

From Surviving to Living: Voice, Trauma and Witness in Rwandan Women's Writing. By CATHERINE GILBERT. (Horizons anglophones.) Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2018. 294 pp.

In this important and highly accomplished study, Catherine Gilbert offers a theoretically and contextually robust textual analysis of published writing by female survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The book explores the main publications within the genre, written by Tutsi survivors. Yolande Mukagasana's *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* (Paris: Fixot, 1997) and Élise Rida Musomandera's *Le Livre d'Élise* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2014) bookend Gilbert's selection. Yet this comprehensive study looks beyond the text. The writing and testimonial process, the readership(s) and the reception of the books in different contexts and locations, as well as their connection to other memory-related practices in Rwanda and beyond, are compellingly explored and tested alongside close textual analysis. This, combined with Gilbert's sensitivity to the issues surrounding the genocide and its aftermath, results in a book that hesitates to profess general truths and statements and instead presents the specific complexities associated with survival and its expressions. While engaging the reader with an impressive range of theoretical material relating to witnessing, trauma, and testimony, Gilbert asks how useful Western trauma theory can be — especially when tested by the particular circumstances of the genocide against the Tutsi; the tension between the private and the public; and the complex positionalities of the survivor-authors considered here. It is very good indeed to see an author writing about Rwanda being mindful of the often forgotten (or dismissed as theoretically uninteresting) pragmatic aspect of survival, witnessing, and commemoration. To this effect, Gilbert writes: 'The Western model of trauma and healing is somewhat idealised and does not take into account the socio-political context of individual survivors and traumatised communities' (p. 45). Gilbert's book considers a number of other important aspects of the testimonial texts. It offers compelling accounts of the different definitions of witnessing and levels of proximity to genocidal violence and their role in shaping testimonial practice (Chapter 1). It also includes a fascinating discussion of the figure of the collaborator in the form of a writer or a journalist present (explicitly or not) in many testimonies published by Rwandan women. It explores the potential complexities of this relationship and the different influences it can have on moulding the text, notions of authorship, and risks of appropriation (Chapter 3). Crucially, the book also undertakes a balanced and astute problematization of some of the state-led memory-making in Rwanda. It focuses especially on the 'culture of silence' surrounding the genocide where 'survivors are only permitted to tell their stories in certain circumstances' (p. 165). Following on from this, Gilbert examines how the published testimonies under scrutiny work against this silence and write themselves into the wider memorial landscape related to the genocide. This is an important book which analyses the testimonies with the nuance they deserve. A theme — strangely empowering, given the subject matter — running throughout this analysis is the crucial distinction Gilbert borrows from Berthe Kayitesi (to whose memory the book is dedicated), between surviving and living (p. 201), and the complexities and (im)possibilities of both in the specific context of Rwanda.

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