensible rape and loss of life. On the 16th December, 1971, Pakistani military signed terms of surrender which allowed the process of Bangladeshi independence to truly begin. What is undoubtedly one of the most vicious wars of the last century remains “unreconciled at home and unremembered broad” (Tharoor). Contemporary Bangladesh is riddled by corrupt governance and military autocracy, the latter of which began in earnest at the highest levels with the military

assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman²⁶. Rahman was Bangladesh's first official elected leader. He was killed four years into his presidency.

During the war of 1971 which resulted in Bangladeshi liberation, 10 million refugees fled the country, displaced by famine and the sickening violence of the Pakistani army (Tharoor).

This war is one compelling example of what Soyinka might call “a collective abandonment of humanity,” and which Avishai Margalit believes said humanity has a responsibility to remember (23). In *Seam*, Faizullah travels to Bangladesh and conducts a series of interviews with survivors of systemic rape and the war. These interviews compose a large portion of the collection – interviews modified into a literary form. It is this backdrop that directs *Seam*.

These women, raped in the war by Pakistani soldiers, often more than once, are given a name by the Bangladeshi government. As detailed in *Seam*,

In 1972, the Bangladeshi state adopted a policy to accord a new visibility to the two hundred thousand women raped during the War of Independence by lionizing them as birangonas (war heroines), though they were frequently ostracized by their families and social circles (Faizullah 25).

There is much to be said on the phenomena of the birangonas in independent Bangladesh: from the gross victim-blaming on display that is all too familiar in South Africa, to the fact of the nation being violently gendered at the moment of its birth, to the failure of communities and social movements to properly conceive of their own patriarchal foundations²⁷, to the impossible pervasive trauma that is treated with cold disregard by structures supposedly designed to support, and so on. I cannot properly attend here to the full complexity and total depth of this phenomenon, but I will attempt to make a few points about the dual-meaning of the birangona and the lens it offers into community and memory in contemporary Bangladesh.

The first point to be made here is that what exists is an official discourse that runs completely against a lived experience of the people in the nation. Much like the site of time discussed in Rwanda, here the Bangladeshi state creates an official category, ‘birangona’, to

²⁶ Rahman's term in charge of independent Bangladesh was, unfortunately, typical of many liberation leaders in that it became blotted by inefficiency, corruption and increasingly violent suppression of resistance and minorities. For more, see Emajjudin Ahamed's 'The Military and Democracy in Bangladesh' (2004).

²⁷ I am thinking here of the crucial critique of the Fees Must Fall Movements by feminist activists, for example see Pontsho Pilane's 2015 article 'Patriarchy Must Fall', and Simamkele Dlakavu's 2015 article 'Gender and Rhodes Must Fall Debate'.

acknowledge the terrible experience of women during the war. However, this acknowledgment is manipulated by a powerful patriarchal and phallogocentric society instead into an oppressive symbol – a symbol which designates those to be ostracized from their communities.

Additionally, what this word does is co-opt systemic rape into a meta-narrative of liberatory war efforts, as if being raped is a sacrifice or act of heroism akin to risking one's life on the front lines. There is something hideous to be said for the fact that the experiences of these women are plugged into and made sense of in the national official imagination only as a narrative of war heroines. This event does not engender a reflexive examination of the misogynist nature of the existing social structures that allow and even encourage such actions against female bodies to occur in the first place, and Kai Erikson is instructive on this point as she argues that

these disasters (or near disasters) often seem to force open whatever fault lines once ran silently through the structure of the larger community [...] The fault lines usually open to divide the people affected by the event from the people spared, exactly the opposite of what happens in a "city of comrades." Those not touched try to distance themselves from those touched, almost as if they are escaping something spoiled, something contaminated, something polluted (189).

Where Erikson is particularly useful in thinking on the birangonas is that she speaks to the difference in the lived experience of these war heroines from their official national status. The state's symbolic gesture attempts to promote a 'city of comrades', but instead provides the word 'birangona' as a site upon which ostracism and further trauma can be meted out. The reason for gap between the two nations of Bangladesh²⁸ is that the state misattributes systematic rape to the war itself and the war alone, rather than the gendered fault lines that already existed in these communities. These fault lines are not addressed and are actually reinscribed by the designation. And the treatment of birangonas after the war is a sobering reminder that the war was not the cause of these rapes. It is perhaps more accurate to say that the war is the site of the atrocities, and that the violent patriarchal structure of Bangladeshi society is most terribly symptomized in the war and the events thereafter. What

²⁸ What I mean by this is that there is the manner in which the nation considers itself as a symbol, and the manner in which the bodies of the nation experience living therein. Similarly, South Africa styles itself officially and is exceptionally invested in the notion of a 'Rainbow Nation', though the lived experience of people in South Africa is one that is rife with division, persistent socio-economic inequality and violent racism. See Michael Nassen Smith's 2017 article 'How Inequality is Wrecking SA's economy, and What We Can Do About It'.

becomes far more radical is a consideration of the systematic rape as always and already possible in society, and the war as correlation with rather than causality for the rapes.

In short, while the birangonas are celebrated at a national official level, they are treated as something *spoiled, contaminated, polluted*, in the communities in which they reside. The paradoxical position of birangonas after the war is most directly addressed by *Seam* in the eighth poem in the series titled 'Interview with a Birangona', as follows:

8. *After the war was over, what did you do? Did you go
back home?*

I stood in the dark
doorway. Twilight. My grandfather's

handprint raw across my face. *Byadob*,
he called me: trouble-

maker. *How could you let them
touch you?* he asked, the pomade just

coaxed into his thin hair
a familiar shadow of scent

between us even as he turned
away. *Leave. Don't come*

back, he said. I walked past his
turned-away back. Past fresh-plucked

lychees brimming
yellow baskets. Past Mother

on the doorstep sifting through rice flour,
refusing or told not

to look up, though the new
president had wrapped me in our new

flag: a red sun rising
across a green field. *You*

saved our country, he said. I said
nothing. The dark rope

of Mother's shaking arm was what
I last saw before I walked away.

No. No. Not since.

This poem clearly details how birangonas are often treated by their families and communities. Her grandfather strikes this speaker, her mother ignores her, and the nation – emblemised here by the figure of the president, does not understand her reality. This poem surfaces again the gendered nature of Bangladeshi society that created the birangonas in the first place, and shows it to reinforce the same violence upon the bodies of violated women. The speaker’s mother is silent, or silenced, it is unclear – “refusing or told not//to look up” – whilst the male head of the household banishes the speaker. She finds some solace in a support group, the members of which Faizullah strikingly describes as “Seven women, upright in plastic chairs like a row of dolls on a shelf, stare at or away from me, fix their eyes above my head or towards the open door where noonlight spills out into the gray-bricked courtyard upon which a line of crows alight” (24).

Judith Herman believes that re-integration into community is the final step in healing from trauma²⁹. The traumatic act cuts through the bonds of safety and trust that community fosters, and the act of re-integration is a powerful signal toward the re-making of the self. But what happens when the community rejects the re-integration asked for *because* of the nature of the trauma? Kai Erikson suggests that this often creates negative emotions, such as anger, which is

rarely a healing anger, however, because it leaves people feeling demeaned, diminished, devalued. It is hard for people to resist the sense of worthlessness that often accompanies trauma when other human beings whose power they once respected and whose good will they counted on treat them with such icy contempt (193).

It is particularly through the kind of treatment represented in the above poem that trauma lives on. Throughout *Seam*, the reader encounters in the ‘birangonas’ interviewed those for whom the time of the war constitutes a very real part of their present lives. Faizullah’s work blurs the line between those touched and not touched, those spoiled and those not, as she writes poetry in a way that is very much affected by the events of the war. For a reader, too, it becomes difficult to feel that these stories do not matter to them, because of notions of difference in location, temporality, identity or responsibility. In what I understand to be a move that is not only feminist, but humanist too, Faizullah tells the story of contemporary Bangladesh, of the Bangladeshi war of liberation, and of herself, by centring the subject and subjecthood of the ‘birangona’, and offering a response to their experiences

²⁹ See her 1997 text ‘Trauma and Recovery’.

that is neither the sanctioned official discourse which clearly knows little about the lives of those it gives the moniker, nor the cold excommunication of the communities within which they live daily³⁰.

Now that I have spent some time speaking to the context of *Seam* and the specific histories it works within and emerges from, I will pivot slightly and consider some of the author's biography and how these elements contribute to a conversation about memory and the present. Faizullah's parents left Bangladesh in the 1970's and emigrated to the United States of America. She was born in New York and raised in Texas, USA. The first poem in the collection, '1971', pulls together not only multiple times, but multiple places. The first two stanzas in the first section of the poem uncover the link between locations and temporalities that seem to be completely different: "In West Texas, oil froths/luxurious from hard ground/while across Bangladesh//bayoneted woman stain/pond water blossom..." (i. 1-5). In the early 1970s the United States' production of petroleum, manufactured from oil-rich states such as Texas and Alaska, peaked. Texas is the state Faizullah was raised in, and at the same time as it underwent a major economic boom from its natural resources the country from which her family left was in the midst of one of the most terrible wars in recent history. In some senses, Texas as an industrial and economic centre was born from the discovery of oil.

In a far more troubling comparison, Bangladesh was born from the blossoming of ponds that marked the war of Liberation. These two constitutional acts are a part of Faizullah's history. My understanding, emerging from these few lines which are revealing for the rest of the text, is that in this collection Faizullah has created a here-there that sheds light on "the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood" (Bhabha 5). That is to say, the textual, or the literary, hold potential as in-between spaces, in which multiple locations, temporalities and identities collide and interpolate. This is particularly evident in *Seam*, which is one of the reasons why it is such an intriguing text to analyse.

For example, in what has been a profound experience for me, I have found on multiple occasions in reading both *Imana* and *Seam* that haunting occurs in the most unexpected places. As I read of the importance of the 16th December, 1971 in Bangladeshi national history, I cannot avoid thinking about the 16th of December and its place in South

³⁰ *Seam* undoubtedly offers much insight and potential for a gendered reading of trauma and traumatic memory. The poem series 'Interview with a Birangona' in the collection is something I have only been able to briefly examine here. Every project has focuses and limitations, and I feel quite strongly that there is much still to be learned from the series that I cannot properly unpack here.

African history – the beginning of the Battle of Blood River, the multiple anti-racist protests carried out on that day during the struggle against Apartheid, the founding of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and in post-Apartheid South Africa the public holiday: ‘Day of Reconciliation’.

In much the same way, Tadjó speaks more directly in *Imana* to how the Rwandan Genocide coincided with another important South African moment: “While the genocide was going on, in South Africa Nelson Mandela was being elected to the highest office. The world preferred to turn its gaze on him to celebrate this historic moment, which marked the real end of Apartheid.” (33). In this coinciding is a warning of what can be elided when only one story is acknowledged.

Much as Faizullah links Texas and Bangladesh in the early 1970s, I insist here, like I did in the first chapter, and alongside Ifi Amadiume and Abdullah An-Na’I, that “prevention demands a role of bystanders, who have a responsibility as non-experts and non-citizens to tell the stories, sharing and not distancing ourselves as outsiders” (17). For some reason, and in different ways for both countries, the past-present of Rwanda and Bangladesh have been excluded and thereby rendered unimportant for South Africa and its citizens. And yet in my reading I have felt tied to these historical places and moments that are not, in any strict or normatively quantifiable way, mine. Walter Benjamin uses the term ‘blasting’ to speak to these peculiar entryways into oppressed pasts, which might

be conceived of as entering through a different door, the door of the uncanny, the door of the fragment, the door of the shocking parallel. Entering one place, another often emerges in juxtaposition, along the lines of a defamiliarization coalescing into a moment of connection (Gordon 66).

This is the revolutionary work of memory and the literary – the text can accommodate ontological articulations that are too readily elided in dominant national-political configurations of identity. In other words, the textual may offer room for an understanding of difference as a space of productive communion; this begins to melt the frozen polar-alterity that sustains the sign of the other as suspicious, threatening and doubly unfamiliar.

When Faizullah journeys to Bangladesh to interview ‘birangonas’ and write poetry of their experiences, it is in a sense to her own oppressed past that she returns. As noted earlier, the Bangladeshi War of Liberation begot a nation crippled by engendering violence which displaced millions. The country she journeys to, shortly after her grandmother’s death, is one that remains actively present in her life. Faizullah goes further, writing that she cannot tell her

mother that "...the country of her birth/became a veined geography inside/you, another body inside your own" (v. 14-16). It is clear here that she travels and listens not to gain knowledge about something dead, something gone, something other, something not hers, but rather to understand something about herself, about what is inside her and fundamental to her personhood. She is not exploring a country far away, but something so close as to be another body inside hers, something so near as to be a part of her corporeal makeup.

What I understand Faizullah to mean here is that the work of *Seam* is not the ethnographer's work about what happens *there* or with *them*, nor is it the historians work about what happened *then*, but rather it is an exploration, for her, about what is happening *now*, what is happening *here* and what is true for *her*. As Avery Gordon, quoting Walter Benjamin, says:

The monad or the ghost presents itself as a sign to the thinker that there is a *chance in the fight for the oppressed past*, by which I take Benjamin to mean that the past is alive enough in the present, in the now, to warrant such an approach. [...] Indeed, to fight for an oppressed past is to make this past come alive as the lever for the work of the present: obliterating the sources and conditions that link the violence of what seems finished with the present, ending this history and setting in place a different one (65).

It is clear that for Faizullah this past, Bangladesh in 1971 and all its residual fallout both personally and communally, is alive in the present and even present inside her. What is crucial for Gordon is how this past might be utilised in the present. What Gordon describes is very similar to the work of traumatic recall: how can one work in the present to no longer be commanded or subjugated by a vicious past, and instead, in conversation with that past, ensure that that violence no longer recurs in the future. Faizullah describes her mother, who reflects on her childhood in Bangladesh, as being "caught [...] in this reeling/backward – 1971" (iv. 20-21). And in this reeling backward Faizullah's mother is speaking not to the author but to a ghost, to a time and a past that was taken from her (iv. 18-19). As Gordon writes:

[The ghost] gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope (64).

The ghost here is Faizullah's 'veined geography', it is the other body inside her own. It is representative of a loss, it is representative of a life she was never able to live, or a place

she was never able to fully live in, a language that never became her own, or perhaps a family (symbolised repeatedly in *Seam* by the figure of her grandmother) she was never able to know as she would have liked. And yet Faizullah's conversation with her own ghosts seems to me to be a mission of hope, and a mission of personal fulfilment. She travels to Bangladesh to learn something about herself, and certainly one gets the sense in *Seam* that "a great deal of what can be known is tied to the search for knowing it" (Gordon 69). Faizullah is traveling to Bangladesh to find something, and as I have said before, it is not only to find something about there or them or then, but to find herself. Again, the hope that Gordon speaks of is evident in a similar mechanism of traumatic recall: the traumatised subject works through their trauma, or speaks to their ghosts, in order to be released into a different future in which they are no longer under the yoke of their violated past. As I recalled in the previous chapter, Avishai Margalit poignantly suggested that "even the project of remembering the gloomiest memories is a hopeful project" (82).

Walter Benjamin believes that memory is a medium in the present for gaining knowledge now, rather than an instrument for exploring the past. In 'Excavation and Memory', he writes that memory "is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried" (400). What is important here is that memory is not a tool for finding the thing in itself, or the event as it happened. Rather, it is a medium that tells us about what then looks like now, and what then might mean now. Benjamin figures memory as an activity in the present, an activity which requires meticulous repetition. This understanding of memory as an approach renders it comprehensively active – though it is not necessarily successful in its activity. For Benjamin, and as will be discussed thoroughly in the next section, the successful work of memory is about an active receptiveness to the past, rather than an active demanding of the past. Benjamin insists that the good work of memory marks not only the findings of the work but also the site in *today's ground* where productive images were yielded. In this essay he repeatedly emphasises that memory can yield "long-sought secrets" for the present subject. Memory, then, is most to do with the person who remembers, who they have to be in order to remember, and what they have learned from the strata which they patiently excavate.

To tie Benjamin's thought here together with Faizullah's work in *Seam*, it is apparent that the past, or memory, can be usefully thought of as textual. By this I mean that memory can be read for insight. Memory is not the event as it happened, what Benjamin calls the 'matter' of the past, it is rather a medium in which the past can be leveraged for the work of

the present. Memory is truly work of interpretation. In it we find meaning. Therefore, Faizullah's work is not simply a telling of the past, it is a re-collection, a gathering of materials and an examination of them in language. Petina Gappah writes on this exact work of memory in the present in her novel *The Book of Memory*, as the narrator muses: "So I reflect on my life, to rework the events that brought me here, to rearrange and reimagine them in an endless cycle of what-ifs" (11 my emphasis). What I am attempting to emphasise here is that memory is partly creative labour in the present. It, as Avishai Margalit suggests, "is knowledge from the past. It is not necessarily knowledge about the past" (14).

Memory is a mode of reading, patient and scrupulous. Memory is a text that reveals differently upon each reading – therefore it does not offer something conclusive or definitive. This makes sense if one understands memory as having to do with the person who remembers, who is therefore constantly changing, a fluid subjecthood. Benjamin states that in memory, one "must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil" ('Excavations').

In reading *Seam*, I see some of what Benjamin says here in the form of the text. The titles of the poem are intentionally similar. There are two poems titled 'En Route to Bangladesh, Another Crisis of Faith', eight poems entitled 'Interview with a Birangona', five named 'Interviewer's Note', two Aubade's and a Nocturne, five poems with the title 'Reading Poet X at/in Y' and so on. Faizullah's poems are the strata to which she returns again and again, turning the soil over, seeking fresh insight. She says, alongside Cornelius in *Murambi*, that "I refuse to ask of the past more meaning than it can give to the present" (Diop 67). And, ultimately, that is all that one can ask of the medium of memory.

If one asks of memory to bring the past into the present whole and untouched then one is asking the wrong question. Memory is an active process of creation, and that does not take away from the importance of its work. The collective pervades the personal, and the author identifies the past in the present in an imaginative act. Petina Gappah is aware of the contingency and flexibility of memory when she writes a narrator who remembers

My father is in a safari suit whose colour I can no longer remember. Or perhaps it wasn't a safari suit at all that he wore and I have only put him in one because it was what all the men wore in those days (1).

This is an example of how the past is created in the present. The nature of the past and how it reaches us is that it is touched and imprinted upon by the one who remembers – it is made whole in the present by the creative input of the author.

What matters more in the work of memory than the ‘matter’, or the event, or the past as it was, is where it is being sought and who the person searching for the knowledge is or, to continue the metaphor of text, who it is that is the author. Benjamin is again instructive here:

It is not the purpose of the story to convey a happening *per se*, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the mark of the potter’s hand (‘Motifs’ 161).

What is being gestured towards here is that the story is inextricable from the one who is telling it. The story bears the mark of the author; it is not sterile or objective information. Benjamin goes so far as to insist that it is fundamental to the nature of the story to bear the mark of the author. Thus, when reading the literary, one reads for experience, not for information, and it is this experience which Faizullah makes available for the reader – an experience that is very much about her now, and not at all less valuable for that fact³¹. Petina Gappah’s protagonist, named Memory, writes that “it is always hard to remember the impression that things made on you when you were a child. It is easy to recast what you now know to how you first saw them, and to see them again with an adult’s understanding” (69). This reinforces the idea that who we are now deeply impacts what we remember, as well as how we remember.

Alongside Benjamin, I claim that Faizullah is journeying the veined geography of her oppressed past – the site she excavates is the other body inside her – toward what Benjamin calls one’s “own buried past” (‘Excavations’). Benjamin believes that to be interested in memory is to be more interested in the seams that Faizullah teases out of herself than the events of 1971, which is more properly the work of history. In his exact words, “for authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than, that he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them” (‘Excavations’). And there are two poems, untitled, in the form of single block paragraphs, which lend rhythm to the collection, that do exactly as Benjamin suggests, that speak not of the findings or images yielded by the

³¹ There is an interesting chain of storytelling that develops throughout *Seam*. Faizullah is often drawing on and re-presenting stories of others, largely the birangonas that she interviews. So, then, those stories bear the mark of them and she is, in those scenarios, a listener or witness. Then, when she re-presents those stories in poetic language she takes up the place of storyteller and voids the space of listener (perhaps she occupies both simultaneously). The reader of *Seam* then takes up the role of listener, and as critic I now move into the position of storyteller, so that by the time this thesis is read it bears the marks of multiple storytellers and has passed through the ears and minds of multiple listeners. Again, one gets the sense of an event in the past, the ‘matter’ that actually happened, receding and distorting. It is crucial that one does not view this recession as a deficiency, and that one does not confuse memory and storytelling with cold information.

strata explored, but describe the sites in today's ground in which excavation was most successful:

I place one foot then the other on each narrow, rusty step to where the concrete floor is rough and raised as a calloused hand. The speakers from the green-domed mosque click on, heralding the start of *adhan*, call to prayer. Other *adhans* start up, overlap like a choral round, surround me with rich, thrumming Arabic. The sun sets past rooftops, lush green trees, women hurry past lithe, dark men holding hands. Dusk settles. Each window carved into Dhaka's many high-rises begins to flicker with light (15).

And again, in the final entry in *Seam*,

I struggled my way onto a packed bus. I became all that surged past the busy roadside markets humming with men pulling rickshaws heavy with bodies. A light breeze from the river was cool on our faces through the open windows. Eager passengers ran alongside us. The bus slowed down. A young man grabbed those arms, pulled them through. The moon filled the dust-polluted sky: a ripe, unsheathed lychee. It wasn't enough light to see clearly by, but I still turned my face toward it (65).

Both of these poems are concerned with the place through which Faizullah has journeyed. They are detailed and evocative descriptions of the site in which insight came to her. She pays deep attention to everything that she senses. There are "rusty" steps, "calloused" hands, the Arabic she hears is "rich, thrumming". These poems depend on adjectives and strong visual imagery. She builds these worlds with her words, combing patiently through each touchstone, offering them as a space for the reader. One becomes aware of the movement of bodies, of hurrying, or running. This is detailed, patient work. And Faizullah demonstrates, particularly in the last line of the later poem, that she has not found something certain or fixed – "It wasn't enough light to see clearly by, but still I turned my head toward it". What she has encountered rather is just enough to continue excavating. She has met intimations, suggestions and whispers. These are all worthwhile. Though they do not reveal something in particular, some absolute tangible truth, they are detailed and noted regardless.

The past may reach the present in a form that is confusing, contingent, uncertain and definitively complex. But when the yardstick of successful or productive memory is not how accurately it can depict an event as it happened, but how illuminating it can be for a present

subject seeking insight to themselves, their communities, and the futures of all of those, that complexity becomes an opportunity rather than a limitation.

Throughout the series some of the most striking literary effect is achieved by the things that Faizullah does not say. She focuses far less on the ‘matter’ of memory, and instead chooses to write evocatively about the women that tell their stories now. She writes about Dhaka and Bangladesh in its visceral presence. She writes about herself and the changes that occur in her during her journey there and back. She speaks of her shame, of her grief, of her desire, of her doubt. In *Seam*, “a great deal of what can be known is tied to the search for knowing it” (Gordon 60) and this is true in a deep and pervasive sense. *Seam*, from a certain angle, reads as both an exploration of the medium of memory, and also establishes strata itself which a reader might patiently explore to gain insight into themselves now, and how close they might be to then, them and there.

Memoire Involontaire

The concept of *memoire involontaire* is one key to the argument made throughout this thesis. In this section, I will detail exactly the idea and origin of *memoire involontaire*, as well as the manner in which I wish to apply it in this work. This will provide the scaffolding for the next section, in which I will analyse *Seam*, with the particular intent of teasing out how and where it looks for the traces of the past in the present.

Walter Benjamin spends two essays considering the work of memory, and takes much of his cue from Marcel Proust’s insistence that “the past is somewhere beyond the reaches of the intellect” (Benjamin, ‘Motifs’ 160). What I take Benjamin to mean, here, is that the experience of the past is not at the bidding of the thinker in the present. Rather, for the past to be yielded productively in the present, something other than intellectual labour is required. This idea has been reflected on already. Suffice it to say, intellectual labour, or the making of demands on the past, is, for Benjamin, far less potent than a process much closer to forgetting.

In the essay ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, Benjamin considers the French Poet Baudelaire alongside French author Marcel Proust, and makes what initially may appear to be a bold, if not counter-intuitive, claim. The claim is that an active remembering yields little, but an involuntary recollection yields all. Benjamin writes this directly when describing “memoire volontaire, and [believes that] it is its characteristic that the information which it

gives about the past retains no trace of it” (160). The English translation of *memoire volontaire* is voluntary memory, or willed memory. That is to say, for the past to live in the present in a manner that is deeper than mere *information about*, or in a manner that retains some of the affective sensory richness of the past, a type of memory that is not a demand is required. Benjamin is a proponent instead of *memoire involontaire*, which I understand to describe a process of openness to the strange ways that and often unexpected places in which the past might move in the present. *Memoire involontaire*, or involuntary recollection, has far more to offer for the present and the future than *memoire volontaire*, which is information about the past. The Benjaminian depiction of *memoire involontaire* is rooted in a productive futurity, and cares more about insight from the past than facts about the past. *Memoire involontaire* is also subjective at its core, and this is an important manner in which it deviates from the objective work of looking-back of *memoire volontaire*. It is this subjectivity that makes the concept intriguing to consider alongside Faizullah, Tadjoo and other contemporary writers.

I understand *memoire involontaire* to be not a looking-back, but a casting forward. In other words, it is an exploration of how, through insight from the past, the future might be set along a different path. It requires an accommodation with the past. Its prerequisite is a willing openness to the presence and movement of an often difficult or troubling past in the mind and creative work of the author. *Memoire involontaire* is an attentive listening to the ghost’s whisper when it might arise, and a weaving of new truths from old events. Benjamin here is not interested in what is usually called ‘memory’, and he makes a strong case for the productive potential of *memoire involontaire*:

The important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the *Penelope work* of recollection. Or, should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the involuntary recollection much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? [...] For an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; the remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it (‘Proust’ 204).

What Benjamin is advocating is that memory is most productive in its created and creating potential. He describes memory as weaving – which suggests the bringing together or convergence of data that may initially seem disparate. He describes memory as work – which indicates that there is intervention from a subject, in this case an author, and that that author partakes in the creation of a memory. He describes, in a lovely twist of concepts,

memory as forgetting – which I take to mean the letting go of the past, in a manner that does not demand it yield a truth, which allows it to re-emerge animated into the present in moments and places unexpected. Finally, he speaks to the potential of memory – it is the medium through which much can be understood. In other words, the productive capability of memory is not confined to the facticity of the event remembered. The past in the present is a tapestry, made up by the convergence of seams, and it is in the wholeness of the tapestry, not its individual seams, that insight can be found. Petina Gappah puts this notion beautifully in *The Book of Memory* when she writes that

But I am also laying out the threads that have pulled my life together, to see just where this one connects with that one or crosses with the other, to see how they form the tapestry from which I will stand back to get a better view (85).

What I have been quietly gesturing toward throughout this section is Faizullah's seam, and how her metaphor sits kindly with the notions of weaving and tapestry that other authors have put forth. Benjamin would applaud this understanding of memory as medium, not as instrument, as from the past, not only about the past. Benjamin points to this distinction when he asks

Is it not the quintessence of experience to find out how very difficult it is to learn many things which apparently could be told in very few words? ('Proust' 209)

This passage reveals two suggestions: the first is that the event, or what can also be called information about an experience, cannot and should never be conflated with learning from an experience. For Benjamin, memory is precisely to do with this learning. It is crucially not most to do with the event. He asks that memory be read for insight, much like a text, that the past is animated as having productive potential for the present and future. The second, following the first suggestion closely: learning and knowledge are very different. Learning from the past is what Benjamin calls memory, whereas knowing about the past is what he would name information. I have described information previously in this thesis as cold, and I believe that that is an instructive metaphor. Information is dead in the present, it is not a living past, it does not challenge normative, illusory and oppressive notions of temporality. Memory can, at its best, do very real and productive work for the future.

The exciting application of *memoire involontaire* in this thesis' analysis is rooted in the fact that the authors have no option to undertake a *memoire volontaire* in any genuine sense.

Neither of the central texts are written by authors who write about events that they experienced as they occurred. This absence from the event in a spatio-temporal sense renders both Faizullah and Tadjoo incapable of reaching back into their pasts and attempting to describe an event as it happened to them.

Further, it is in this distinction that I believe thinking about *Seam* might push Benjaminian notions of memory to a place which Benjamin himself did not consider. In his focus on Proust, and Proust's focus on his own childhood, the concept of *memoire involontaire* was only considered from and applied to the position of an author remembering their own life. What happens, then, if an author attempts to remember and write a past that is not immediately or obviously theirs? That is the question that the next section seeks to address. The following section leans on the notion of 'memory in the object' that is a crucial component of *memoire involontaire*, but also seeks to complicate the completely passive nature of such a mode of memory insisted upon by Proust and Benjamin.

As I will show in the next section, while Faizullah is both unwilling and unable to force the past into the present in a *memoire volontaire*, her openness to the past in the sites she journeys is an active and deliberate component of a *memoire involontaire* newly coordinated as an ethically conscious political decision. I am going to insist that, for one to do the work of memory with a past that is not obviously their own, some amount of conscious opening of the self to the past and the other is required. It is my position that this openness, this rendering of oneself as a vessel for the past – however it may or may not choose to arrive – allows for a radical conception of *memoire involontaire* for the work of literature in the frozen time of the contemporary moment.

Gather These Materials

A remarkable piece of writing that continues to echo long past its inscription in the work of literary, cultural and memory theorists is the passage referred to in shorthand most often as 'Proust's madeleine cake'. In the early stages of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time: Volume One*, the narrator speaks of an incident through which the past, and memories long since seemingly gone from him, come to vivid life in his present. This occurs through what I will call 'memory in the object' – a notion which has deeply influenced much thought on memory that followed. I will quote at length from the section, look to other examples of literature that have suggested similarly, and then read Faizullah's process of memory in *Seam* alongside it.

In struggling to remember his childhood in Combray, M. Swann, the protagonist of Proust's epic, contemplates that

there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised them the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and return to share our life.

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of the intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of the intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves die (50-51).

Swann goes on to detail the marvellous experience of being served a madeleine cake and tea by his mother. This produces in him an exhilarated and joyous feeling, which is suggestive of an epiphany, a past previously uncovered. He lurches after the sensation:

I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, then a third, which gives me rather less than the second. It is time to stop; the potion is losing its virtue. *It is plain that the truth I am seeking lies not in the cup but in myself.* [...] I put down the cup and examine my own mind. It alone can discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. *Seek? More than that: create* (52 my emphasis).

After a protracted period of differing attempts, both in method and success, to connect the sensation of the madeleine cake with an image of his past in Combray that Swann is sure that the feeling contains, he despairs:

Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up out of the very depths of my being? I cannot tell. Now I feel nothing; it has stopped, has perhaps sunk back into its darkness, from which who can say whether it will ever rise again? [...]

And suddenly the memory revealed itself... (52-53)

Swann then finds the long-buried images of his past displayed before him, vivid and detailed. This section, in which the taste and smell of the madeleine cake contains so much of the past, is a famous reference point for memory studies. Furthermore, a similar idea recurs in much of the literature that I have read for this thesis. There are a few notable concepts in the passages that I should draw some attention to. The first is the notion of chance, in which I

believe Proust puts too much stock. As mentioned in the criticism of Margalit in Chapter One, it seems to me that both Tadjoo and Faizullah actively seek to re-member themselves into communities of memory that are not obviously their own. In an attempt to recover a past somewhat different in quality from that of Proust's, in that it is *not* the author's lived or experienced past that they seek, there is more than simply chance at work. Both authors actively seek out these pasts, and as I will show in the analysis of 'memory in the object' in *Seam* that follows, Faizullah gathers materials, traces seams, in order to increase her chances of a successful excavation of memory. I believe that a productive politics of memory cannot depend so much on chance, as that might reinforce Manichean notions of what is mine and what is not, what is here and what is there, what is past and what is present. It is more useful to work within the Benjaminian notion of the excavation, which requires patience and a returning to the strata that make up memory, but is far from entirely based in chance. One has to work, one has to excavate, and one has to be accommodating to the past if, and when, it chooses to converse with one.

In fact, Proust does, after an initial dependence on chance, make a demand on human agency in the work of memory, noting that it is indeed the work of creation in the present. I believe that chance is not necessarily the beginning of the causal chain of memory in the object, and Faizullah shows this to be the case throughout *Seam*.

The second concept is the first italicised sentence in the extract – “It is plain that the truth I am seeking lies not in the cup but in myself” (Proust 52) – this reinforces the work done in the previous section of this chapter which suggested that the work of authentic memory had both its roots and its altering destination in the one doing remembering, not in the past being recalled. As Benjamin writes, Proust “did not describe a life as it actually was, but a life as it was remembered by the one who had lived it” (204). The fascinating aspect of the work done by Faizullah is that, through literary representation, she describes a life that was not lived by the one who seeks to understand it, as well as find its propinquity to her. In this process, Faizullah comes to see

...How thin
the seam between
the world and the world:
a few layers of muscle
and fat, a sheet wrapped
around a corpse: glass
so easily ground into sand.

- ('Reading Tranströmer in Bangladesh' 62-68)

What Faizullah is gesturing towards here is that a life lived is in almost unbearable proximity to a life not lived, that the story that is ours is very close to the Other's story. This gives potency to the idea that one might find a past not obviously theirs in an unexpected object, if only they turn the soil over enough times. The final two lines of the poem even suggest that the world for one and the world for another are almost identical, but in different forms, that they are as similar as glass and sand.

The main thrust of the argument made in this section is that the past is not contained in facts or information, but rather it is absent in both of these. The qualities of the past, the ways in which the past can be alive in the present, are eroded in historical or cold knowledges. Unmistakably, for Proust, the past is truly alive in the object, though that object is elusive and perhaps never to be found. Instances much like Proust's madeleine cake are littered throughout literature, and there are multiple of these in the literature reviewed for this thesis. What this demonstrates is that multiple thinkers and artists have found the past summoned through the object, and see memory in the object as a viable and unparalleled tool in accessing a repressed past.

In Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, a character looking for sex-work on the streets is aware of memories stored in the object: "tucked safely within her low bodice are monogrammed handkerchiefs which she has retrieved from the pockets of white men. She withdraws one of them forcefully and shakes the memory of a bitter encounter off it..." (38). What is interesting here is that memory seems to cling to the object, and the character is desperate to be rid of the memory that the handkerchief stores. It seems that the memory evoked by the object is malleable to her once it has presented itself, once it has been acknowledged it can be done away with. The reader is not given indication as to how successful her attempt at evicting the memory is, but what is sure is that the handkerchief stores some of the sensation, in this case the bitterness, of the past.

I will only draw attention to one more example of memory in the object in my secondary texts before turning to *Seam*, which is important for the way in which it seeks a past that was not experienced by the one seeking, and that is from Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi*, in which it is written that "depending on the day, it came back to him in fragments – the slightest detail could plunge him into a long bout of reverie – or like an almost perfect painting" (141). I focus briefly on this example for similar reasons to Vera's text, namely to illustrate that the past is not at our bidding. What I mean by this is that, like Vera's character,

sometimes we are confronted with a past that is not expected, and also potentially not wanted. The memory in the object is not always as pleasant as Proust's madeleine cake. In this way, the memory in the object works against active forgetting as much as it is beyond active remembering. Some of the horrible events of the Rwandan genocide emerge unbidden in the present, because "a mere suggestion was enough to bring the torment back to life: the colour or cut of a dress, a melody, or the sound of a voice" (Diop 173).

Therefore, traumatic memory too can be contained in the object. The process of the traumatic event returning unbidden because of a likeness in sensation or scenario is known as intrusion, and can be exceptionally damaging and traumatising in its own right. This is particularly true if the traumatised subject has not undertaken the process of converting traumatic memory into narrative memory.

Some of the most potent, revealing and enduring metaphors utilised in *Seam* are rooted in the object. There is a binary throughout entrenched in the twin symbols of clothing: a Bangladeshi woman or the figure of a 'birangona' is represented with the word 'sari', and the violent, raping Pakistani military is represented with the word 'khaki'. In this way, Faizullah writes memory in the object, as the sari- or khaki-clad body comes to bring with it an entire history subdued, but not silent; quietened, but still murmuring and intimating.

With this understanding of the place and potential of 'memory in the object', there is a phrase that emerges repeatedly in *Seam*, a phrase which, if tugged at, reveals a river that winds throughout the collection. This phrase depicts the picking up of objects and the past that they contain. It shows them carried throughout the Bangladesh Faizullah explores. The first time Faizullah deploys the phrase is in the second section of the opening poem, '1971', in which she uses it twice:

Gather these materials:

slivers of wet soap, hair

swirling pond water, black oil.

Amar peet ta duye de na,

Grandmother says, so Mother

palms the pink soap, slides

it between her small hands

Gather these materials. The poem ends with an em dash, an ending that does not carry the conclusive finality of a full stop. The poem continues into section 3, and that is one reason for the em dash, but there is something more at play here. The em dash is long, like a river, or a seam, something to be traced or pulled at, like a past. It also appears throughout the collection, and without a space between the word before or after the dash, it functions as a seam: tying one word closely to the next, one story to the one alongside it, the past to the present. One of the materials gathered is the sunlight on the river at dusk, which gleams “like bits of bomb-/shell” (16-17), evoking the Bangladeshi War of Liberation. Faizullah, in subtly bringing to the reader not only the sustaining and communal nature of the river, but also the violence and destruction that played out upon it, and then so soon after ending the poem with an em dash, reminds that the past is not finished. This ending also invites the reader into the collection – it makes space for their subjectivity – and asks the reader to re-member.

Perhaps this choice in punctuation contributes to the collection being so moving, for the things that Faizullah does not say, for that which is not made explicit, for the words that whisper on my lap once the book is closed. *Gather these materials.*

It is clear that Faizullah regards the river as a material that contains the past. This is demonstrated both in that the past, its ceremonies and practices are “undrowned”; as well as when the light reflects off the “long river in the wet twilight” the past returns to the poet (13/19). She is able to re-present, re-member herself into, and thereby recreate a scene for which she was not present but which is still present in her. Faizullah gathers soap, she gathers wet hair, she gathers the very landscape of Bangladesh in her hands and finds it unlocks what was previously inaccessible. She lets these materials speak their memories through her, and they in turn bear the mark of Faizullah as artist. Walter Benjamin speaks to the potential of this sort of memory work when he writes that “an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before it and after it” (‘Proust’ 204).

In this opening poem, Faizullah begins the work of seeking memory in the object, and finds it to be so productive that she continues it throughout *Seam* in a manner that is striking and almost obsessive. In normative terms, Bangladesh is not her country, but I believe that Faizullah, in a manner that runs against the Proustian notion of chance, opens herself up to a community of memory that allows her to re-member herself into the past-present of Bangladesh that these materials, gathered, hold.

The next time that the phrase appears in '1971' is in response to a question posed to the speaker by her mother, and it is revealing of how seriously *Seam* takes the notion of memory in the object:

.... *But tell me*, she asks,
why couldn't you research the war
from here? Gather these materials,

these undrowned ceremonies—
tea poured into a cup, a woman
stepping lightly across green field

into a green pond—

(v. 7-13)

The gathering of materials is not the academic work of a historian in an institution abroad. It is work that is deeply personal. It is work that can only be done in the presence of certain objects, which contain the past in all its sensory fullness. This is the implicit response to the question – somehow Faizullah knows that the past she is seeking is crucially *in* Bangladesh. There is something that would be missing from a research conducted at a distance. There is much cold knowledge, but there is little of the past itself, available to her in Texas. She must gather certain materials. She wants to encounter the past, not know about it. Or, in Margalit's terminology, she seeks knowledge *from* the past – not necessarily knowledge *about* the past. The next poem, 'En Route to Bangladesh, Another Crisis of Faith' begins with an emphasised demand. I read it as a more direct response to the same question posed by the speaker's mother halfway through '1971 v.' which is, in different words, why do you have to go there? The speaker answers, in the next poem

Because I *must* walk
 through the eye-shaped
shadows cast by these
 curved gold leaves thick
atop each constructed
 palm tree, past displays
of silk scarves, lit
 silhouettes of blue-bottled
perfume—

(1-10 my emphasis)

She *must* – there is simply no other way – she must go to where the past is contained. Here, in walking, the speaker literally moves in and through objects holding memory, waiting for them to open themselves to her. It is worth noting again how much time Faizullah spends in this collection of poetry acutely detailing and describing the space she is moving in and the things that she sees. She is noticing everything; she is minimising the role of chance. If Avery Gordon is read alongside Proust, one might say that Faizullah undertakes, and therefore presents, a method of memory that is accommodating and welcoming to the ghosts that may lie buried in the objects of pasts she actively wishes to re-member herself into.

To re-inforce this final point, and to complete the detailed analysis of memory in the object in *Seam*, I will quote at length from another poem, the first of two which share the title ‘Reading Willa Cather in Bangladesh’:

Together, they lifted a lid, pulled out a drawer, and looked at something. They hid it away and never spoke of what they had seen; but neither of them forgot it.

Each day, I begin
to disappear into yards
of silk or cotton—
the one that is me but not
begins to emerge,
coaxed out by each hand
pressed against me,
its desire to remember—
cousin, aunt, beggar,
vendor—then rain, slanting
like sheets flung out,
hung up—then rooftops, skin-
thin, lightbulbs swaying
like newspapers clipped
to clothesline after clothesline—
then smell after pungent smell

rising from gutter to rooftop:
 fruit: rot: spice: body. It is the sea
 itself. It belongs and does
 not belong to me. In my room,
 I lift lids, pull out drawers,
 measure time by each object
 left behind: string: sandal:
 bead...
 (1-24).

To begin with the knot, I read the ambiguous line “its desire to remember” as follows: I understand the unsettled pronoun ‘it’ to resolve itself as both the hand mentioned before and all the subject (vendor, cousin, aunt, beggar) mentioned after. These hands wish to remember, to find space for themselves and the stories they symbolise, in the present. As Faizullah and her body disappears it is replaced by the corporeality of these ghosts as they seek accommodation in the present.

This transmogrification described by Faizullah in lines 1-11 is crucial to understanding the work of memory in *Seam* for two reasons. The first is that it shows that it can be in memory in which the overlapping, interpolating and common seams that connect so much can be clearly found. The second, which informs and buoys the first, is that it is in the object or the site that memory in its authentic form – that is to say, bearing traces of the past – is most likely to be found.

At this point in the collection, Faizullah has spent considerable time in Bangladesh. She has conducted multiple interviews with birangonas, she has reflected on her compromised position as interviewer³² and the false objectivity or distance which that

³² In a deeply self-aware thread woven through the collection, there is a series of poems entitled, successively: ‘The Interviewer Acknowledges Desire’, ‘The Interviewer Acknowledges Shame’ and ‘The Interviewer Acknowledges Grief’. In ‘The Interviewer Acknowledges Shame’ Faizullah writes that she only felt shame at the moment when “she begins to write about it in third person,/as though it was that simple/to unnailed myself from my own body” (42-45). It is for this reason that I hesitate to use the term ‘speaker’ when writing of the voice narrating these poems – Faizullah works throughout the collection to understand how these poems are hers. She feels shame when abstracting into the third person, and thus I insert her name or use the term ‘author’ to indicate the fundamental mechanism of the self actively re-remembering into a community that defines the work of memory in this text.

position suggests, and she is reading a favoured writer of hers and finding the seams between his work and hers now. She begins to write about how, repeatedly, *each day*, she *disappears* into the object, in this case *silk* or *cotton* – reminding again of the importance of the symbol of the sari in the collection, and the crucial role textiles (predominantly produced by women) play in the economy of Bangladesh – and then “the one who is me but not/begins to emerge” (4-5). This is a crucial moment in the collection. Faizullah understands that, by working with the past in the present, something radical occurs in the ontology of a Manichean self/other binary. Faizullah finds that, between self and other, there is not a sea which functions as an unbridgeable divide, but there is a seam, which ties the two irrevocably whilst at the same time providing a distinguishing marker. *The one who is me but not*; this is a description of what might happen if the seam between self and other is traced.

Importantly, I am not suggesting here that Faizullah’s poetry aspires to or suggests an obliteration of difference, which might create what Saidiya Hartman names a “facile intimacy” (19). Facile intimacy is most likely to occur when one imagines oneself in the stead of the other, thereby failing to increase the space their space and, actually, closing it off entirely. The series ‘Interview with a Birangona’ works exceptionally hard to increase the space of those women who experienced horrors which Faizullah lays no claim to. Nor should she. No, Faizullah instead tugs on the thread to see what might be produced in the “how thin seam” between the world and the world – between what is now and what is then, what is there and what is here, what is other and what is self. In this way she largely avoids the repressive effects of empathy. As one partakes in a community of memory, ghosts seek space for accommodating conversation, and out of what the poem above calls their *desire to remember*, the past begins to emerge and speak, and live, in the present.

Put differently, in a series of sensory interactions with living objects, Faizullah makes space for the ghost. As Benjamin reminds us, the act of storytelling and memory bears the trace of the author, and in this way Faizullah writes those who are not her but who, through representation, are imprinted with her literary spirit. “[C]ousin, aunt, beggar,/vendor” press against her and ask to be fought for, to be recalled, to be listened to (9-10).

In this poem, the past, the ghosts of those who desire to remember, emerge and take up the space she offers in the objects listed: silk, cotton, rain, rooftops, lightbulbs, pungent smell, string, sandal, bead, cup of tea, pearls around neck, skin, powder. “I lift lids, pull out drawers,/measure time by each object/left behind...” (21-23). Throughout *Seam* and evidently in ‘Reading Willa Cather in Bangladesh’, Faizullah demonstrates an acute

awareness of memory in the object, how these objects retain the past and allow time to be wholly reconsidered.

Later, Faizullah writes “It belongs and does/not belong to me” (19-20). This is a phrase that encapsulates much of what makes her journey to Bangladesh, as well as Tadjó’s journey to Rwanda, important for the way in which literature can purpose memory for the future. In reading these texts I have come to firmly believe that the two authors have made a choice – they have chosen to trace the seam and find how it might belong to them, how what is distant and other might too be in some way theirs. And that is, ultimately, the only choice one can make if one wants to set in path a new future. Faizullah travels to Bangladesh because she believes there is a chance in the fight for the oppressed past. But to fight for that past, she first has to seek it out, and she finds it again and again in the objects and site of Bangladesh.

In order to comprehensively consider this poem, I must also speak briefly to the second poem in *Seam* that shares the title ‘Reading Willa Cather in Bangladesh’. In this later poem, Faizullah speaks to the choice she makes, the one I have described here as the only choice that can be made if one wishes to make a new history out of old events. It is not an easy choice, in fact it is the difficult one, to look for the seam as opposed to rejecting difference as sea. And Faizullah reflects on this here

There were again things which seemed destined for her...

I would give it up: this heaviness
built of neither silence nor snow. I am

there, but here, back in Virginia, walking
through shadows of leaves imprinted damp

on gray sidewalks. I would look toward
their soil-etched wings, and curl away

from dim corners where shadows must
be rubbed away from mirrors, where TV

might flicker with the figure of a woman
dressed in green reading the news aloud

from blue-inked pages. Daily, it is possible
to forget. I would give it up: the commotion

of wrought-iron windows looking out to fields
of tea and rice, the failed light pouring through.

I would turn from beggar hands pressed against

glass, their hungry and open mouths. I would
rather be here, pacing in a room papered with
shadows of bare oak limbs, than there, sitting
quietly in each dark room that holds its breath, waits
for the hum of the generator to light its cement walls.

What Faizullah seems to gesture toward here, in tone and content, as well as the epigraph which speaks of fate, is that the choice of going to Bangladesh, of inhabiting that past, of exploring the “veined geography inside” her, is not an easy one. The repeated refrains *I would rather* and *I would give it up* speak to the difficulty and emotionally arduous work, the “heaviness/built of neither silence nor snow” that conversations with ghosts require (1-2). Once one finds the seam, “daily, it is possible to forget” but only briefly, only to allow oneself pause. The tired and jaded tone of the poem gives pause to the notion that any of this work is as easy as eating a madeleine cake and recalling a happy childhood.

As Faizullah wonders earlier, “Why call any of it back?” similarly she speaks here to the sheer enormity of the task ahead of the re-membering artist, but she always decides – or even intuitively knows and feels – that, both intrinsically and instrumentally, it is a task that needs doing. After the second ‘Reading Willa Cather in Bangladesh’, replete with the exhausted wish to reject, to curl away, to give up, to *turn away from*, she returns again to Bangladesh to conclude the collection and on page 65 remarks

...The moon filled the dust polluted sky: a ripe, unsheathed
lychee. It wasn't enough to see clearly by, *but I still turned my
face toward it.* (added emphasis).

Finally, after much doubt and difficulty Faizullah turns her face toward her work, toward the birangonas, towards Bangladesh, towards exile and pain and loss, as well as beauty and joy and love, and tries to find ways to write about all of these.

Chapter Three

One of my intentions in this final chapter is to bring together *Imana* and *Seam*, the two central texts of this thesis, which have thus far been considered in separate chapters. To further tease out what has been a productive metaphor: the organising element of this chapter is a seam. This seam has been felt throughout the thesis, has at times been traced, at others brushed against, sometimes skipped over, but not yet picked at. In this chapter, I am led by this seam. I hope that, by giving it explicit attention, the literary possibilities I have been constructing might tug towards the complicated re-writing of a particular site: the site of the(ir) nation(s)³³.

Herein, I have already contemplated the place and operations of both Bangladesh and Rwanda as nation-states in the global, and my own, imaginary. I have also touched repeatedly upon the importance of the particularities of space and site for Tadjoo and Faizullah. This has perhaps been made most evident in their work by the unambiguous value they place on travel-to, journey-within and writing-from these specific nations. They understand themselves as writing from and about nations, and as such request that their works be considered in some way within a discourse on the(ir) nation(s).

Therefore, I would be remiss if I did not dedicate a significant portion of this thesis to what is persistently (and unavoidably so, I would argue) a vital consideration throughout both *Imana* and *Seam*: what might be generated when the literary is, conceivably, always already placed in relation to the elements of the(ir) nation(s) that are hegemonic and oppressive. Implicit in this consideration is its aspirational sibling: what liberatory work can the literary do against what is tyrannical in the(ir) nation(s). Put slightly differently, with more attention on the work done in this dissertation: in what ways can this thesis' reflections on memory, temporality, identity and responsibility illuminated by and in these texts be coordinated toward the current configurations of the(ir) nation(s). Or, in what ways is/are the(ir) nation(s) antecedent to these deliberations.

³³ This figuring – the(ir) nation(s) – attempts to speak to the multiple, intersecting sites and concepts of import to Faizullah and Tadjoo. It is clear that whilst they are both interested in 'the nation' as a (perhaps 'the') broad organisational feature of global politics, power and discourse, they attend too to 'their nations', the specificities of Rwanda and Bangladesh. My hope is that the figuring above describes both the unique and constitutive features of the spaces from and about which they write, as well as the implications and utility said writing has in a broader discourse to do with 'the nation'. In short, this representation, as this thesis, hopes to attend to both difference and similarity, tracing seams, without eliding either.

Further, I wish to, at the outset of this chapter, set myself firmly against the potential misreading that these considerations *only* hold productive political value when read with the nation – I believe that the prior chapters consistently prove value in and of themselves. The nation is an important site for the considerations developed previously, but it is not by any means the only or even the central site in which they find utility. It is, however, one of the spaces that both *Imana* and *Seam* contemplate most vigorously and as such is an intriguing ground on which to consider them together.

I should impress at this juncture that these texts ask of a reader to continually be alive to the possibility that the nation is not only that which influences and demands – through what Bhabha names a national pedagogy, but also that which is provisional and responsive to change and disruption – opened up by what Bhabha terms national performance. That is to say, both *Imana* and *Seam* offer new imaginings of the(ir) nation(s), whilst still acknowledging the deep and ubiquitous workings of the(ir) nation(s) as political reality. In the contemporary moment, as has been mentioned earlier, the nation continues to impact, work through and organise the corporeal lives and epistemological worlds of national subjects. Here, I think particularly of those who find themselves locked within (whether physically and/or via symbolic assignation) and defined in relation to national borders.

It is in this configuration that Homi Bhabha's work in *The Location of Culture* becomes useful. This chapter will work closely with Bhabha, particularly the eighth chapter in the book, 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation' (DissemiNation). Bhabha's thinking on temporality, nationhood and the literary is incisive. That being said, his style is often intractable and sticky, and with this in mind it is my hope that these literary texts, read synchronously with 'DissemiNation', might illuminate some of his less accessible ideas.

Per Bhabha, the nation as a site of power, and indeed this is evident in both Bangladesh and Rwanda, employs strategic symbols that seek to both cohere and regenerate a continuist national narrative. Inevitably, this coherence demands essentialising and a varnishing of difference. This provokes, for Bhabha, and in our historical contemporaneity – where nations are constituted by complex groupings of multiple positionalities³⁴ – a crisis of representation.

³⁴ As Bhabha writes at the outset of 'DissemiNation': "I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and *emigres*, and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering in

That is to say, some people are marginalized or dislocated by the coherent/successful national narrative. Thus, they are, by moving in the nation's blind-spot, oppressed in their undesired presence rather than being recipients or citizens of the caring nation that the national narrative presents.

Tadjo and Faizullah's texts can be read as speaking directly to and against the continuist national narrative of the(ir) nation(s). They tell the stories of those elided by the national pedagogy, of those performing a supplementary national present. Sitting in these stories, as literary critics, might allow us to understand complex forms of co-existing difference than polarizing nationalist identities ask us to imagine. In this way, one encounters the nation split within itself, which takes us to the seam between nations, peoples and lives, allowing us to imagine ways to accommodate difference, rather than destroy it.

This chapter, while still thinking 'the time of memory', will consider *Imana* and *Seam* against the backdrop of the(ir) nation(s) and alongside 'DissemiNation', in order to understand the significance of their efforts to articulate the complex lives of those repressed by the national narrative.

In this process I will pick at the seam that both joins and distinguishes, the seam running between *Imana* and *Seam*, Faizullah and Tadjo, Rwanda and Bangladesh. If successful, this final chapter should reveal additional pathways by which the two texts are coordinated toward a radical literary humanism that encourages a new reading of memory and the past, one's relation to it, as well as the future, and one's role in determining what it might look like.

The 'Beyond'

Homi Bhabha, in the introductory chapter to 'The Location of Culture', attempts to define that terrain which is always shifting, slipping, resisting fixing by hegemonic constructions of power, and therefore that which is crucial to analysing the articulations produced against that power. He names this terrain the 'beyond' (1). Bhabha attempts to give the fullness possible to the concept of the 'beyond', without fixing it in place by definition, understanding it as a terrain, or multiple 'always moving terrains' in which space emerges for creating strategies of

the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present" (139).

selfhood “that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (1-2). It is in this beyond, which “is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past” that the nation itself is negotiated (Bhabha 1). This is because the nation, understood here as the pedagogical state, seeks to fix, homogenise and concretise its populous into and via a singular, forgetful national narrative. But it is challenged at its borders, it is refuted from the ‘beyond’, where articulations and productions of cultural difference seek to supplement that narrative and render it impotent. In this way, from the ‘beyond’, the nation is revealed as already split, always already compromised, and it is from the ‘beyond’ that the people and stories elided, erased, varnished into shiny continuity by the national narrative, might be found, might be listened to, might be written and read.

Reading Bhabha on the ‘beyond’ offers particular invigoration to this study:

The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past...Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth (1).

The disorientation Bhabha speaks of as being fundamental to the ‘beyond’ comes up repeatedly in both *Imana* and *Seam*, and in the positions from which the respective authors write. Both Tadjoo and Faizullah articulate themselves and are articulated in the(ir) nation(s) as disoriented, they are found at a tense border – both here and there, both inside and outside, both included and excluded. It may be that when the work of the traveling writer, the re-membering writer (for these two are inextricable), is considered as operating in and from the ‘beyond’ that the national importance of their work can be most comprehensively explored.

Paying particular attention to the ways in which *Seam* and *Imana* articulate their terrain of production as the ‘beyond’ will be instructive. Much of the work in the preceding chapters can be understood in the terms Bhabha uses above, and as such I will speak to only a few illuminating moments. He uses the phrase ‘moment of transit’, and it is into this moment that the traveling or re-membering writer has to fit. Tadjoo and Faizullah, in three ways, are in transit: transit as literal travel; transit as spatial transience; transit as temporal transience.

To the first, there is much literal movement depicted in and producing the texts, the subtitle of *Imana* is ‘Travels in the heart of Rwanda’, its opening chapter is ‘The First

Journey’ and includes ruminations on various cities and flights that bring Tadjó to Kigali. The concluding chapter is ‘The Second Journey’, and this notion of transit, of journey, therefore bookends the text. And as Bhabha so rightly points out, when beginnings and endings (here read as the first and last chapter) are replaced by notions of transit, movement, and crossing, one senses a complex continuing of the ‘beyond’ rather than absolute and clear definition of the borders of a text, and a nation. Faizullah also travels in *Seam*, and literal transit is a recurring theme. Twin poems, already analysed in Chapter Two, are entitled ‘En Route to Bangladesh, Another Crisis of Faith’ – and this *en route* emphasises and situates the textual in the moment of transit, not in the leaving and not in the arriving, but in the space between those two.

The idea of spatial transience is the second way in which a ‘moment of transit’ is pivotal to these texts – Tadjó clearly articulates the spatial movement and leakage of Rwanda in a phrase I have already dwelt upon at length: “Yes, I went to Rwanda but Rwanda is also here in my country” (31). Now one sees the *au-delà* that Bhabha champions, that Rwanda is here with Tadjó in the Ivory Coast, it is there where she travels in Rwanda, and it is indeed on all sides. Faizullah’s personal and familial history is marked by spatial transience, as she renders Bangladesh as a country which she is outside but which is inside her, and she moves through that nation as someone who is outside of it but also inside it. Faizullah writes this complex figuring of that which is different and that which is same, of how she always finds herself the seam between at least two spaces:

I take my place among
 this damp, dark horde of men
 and women who look like me—
 because I look like them—
 because I am ashamed
 of their bodies that reek so
 unabashedly of body—
 because I can—because I am
 an American, *a star*
 of blood on the surface of muscle.

(‘En Route to Bangladesh i.’ 31-40 original emphasis)

Here, that place that Faizullah takes is contingent and uneasy. It is disorientating, but I believe it is a productive disorientation. She takes the place that is hers, amongst bodies with which her body identifies and can be identified, whilst simultaneously feeling distanced,

ashamed, and *not-in-place*. She is en route, she is the restless explorer Bhabha finds in the ‘beyond’.

The final moment of transit that I have alluded to is that of temporal transience. This moment is central for Bhabha as both the epigraph and the chapter of *The Location of Culture* I am most closely analysing in this chapter turn their attention to the temporal. The epigraph, lifted from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, reads “The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time” (Bhabha, unnumbered). Bhabha speaks in the excerpt above of finding ourselves and the ‘beyond’ in the “moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures” and the element of spatial transience of *Imana* and *Seam* is always crossed with temporal transience that I have repeatedly articulated as the active work of memory. My various articulations of this have included, most directly with regard to *Imana*, Avery Gordon’s call to listen to ghosts and pay attention to the demands of hauntings; in *Seam*, Walter Benjamin’s profound emphasis on leveraging the work of the oppressed past in the present. I have firmly established throughout this work how necessary the ‘past-present’ is for the writers considered here.

With the guiding illumination of these three lights, provided by Bhabha’s articulation of a ‘moment of transit’, I am suggesting that Tadjoo and Faizullah write from and in the ‘beyond’. It is at the edge, at the always shifting border of the(ir) nation(s), which their texts and the lives which these write, are to be found. Further, due to the nature of their particular projects, they cannot write from anywhere else. In this configuration, then, what usually can be read as deficiency or limitation I am re-thinking as loaded and productive. Yes, neither Faizullah nor Tadjoo are citizens or even permanent residents of the(ir) nation(s). Yes, neither Tadjoo nor Faizullah have experiential knowledge of the time of the events which they remember themselves into. But they call those all back anyway. They write all those anyway. They expand what is relevant in and for the present. It is not at the boundary that the nation ends. It is at the boundary that one first notices the presence of these texts. The ‘beyond’, Bhabha reminds us, is not a new horizon, or a break from the past, it is the space of a presence and lives which combat homogenizing hegemony (1).

Tadjoo and Faizullah are necessarily disoriented, necessarily lacking, necessarily at the margins, stumbling over the constantly-drifting tripwire of the national present. All that can be productive. They write from and in the ‘beyond’. And, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, that gives these writers great power, because it is crucial to work against productions such as

The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism [which] proves that the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood (5).

It is against these deaths, all too familiar in a South Africa settling back in to antagonising racialized ethno-linguistic identities, that the 'beyond' might offer promising resistance. It is impossible to have read *Imana* and to not think 'Rwanda' when Bhabha evokes Serbia here. Bhabha writes that "to dwell 'in the beyond' is also [...] to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*" (7). What I understand Bhabha to mean is that reading and writing in and from the 'beyond', to think of a temporal and textual 'beyond' is a way in which a radical literary humanism – one that traces and teases the seam between lives, communities, nations, genders, races, linguistic groups, and in that tracing teases out difference and similarity – might look for the past in the present and leverage that in-between temporality for a future that looks and lives differently for all who might wish to breathe there.

The Stairwell

A delightful metaphor that Bhabha uses, when thinking of where one might find articulations of cultural difference, is that of the stairwell. He writes this metaphor, pointing out that "the hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end from settling into primordial polarities" (4).

What is useful here is to consider how deeply Tadjoo and Faizullah occupy the stairwell. In ways that have been dwelt upon already, they are both inside and outside the(ir) nation(s), they belong and do not belong to the(ir) nation(s). Another phrase for the terrain of the stairwell could be the 'beyond' – and it is precisely this disorientation, this space that is neither beginning nor end, that demands attention. For Bhabha, it is in this temporal movement and passage that the people as they are can be found, and crucially not the 'people' as the nation attempts to construct them.

Through the paradigm of the stairwell the national border is known to be something that does not end or divide, but instead is that site from where the other begins to pulsate in a space supposedly not its own by right. Tadjoo writes that "what had happened [in Rwanda] concerned us all. It was not just one nation lost in the dark heart of Africa that was affected"

and in this she shows that the literal border of Rwanda is not where that nation ends, but rather where it begins to presence in different spaces (3). She also continues to insist that the affective repercussions of Rwanda do not merely belong to those within the national, polarized identity of ‘Rwandan’, or even the continental concretized ‘African’ – for her neither of these make sense. In the stairwell, in the contingent and slippery terrain of the ‘beyond’, Tadjó is able to make the claim that the Rwandan Genocide is about all people, *us all*, not only those within or displaced by that power structure situated in a particular geo-space. It is a balance, one that Tadjó constantly negotiates, and an important one: to not elide the specificity of difference whilst simultaneously not allowing difference to be co-opted into discourses of violent alterity.

The stairwell is the seam. It is that place where the polarizing discourse of modern nationhood is shown to be fraught and contingent. No nation is alone, and this is confirmed in *Imana* when Tadjó has her “first encounter with Rwanda while [she] was in South Africa” (4). Somewhere between here and there – an Ivorian in South Africa encountering Rwanda. This is the stairwell. This is the passage between those essentialising identities (here largely national) which prevents those from concretizing into divisive othering. If, Bhabha suggests, we can read *in and from* the stairwell, we may find the people.

Frantz Fanon is quoted by Bhabha who writes that

continuist national narratives miss the ‘zone of occult instability where the people dwell’. It is from this *instability* of cultural signification that the national culture comes to be articulated as a dialectic of various temporalities – modern, colonial, postcolonial, ‘native’ – that cannot be a knowledge that is stabilised in its enunciation (152).

This is a strong reminder that the people live complexly and experience and articulate outside of ‘continuist national narratives’. The nation attempts to stabilize these epistemological and lived temporal differences. However, the instability of the ‘occult zone’, the passage of the ‘stairwell’, the disorientation of the ‘beyond’ – these are all gestures towards that place wherein the people dwell, that place which cannot be fixed in place. In simpler terms, the people are not found – in fact they are displaced – within continuist national narratives. Continuist national narratives seek to reinforce the structure of nation as power, and to consistently display the nation in a positive and progressing light. But, and this is where Gellner’s thought in *Nations and Nationalism* is illuminating,

Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all is not what it seems to itself [...] The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism [...] is itself in the least contingent and accidental (56).

We are reminded in 'DissemiNation' by Gellner that the nation as it presents to the world, to its citizenry, and to *itself*, is not that which it seems. The nation as a structure of care presents as a coherent and comprehensive unit – the repeated metaphorical refrain of 'many as one'. Thus, the narratives and temporalities whose 'shreds and patches' are not utilised for this national pedagogy, are either co-opted or elided. It is at the moment of erasure that Tadjo reminds us "to forget Rwanda after the sound and the fury was like being blind in one eye, voiceless, handicapped" and she insists that there is a deficiency in this national narrative that seeks to write away that which is violent, oppressive, repulsive (3, my emphasis).

(It is at this point important to point out that the lives and stories at the margin are marginalised only because those stories and lives in the centre are benefited by the essentialising national pedagogy. Put differently, this notion of the 'people' is one which drives and perpetuates nodes of economic, social and symbolic power. For example, in *Imana*, Tadjo represents a man who tells her that, in Rwanda after the moment of genocide

It seems as though nothing is moving forward, that gradually everything is falling into oblivion. No one wants to be weighed down by that unbearable memory. Those who survived are there to remind us of the past and we would prefer them not to be in the forefront any more so that the country can rebuild itself more quickly, so that money will come back. The survivors are an embarrassment, the prisoners are an embarrassment. We want to freeze our memories in monuments of stone (111).

For various reasons then, the(ir) nation(s) need to marginalize, need to homogenize, need to forget. The reasons espoused in these extract are that the articulations of trauma and difference – those of victims, survivors, perpetrators – do not attract international investment, particularly in a nation already weighed down by the symbols of Africa and genocide. But these impulses produce a national essentialism of the very same kind that engendered the conditions for the horror of the genocide in the first place. Lives, complex existences, considered to be an *embarrassment*, considered to not fit the continuist national narrative of a place coherent and worthy of investment, are marginalized. These are the ones that die, in the

ways Bhabha speaks of. And their deaths serve to benefit those who prosper from a coherent national pedagogy.)

This impulse to forget is what Bhabha names a “syntax of forgetting” and, he believes that it is through this impulse that “the problematic identification of a national people becomes visible” (160). Tadjó’s early impressions of Rwanda are shot through with this ‘syntax of forgetting’, as Rwanda seeks to establish itself, as nation, as in a time firmly *after* the genocide. She sees this in the very structure of the country as she writes that “everywhere, construction is in progress” and this sentence can be read as having to do with a national narrative of forgetting, as in this construction “the city seems to have forgotten everything” (18, 9). The(ir) nation(s) then seek to fix the ‘people’ in a national pedagogy whose present is not the past of atrocity, though the people continue to perform far more complex temporalities. Bhabha understands the national narrative as being developed and perpetuated in a time of writing, and it is in this time of writing that the textual possesses so much potential in unsettling the hegemonic and oppressive nation.

The Time of Memory

If one spends some time with the third section in the fragmented, longer poem ‘Interviewers Note’ in *Seam*, and then places it in the larger context of the ‘birangona’ narrative, a number of these processes reveal themselves

iii.

*if burnt, she said, I'll turn to ash,
and you wondered if she meant, Who
will touch me as though they never
did? She said, When I remember,
my being shatters, and you thought of dusk
candling into small flames in dark
canteens across the city, flagrant
across faces of beggars, their gaunt,
atrophied arms they set swinging
to garner the little pity the rippling
glimpses of our faces offer through
each tinted, glossy window. You
tell me, she said, am I not also your mother?*

What we are confronted with in this poem, particularly in the italicised dialogue offered by a birangona, is the time of memory. The time of memory, that oft-evoked past-present, cuts through a simplistic and violent national pedagogy. The time of memory is one of those ‘zones of occult instability’ that Fanon considers. Here, in the temporality occupied by the birangona, “[her] being shatters”. There is nothing stable about the ontology of a self who, beyond fragmenting, actually shatters. In the past-present that is the temporality of trauma, the temporality of the remembering birangona, the self-under-pressure ultimately shatters. *This is where the people are*. In Bangladesh, the construct of the ‘birangona’ elides the reality of those women, as examined in chapter two. In the time of the nation, in national time in Bangladesh, the ‘birangona’ is not what it seems and *not what it seems to itself*. There is something gross about the national pedagogy of the ‘birangona’ when considered alongside this poem.

Put differently, when one’s being shatters, there is great violence required to cohere such an experience into a successful and progressive national pedagogy. This nationhood takes “the scraps, patches and rags of daily life [and repeatedly turns them] into the signs of a coherent national culture” (Bhabha 145). What we are confronted with in the poem is the time of memory as yet untainted by the nationalist pedagogy. It is therefore apt that Faizullah in the poem is made to think of more of those at the boundaries of the nation, the subaltern who beg with gaunt arms, attempting to elicit some sympathy and protection from the space around them. When Faizullah writes a poem like this, one of its purposes is to prevent “the national history [from looking] itself narcissistically in the eye” (Bhabha 168). The national history, that fixes and reifies ‘birangona’ as a coherent part of Bangladeshi life, that dilutes their heterogeneity and potential-to-be-shattered into a single symbol co-ordinated toward freedom, sacrifice and nationhood, *that* national history does not want anything to do with the person speaking in the poem. It wants nothing to do with the beggar and their “gaunt/atrophied arms” swinging for pity. It wishes to flatten out their complex existences and homogenise them into a performance of national life, into a ‘many as one’.

What Faizullah’s writing in *Seam* repeatedly performs is the present of the(ir) nation(s): not made up of a “harmonious patchwork of cultures” but constituted by people who live a liminal and complex existence that disturbs the obligation to forget, that performs a temporality in tension with the national pedagogy of the national present.

Any stories of the people that articulate a different nation or *inhabit* a different nation than that of the ‘people’ constructed by the national narrative, are silenced or repurposed into that coherent national narrative. This process takes that which is gaping, split, frayed and

confusing and *turns them into* that which they are not – coherent and harmonious. Crucially, this process of gross transformation is not always successful – in a sense, the nation depends upon that which can undo it. It needs the everyday performance of a national present in order to

demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process (145)

But – and this is where Bhabha believes that his intervention of the performance of the present might be productive in writing a new national narrative – this requirement for the nation to not be just a past or pedagogy, but to also be a living and vital performing present creates potential ambivalence in the national narrative. There is tension in this dialectic between the national pedagogy and the “forms of life struggling to be represented” in the space opened up by a necessary national performance (Bhabha 147). Faizullah writes, in the poem above, of two forms of life that perform their complex existence in tension with the nationalist pedagogy of a coherent, independent and caring Bangladesh, and as such, reveals the limits of its representation. In other words, the(ir) nation(s) attempts at fixing a representative and homogeneous the ‘people’ are always already misdirected. Bhabha explains further that

The cultural moment of Fanon’s ‘occult instability’ signifies the people in a fluctuating moment *which they are just giving shape to*, so that postcolonial time questions the teleological traditions of past and present, and the polarized historicist *sensibility* of the archaic and the modern (153).

This passage, while reinforcing the indeterminacy and movement that is crucial in any articulation of the people of a nation, also shows us that the location of the people in these liminal spaces is a threat to the epistemology of the modern nation. Bhabha insists that the ‘people’ as constructed by the nation are always under threat from the epistemological facticity of the people (153). It is crucial to consider this problem from the standpoint of time – the national performance of the marginalized, or the counter-narratives in the textual, open up the present to other histories, writing from a postcolonial temporality which is always “questioning the teleological traditions of past and present” that the continuist national narrative prescribes (Bhabha 153).

That is to say, following Fanon, if the people are to be found in a moment, in a time, which they are always ‘just giving shape to’: continually creating themselves, and living *complex* lives that do not cohere into a national narrative of harmony, then the national pedagogy is confronted with a performance of

Complex personhood [which] means that all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others. Complex personhood means that people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves. Complex personhood means that even those called "Other" are never never that. Complex personhood means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward (Gordon 4).

These words echo Bhabha’s intervention that the “harmonious patchwork of cultures” insisted upon by the national narrative is misrepresentative, and it is not in that patchwork that one might find the people. The nation continually attempts to fix the ‘people’ as an epistemological site that is coherent and comfortable – in ways that are both literally and figuratively violent. But, this attempt is always undermined by the complex lives and articulations of the people.

What we have in the ‘stairwell’ is far less steady and contented than the coherent national narrative. The ‘stairwell’ is a shifting terrain where these polarizing identities come into contact, move and slip, and show that the idea of the nation as metonym for coherent Self in relation to dangerous Other is cracking.

The Nation Split in It/Self

The Marxist teleological temporality employed by the(ir) nation(s) as power is always already undermined by that which it does not acknowledge. It does not, perhaps even cannot, acknowledge how the “past *always* haunts the present” (Gordon viii). This is *especially* the case for those national pasts that have been actively elided, scrubbed away in order to totalize the people and unify the national will (Bhabha 160). Bhabha sees this scrubbing as an obligation meted out by the nation – he believes that the ‘people’ are “obliged to forget”, and this obligation to repress narratives of violence and oppression constitutive to the nation is the very mechanism which articulations of cultural difference within the nation resist.

I wish to utilise Faizullah now, and ask a question of the(ir) nation(s) lifted directly from *Seam*, from the fourth section of the fragmented poem 'Interviewers Note'. She wonders

*It is possible to live without
memory, Nietzsche said but
is it possible to live with it?*

(8-10)

If that question is directed toward the national pedagogy one sees it in an antagonistic and productive light. Bhabha, Fanon and Kristeva show us in different ways throughout 'DissemiNation' that the national pedagogy, that cohering and solidifying mechanism of elision, is built on forgetfulness. It actively works against and subjugates minorities and their narratives, as well as the temporal complexity that confounds its progressive sensibilities. Nietzsche may well have been speaking about Bhabha's national pedagogy here because, yes, the nation (and its continuist national narratives) can live without certain memory. In fact, the nation-as-power needs to forget in order to self-generate. On this much Bhabha is clear. Faizullah's following question, when directed toward the(ir) nation(s) is far more provocative. What happens when the nation is confronted with memory, with the discourses elided and marginalised? What does continuist national time become when cut across by circular, concurrent and different temporalities? What happens when the 'beyond' articulates? What happens when we press our ears to the door of the stairwell? Can the(ir) nation(s) as oppressive hegemonic structures of power continue to live?

This continuist national narrative is contested, then, by those who articulate from the 'beyond', by those who inhabit the stairwell. They write against the totalizing, cohering metaphor of the nation. They offer contesting temporalities and counter-narratives of the nation. In what Bhabha would term a performance of the national present, Tadjoo and Faizullah refuse to forget. Their projects are directly against this national construction of the 'people' which has as a central mechanism the displacement of certain narratives for the sake of "national memory" (Bhabha 169). Tadjoo sees that one of the ways to write Rwanda is not in this displacement, or this flattening of the incoherent. She opts instead for laying stories on top of one another, patiently, building a jagged, vertical and heterogeneous national narrative. For Tadjoo, after much listening in Rwanda, she comes to believe that "it is only at night, when darkness has fallen, that occasionally you will hear a few snatches of the truth. *The*

fragments of their stories overlap with each other, and finally, a picture emerges” (86, my emphasis). This is a process far more Benjaminian in its repetitive and quiet attention than the national continuist narrative. The national pedagogy seeks to fix the ‘people’, Tadjó’s writing seeks to find the people. That is the important difference. One is directed downwards in order to sustain power, the other moving constantly attempting to locate those who have been forgotten.

Seam and *Imana*, time and time again, “lead[] us to question the homogeneous and horizontal views associated with the nation’s imagined community” (Bhabha 144). It is my claim in this chapter that both Tadjó and Faizullah *write the nation from the ‘beyond’*, and as such “continually evoke and erase [the(ir) nation(s)] totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – [and] disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (Bhabha 149). Both texts articulate counter-narratives of the(ir) nation(s) and display that the nation is always and already split in itself. This concept is explained at length by Bhabha:

The boundary that marks the nation’s selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production and disrupts the signification of the people as homogeneous. The problem is not simply the ‘selfhood’ of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred nation *It/Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourse of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference (148).

Tadjó and Faizullah are part of this project of disruption and interruption. Through their agency, their acts of re-membling, of gathering materials, of transit and conversation with ghosts, they refuse the obligation to forget that would allow the nation to eternally self-generate. In other words, through their writing they do not allow the nation to construct its Other elsewhere, they demand the nation acknowledges the articulations of difference, contestation, and minorities *inside itself*. Bhabha sees the nation as trying always to cohere the daily lives or *performance* of national subjects into a national culture, taking many and making one, but this is an attempt that always fails as “the nation’s totality is confronted with, and crossed by, a supplementary movement of writing” (154). *Imana* and *Seam*, in the(ir) nation(s), are a part of this movement.

Again, I turn to ‘Interview with a Birangona’

3. *Would you consider yourself a survivor or a victim?*

Each week I pull hard
the water from the well,

bathe in my sari, wring
it out, beat it against

the flattest rocks—*Are you
Muslim or Bengali*, they

asked again and again.
Both, I said, *both*—then

rocks were broken along
my spine, my hair a black

fist in their hands, pulled
down into the river again

and again. Each day, each
night: river, rock, fist—

*the river wanders this way,
breaks that way, that is*

always the rivers play.

The question which opens the poem presents a binary. Faizullah, in asking of the birangona, are you this or are you that, falls into the conventional mechanism of the national pedagogy. In seeking to understand the condition of this birangona, Faizullah seeks to fix and cohere her into a singular narrative. *Would you consider yourself a survivor or a victim?* Her attempt to make sense of what it is to be a birangona is met with the time of memory. In the time of memory, the birangona articulates that she is both. Both, she says time and again, and Faizullah's essentialising question – in a remarkable and brave play of language – becomes in the body of the poem another essentialising question: are you Muslim or Bengali? This question presents the violent choice between two national pedagogies of nations built on a categorical division. Are you Muslim, are you Pakistani, are you with us?/Are you Bengali, are you Bangladeshi, are you against us? 'Both' speaks to the past-present that is a feature of the time of memory. The birangona points out Faizullah's flaw when she states that she is victim and she is survivor. She moves between these identities and lives a temporality in which both are always already possible.

The antecedent 'are you' is representative of the totalising impulse of the homogenising national pedagogy. The response, offered by the birangona, of 'both' is an articulation of the stairwell, in which complex and contingent multiple identities never

concretize into violent polarities. It is at this point in the poem that Faizullah, through the language of metaphor, presents the ambivalence of a dialectic between the cohering national pedagogy and the complex national performance.

The poem juxtaposes the uniquely Bangladeshi symbols of pedagogy and performance: the violence performed on the body of the birangona by rocks and fists – demanding she settle into an essentialist polarity – is juxtaposed with the birangona’s evocation of the river which says no, the river which refuses to settle, which wanders this way and that, the river which here *writes the contingency of complex personhood*.

...Each day, each
night: river, rock, fist
(13-14)

The rock and the fist seek to cohere. The river resists. This dialectic is repeated in the birangona’s memory of her trauma. Her time of memory cuts across any homogenising, essentialising, continuist narrative. She speaks in the about the past in the present tense. *Each day, each night*. Her articulation of a past-present is immensely powerful. By this articulation, Faizullah’s question – hoping for an answer that fixes an identity in a normative and sensible fashion - is crossed by the supplementary movement of the birangona’s articulation that she is the river, that she is both, that she is always moving and as a living, breathing person, will be cohered. In the time of memory that can be the stairwell, one is always more than one thing and always moving in more than one time, between more than one place.

It is important for a nuanced reading of Bhabha’s intervention here to understand what he means by ‘supplementary movement’. At length, then, he points out that those involved in those movements attempt to open the present up to other histories. In order to achieve this opening

the minority does not simply confront the pedagogical, or powerful master-discourse with a contradictory or negating referent. It interrogates its object by initially withholding its objective. Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity. The questioning of the supplement is not a repetitive rhetoric of the ‘end’ of society but a meditation on the disposition of space and time from which the narrative of the nation must *begin*. The power of supplementarity is not the negation of the preconstituted social contradictions of the past or present; its force lies [...] in the renegotiation of those times, terms and traditions through which we turn our uncertain, passing contemporaneity into the signs of history (155).

Bhabha insists that if the supplement were to make the calculation complete, it would be teleologically coordinated to the 'end' of society. Bhabha says rather that the supplement asks us to think about where the narrative of the nation must begin. When the birangona in the above poem responds "*both, I said, both*" she is fulfilling the role of the supplement – she does not object to the terms of the question by saying 'neither', but rather, by articulating the contingency and difference within those very categories, "antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity" which the rock and the fist seek (Bhabha 155). She asks a question about where the national narrative of Bangladesh might begin – and demonstrates that if it continues to pursue genesis in these polarizing identities presented in the poem only a perpetuation of a history of violence, oppression and erasure can occur.

Gasche writes that "supplements are pluses that compensate for a minus in the origin³⁵" (Bhabha 155). This is seen in the poem which does not provide relief and complete the national narrative – by answering Faizullah's question – by adding the missing brick. Instead, via a wandering river, this birangona suggests that her national house is built on sand.

³⁵ I understand the minus in the origin of the(ir) nation(s) to be built into the 'obligation to forget' that is essential to any cohering and coherent national narrative. The minus is, in one sense, those elided histories of violence and oppression that are the genesis and development of the(ir) nation(s). The minus is, in another, those categories that seek to instrumentalise identity toward the violent othering of those who refuse to be fixed within them.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore, through two central literary texts, what it might mean to remember, to forget, and to write in the moment of the historical present. I departed from and through literary texts because it is often possible that figurative language and representations might offer access to forms of truth veiled in language aspiring to objectivity.

The first chapter, focusing on Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana*, revealed the many ways in which violent Manichean thinking drives much social discourse and historical events. With a particular focus on Rwanda and the Rwandan Genocide, Tadjó skilfully displays that the invocation of and investment in false and damaging binaries can be found at the root of much of the discourse that engenders genocide. In addition, and for particular interest to me, Tadjó believes that a particular sort of memory – formed in active participation with communities of memory – is crucial in the pursuit of the project of restorative justice and an aspirational future for Rwanda, the African Continent, and the world.

Determinedly articulating a humanism rooted in universal responsibility and solidarity, Tadjó's text makes a startling move – it resists even the binary between those dead and those alive. This forced my analysis to respond with a description of a temporal paradigm far more complex than a simple linear progression from past to present to future. What this paradigm suggests is that memory, usually conceived of in relation to a past that is certainly passed, could do important work in the present with the view to an aspirational future. In Tadjó's text, then, I began to look for representations of the past in the present.

To solidify the argument for this temporal paradigm that contains simultaneous multitudes of times dwelt in by subjects, I close read a chapter detailing the life and death of Anastasie, who was raped by her brother before the genocide. Reading this chapter alongside trauma theory as well as discourse on notions of beginnings and endings, fortified my belief that, in order to better understand memory and temporality in a site/sight/cite of time, one needs to fundamentally question the accepted nature of time, and therefore the responsibility of critics and humans everywhere to the past.

Embroided in all of this, as it inevitably is, is a conversation about representation: of Rwanda specifically and of Africa and its peoples more broadly. Tadjó wishes to write a more complex, layered, true Rwanda than the genocide-plus bloodbath so often depicted. Even so, she finds herself struggling against representations and how they have influenced

her thinking. This chapter sought to engage those representations and contribute to a deeper and broader conversation about Rwanda in and of Africa.

The second chapter, analysing Faizullah's collection of poems entitled *Seam*, makes a case for the important work of memory being oriented toward a better future, as opposed to a sterile engagement with a dead past. Working closely with Walter Benjamin and Avery Gordon, this chapter dedicated itself to exploring the work of memory detailed in Faizullah's poetry.

A useful concept in this chapter was that of *memoire involontaire*, which suggested that the past and its lessons are available to one who continually and patiently moves through and engages with a space in the present. A key upshot to this consideration was that the past is not at the bidding of the present subject, but rather that it appears in a process tinged with chance. I was insistent on nuancing Benjamin's notion, as I concluded that there is an active element to *memoire involontaire*, and that the activity in this case was Faizullah traveling to a country that was no longer obviously her own, and moving in that country, seeking a past that did not immediately happen to her.

When trying to understand exactly how one might access a past that did not directly occur in their sensory experience, the process of gathering materials became one of great importance. Through the excavation of various sites, some physical, some corporeal, Faizullah and I dwelt on what the past might mean for the subject now – what potential it may hold for laying down the path to a future in which terrible violence does not recur.

I found also in this chapter that Faizullah was interested too in how close and linked those are which are usually separated by binaries. Her poems contest the stark binarisation between foreigner and citizen, between Muslim and Bengali, now and then, subject and object, self and other. The emotional work undertaken by the poet struck me, and it was important to conclude the chapter noting that the work of putting in place a different future is not free from burdens of its own. I echo Faizullah, though, in being certain of its necessity.

The third chapter, utilising the theoretically imperious Homi Bhabha, sought to think these two texts together and with the concept of nation. The concept of nation is a placeholder for various articulations: modes of belonging and inclusion, constructs of histories and futures, politics of aspiration and repression.

For both texts, the idea of nation figured centrally, at the very least as a constant fault-line. Rwanda and Bangladesh, the representations thereof, and the way those nations are

thought of were of immense interest to me. Importantly in this chapter, however, was my attempt to think through the way that these nations were thought about by themselves. That is to say, how do those with personal (and perhaps legal, or social) investment in these nations think of them. Further, how does this thinking compare and contrast with the way that the nation-state as a site of power attempts to define itself and the way it should be thought about.

Bhabha's concepts of the 'beyond' and the 'stairwell' articulate that the lived reality of the nation is always already in contestation with the coherent pedagogical national narrative, which seeks to fix the nation in a time and a particular version of events. Generally, and definitely in Rwanda and Bangladesh, this version of events is deeply violent and exclusionary. The pedagogical narrative is dangerous. For Bhabha, it is the task of the critic and the creator to articulate the performance of complex personhood which is articulated from the margins of the nation – that is to say, from those marginalised by the cohering, eliding national narrative.

I explored the processes of interruption and disruption of this singular national narrative through *The Shadow of Imana* and *Seam*. These texts reveal that a new way of thinking the nation needs to be an important component of the way in which one conceives of the work of memory. It is the work of reading alongside texts that perform and assert difference that the cohering and violent national pedagogy is dismantled.

The work of memory with regard to the nation insists that the national past as pedagogy is incomplete, it is unfulfilling, it is discriminatory. These texts and this thesis, then, form part of what Bhabha refers to as the 'supplement' or that which asks where the narrative of the nation must begin.

This thesis concludes that it is by re-membering oneself into the past that is present, by articulating the complex personhood of those at the margins, by insisting on the accommodation of ghosts, of difference, that the oppressed past might be fought for. If one fights for this oppressed past, a future with a different destiny than the pain and violence of history might be imagined. To begin with the birangonas, to begin with Anastasie, to begin with Bangladesh and Rwanda and how their ghosts move in the world now, that is the work of this thesis.

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