

African War Films and The Tragedy of Ethnic Tensions

Austine Amanze Akpuda, PhD

Professor of English Studies
Department of English
Abia State University
Uturu, NIGERIA.

If all ethnic groups were allowed to found their own sovereign units or join those of their ethnic brethren, then the tragedies of Bosnia, Chechnya, East Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda, and many other strife -torn peoples and countries would not have occurred.

- John T. Rourke (151).

In his book, *Film in Nigeria*, Hyginus Ekwuazi recognises that though there are various dimensions of censorship exercised by the Armed Forces on films that have security implications for the army, "wars have a perennial and irresistible attraction to filmmakers; time cannot stave this action" (166). Thus, beyond the fertile imagination on the screen, which the world wars have brought to bear on the consciousness of filmmakers, Ekwuazi notes that even an event as relatively remote as the American Civil War "continues to be revisited and reinterpreted by American filmmakers" (167). Of course, if films can be made about wars in antiquity such as those of Troy and Peloponesia, one can then appreciate why it is contended that war has a serious attraction to literary people and filmmakers. Ekwuazi's assessment and prediction at the end of his study that "as of now the Nigerian civil war may be something of a taboo subject, but a safe prediction is that this will not always be the case"(166) are crucial to our

understanding of not only Simi Opeoluwa's *The Battle of Love* but also Raoul Peck's *Sometimes in April*, both films based on the internecine conflicts between ethnic groups that have resulted in a majority of the numerous civil wars and genocides in Africa.

Certainly, the seeming taboo character of the civil war story in Africa must have been complicated by the fragile economy of the African nations concerned which cannot easily finance big budget war films and the facts that the stories about the civil wars in Nigeria and Rwanda are being told from perspectives that do not seem to valorise the mainstream national army. Granted such a scenario, it is important to reflect on the socio-political and socio-cultural variables that broke the taboo about unveiling those wars on the screen. Part of the irony is that as with other historical wars of recent memory such as the Vietnam, whereas no censorship of literature is observed, presentation on the screen is often conceived as a guerrilla or insurgent activity. For instance, despite America's humiliation in Vietnam, some variables have been considered as being responsible for the proliferation of films about Vietnam in the 1970s and the 1980s. William J. Palmer isolates two definitive phases and tendencies that seem to justify and characterise the production of the Vietnam war film. Concerning the first phase of Vietnam war film Text, Palmer notes as follows:

in the late seventies, the Vietnam war films, specifically *Coming Home*, *The Dear Hunter*, *Go Tell the Spartans* and *Apocalypse Now*, served as barometers that measured the submerged public opinion toward that war and the soldiers who fought in that war. These movies indicated that beneath the surface of American society there was both a thoughtful sympathy for

understanding the situations of the veterans who fought and survived that war and a historical curiosity as to how that war was fought and what that war meant (16).

Fundamentally, it was the reluctance to reintegrate the Americans who fought in the Vietnam war that gave rise to these films. Invariably, once those veterans were assimilated, the focus on the Vietnam War almost got faded from the American consciousness.

According to Palmer, other social and political factors brought about the resurgence of the Vietnam War in movies during the next decade. In Palmer's reasoning,

a number of particularly eighties events kept the Vietnam war alive, not as a social issue but as a metaissue, a cautionary metaphor from the seventies for other eighties issues. That unique set of events that kept both America and the eighties attuned to the lessons of the Vietnam war were the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, the failure of the hostage rescue mission into Iran due to blowing sand (another failure of American technology), the increasing American presence in Central America, the loss of life, and the withdrawal of troops from Beirut (16).

The enduring significance of the Vietnam war experience is something that Palmer believes justifies the reason for the production of many films on the war in the 1980s. As Palmer argues about the socio-political milieu that made inevitable the "Vietnam War as film text",

Vietnam remained a fascination in movies, in books, in classrooms, and in the American social consciousness all through the eighties because it had become in the economic and political cold war with Russia and Japan, a loser. Vietnam became a warning, a symbol of defeat and loss ... (17).

As with the Vietnam experience, certain socio-political issues account for the filming of the civil wars in Nigeria (1967-70) and Rwanda (April – July 1994). While the film based on the war between Nigeria and her breakaway sister Republic, Biafra that we are concerned with is called *The Battle of Love*, that of the life-long struggle between the Tutsi and the Hutu is called *Sometimes in April*. A more celebrated text on the Rwanda war is the multiple award-winning Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda*.

Crawford Young's conclusion at the end of his discourse on Biafra published in the late 1970s that "it is doubtful whether many Ibo are able to look at Nigeria in quite the way that Nnamdi Azikiwe did three decades ago, or even as Major Nzeogwu did in 1966" (474) is as haunting as it is prophetic. The post-war Igbo rejection of whatever Azikiwe stood for, unity, pacification; the somewhat diplomatic and often crude disengagement of the Igbo from strategic position in Yakubu Gowon's supposedly New Deal government and the succeeding governments thereafter coupled with the realization that whatever Biafrans fought for was never won are among the variables that brought about the snowballing of the Biafran consciousness given serious ideological prompting by the Ralph Uwazuruike - led Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). In the wake of the emergence of MASSOB among other initially culturally creative

organizations later dubbed ethnic militias, the MASSOB initiative, just like the earlier Ken Saro-Wiwa led Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), brought about a new dimension in the internationalization of what was considered as the marginalization of people of the former Biafran enclave. It is the survivalist nationalism with which the much celebrated rebirth of Biafra, the Biafra of the mind, is associated with in the period between 1994 and 2004 that gave rise to the pro-Biafran war films that are today in somewhat restricted circulation in Nigeria. Some of these pro-Biafran war films that came in the wake of Ralph Uwazuruike's MASSOB campaigns are *Turning Point 1, 2, and 3*, *The Battle of Love* and Bruce Willis' *Tears of the Sun*. It is for instance strongly believed that some MASSOB faithful were part of the production process that saw to the birth of the intensely engaging Biafran war film *Turning Point*.

The outcome of the war Tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, represents a watershed in the belated international outrage against the Rwanda genocide often described as a civil war. Issues raised at that important forum must have shaped the anti-Rwandese government army profile of the leading films on what Arnold describes as "the sorriest spectacle yet of calculated big power indifference and political cynicism of the post-cold war era" (15). Somehow the fact of the complicity that the European world especially was saddled with may also account for the attack against the Rwandese government of the pre-war period. In the same vein the predominantly pro-Rwandan Patriotic Front viewpoint in the film *Sometimes in April* is both a reflection of the aftermath of the war Tribunal at Arusha and the really patriotic acts of the RPF.

The three areas in which both *The Battle of Love* and *Sometimes in April* highlight the mismanagement of ethnic relations are relayed through the presentation of historical

excursion, the trauma of inter ethnic marriage and the prosecution of genocide in the name of war. We shall be examining how the above mentioned variables advance our thesis.

Both films present in capsule form aspects and phases of the national histories of the two countries in question; Nigeria and Rwanda. While *The Battle of Love* recreates events in the pre-war and war periods, *Sometimes in April* presents three phases namely pre-war, war and post-war periods. The major focus of the two films in the pre-war period is to present what approximates a 'documentary authority' of the seeming inter ethnic tolerance and harmony existing in Nigeria and Rwanda before the civil wars in both countries. With a temporal setting of March 1966, the Nigerian film opens with an elaborate carnival-like marriage ceremony involving spouses from two different ethnic groups, Igbo and Hausa. We witness here in *The Battle of Love*, a consummation of marriage between Major Dubem (Kanayo Kanayo), an Igbo, and Habiba, a Hausa in a Northern Nigerian town probably Zaria. It is the type of bliss that we find absent in Amanda Adichie's drama, *For Love of Biafra* (1998), where Adaobi rejects Mohammed because of her passion for Biafra.

The producers of *Sometimes in April* devote a lot of valuable time and space to their presentation of the idyllic scene that was Rwanda in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The scenic beauty and peaceful Rwanda presented is a delight to watch. However, this presentation as with that of the Nigerian film takes a lot of things for granted. For instance, in 1945 and 1953 in Jos and Kano, some supposedly minor disagreements brought about very serious anti-Igbo feelings that led to wide scale massacres of the Igbo in those Northern Nigerian cities. Similarly, hemmed and hedged in by Zaire, Uganda and Tanzania – Burundi, Rwanda is one of the tiny

states in the Central African region that has been in the news since 1925 when its refugee problems caused a great exodus, one that was repeated in 1959 as result of the mismanagement of the relationships between the Hutus and the Tutsis. There is no mention of the October 1, 1990 invasion of Rwanda by Major Peter Baingana's 3,000 strong Rwandese Patriotic Front Army and the rest of the Rwandese refugees hitherto on a 30 year exile in Uganda.

In a special magazine report entitled "Refugees No More?", Sam Mukalazi reflects on the travails of the Tutsi in the power tussle with the Hutu in the period between 1959 and 1975 and 1975 to 1990 in demonstrating that "the ethnic conflict between the Tutsi and Hutu" was there before Rwanda was granted political independence by Belgium in 1962, Mulakazi writing about the period before Habyarimana became president in 1975 remarks as follows:

the minority Tutsi dominated Rwanda society until independence. They were driven from power by the Hutu in a bloody rebellion in 1959. More in exile ever since, and they form the majority of the invading force, with a few Hutus who went into exile for various political and economic reasons (22).

Writing in a November, 1990 issue of *African Events*, Mulakazi could reflect long before the 1994 massacres that "Ethnic tensions have erupted into tribal massacres over the last 30 years" (22).

The build-up to what became the ethnic cleansing programme of the Rwandan government in April 1994 can be traced to the entrenchment of a hateful apartheid policy under Habyarimana's regime, an issue not broached in *Sometimes in April*. Commenting on the fate of the Tutsi in Habyarimana's

Rwanda, Mukalazi remarks as follows:

The Tutsi, who remained in Rwanda while their kins fled the country, have been subjected to policies of "Ethnic Balance" and "Regional Equilibrium", whereby only 10% of Tutsis can be admitted into government and private institutions, including the army. "Regional Equilibrium" is a policy whereby people are "balanced" in society according to their regions of origin. For political reason, a Rwandese identity card must indicate whether someone is a Hutu, Tutsi or Twa (22).

Thus, the politicisation of ethnicity which forms the background of the conflict in *Sometimes in April* can be traced to Habyarimana's identity card ethnic separation project.

Against the background of what we have relayed above, the issue of an inter ethnic marriage in the two films was bound to be a relationship wrought with a lot of problems. The tension soaked atmosphere of Nigeria of the early 1960s can be felt during Captain Bako's interruption of the traditional wedding rights between Major Dubem and Habiba. Apparently do demonstrate the effrontery only a Northern Nigerian soldier of that period can display, Bako drove into the venue of the wedding, summoned Habiba, barked at and threatened her openly right before her husband and the numerous wedding guests. Notwithstanding that major Dubem uses his position as a superior officer to push Bako onto the ground and out of the scene, the Captain pledges to make Dubem account for his actions "one day". At the outbreak of hostilities much later, Bako visits Habiba right in her marital home still with the intention of displacing Major Dubem who had fled the North for the East. To a great extent, despite the past where Habiba

was betrothed to Bako, Bako's desperate effort to claim her is a subtle reference to the supposedly subdued echoes of the tribalistic tendencies of Nigeria of the pre-war years. This much can be seen in some of the unprintable names that Major Duben was called by the mob that came to kill him.

The degree of relative moderation displayed by the members of Habiba's ethnic group towards her is absent in Raoul Peck's *Sometimes in April*. In the Rwandese civil war film, marriage to a Tutsi is comparatively worse than an Hausa woman being married to an Igbo. Thus, any Hutu married to a Tutsi becomes as tainted if not worse than the situation reserved for the Tutsi variously described and dismissed as cockroaches, snakes and devils. This is the lot that Captain Augustin Muganza, a Hutu and his lovely Tutsi wife and professional nurse, Jeanne face. It is a besieged family such as Captain Muganza's that produces children-Marcus and Yves Andre-harassed into asking the following pathetic questions: 'Mam, why do they call us cockroaches?'; 'Dad, what are we, Hutu or Tutsi?' and "So, when I grow up my ID card would say Hutu?"

Despite Captain Augustin Muganza's laborious effort to play down the extremely hostile atmosphere that reminds one of India's caste system, the realities on the ground are enough to jolt the urbane and liberal Hutu soldiers. On his own part Augustin laments that "teachers are registering students by ethnicity". Also while with his brother the Pro-Hutu broadcaster, Honore, Augustin reminds him that even "wars have rules". For Jeanne who keeps on asking her husband "How can I call this home when I am constantly living in fear?" Inter-ethnic marriage is the worst crime a Rwandese can commit. It is a hysterical Jeanne who rushes home from the hospital where she worked and where an atmosphere more irritable than that in Apartheid – South Africa of old existed that draws her husband's attention to the enormity of the tragedy known as

inter-ethnic marriage in Rwanda. After asking her husband whether he had "seen the Hutu Ten Commandments?" Jeanne narrates how one of her co-workers tactically deposited one of the leaflets bearing the demon – inspired commandments where she would pick same. As she reminds captain Muganza, her dear husband besotted with the utopian of one Rwanda and one that should be compliant to the dictates of the Arusha agreement, the Hutu Ten Commandments states, among others, that "The Rwanda Armed forces should be exclusively Hutu. No military man should marry a Tutsi". Any wonder then that Augustin's name appears on one of the numerous circulating death lists as a Tutsi sympathiser. After captain Muganza had managed to move his family to a place of temporary safety, the commander of the execution troop that frisked Augustin's compound informs him that since he married a Tutsi, he was their next target. In fact in deference to comradely concern, the commander encouraged the captain to disappear from his compound before their next visit. A comparable scenario is played out in *The Battle of Love* in Major Dubem's residence when the highly suspicious mob that came to fish him out regard Habiba quite menacingly.

We have a fuller taste of the murderous discrimination meted out against the Tutsis shortly before the genocide at the All Girls Catholic School, Sainte-Marie. The Commander of the genocide mission at Sainte-Marie shows the dichotomy in the ethnic configuration of Rwanda by shouting as follows: "Bring all the cockroaches here" "Hutus here, Nyezis here, Hutu girls behind me. All the Nyezis there". When he is challenged by the school mistress to think of the harassed girls "as your own daughters", the Commander of the extermination group becomes maniacally angry. Beyond shouting that "my daughter is not a cockroach", he not only violently hits his gun across the mistress' stomach but also begins to shoot at the

defenceless school children. As people of a predominantly mixed parentage it must have been pretty hard for the school children to easily present themselves as the demonised Tutsis. Their case may not differ from those called the Mchanganyiko, a term referring to people of mixed marriages generally and those of mixed Tutsi-Hutu blood surviving as refugees in Mkugwa, a Tanzanian refugee camp. Even when a majority of the refugees were produced from Burundi's civil war, what Will Ross says about Mohammed one of those of mixed parentage is emblematic of the fate that befell many a Rwandan in the period between April and May 1994. According to Ross's presentation of Mohammed's pathetic story,

His Hutu father was killed in 1972 genocide and he hasn't seen his Tutsi mother since 1993 so he assumes she was killed in the fighting which followed the assassination of President Ndadaye. Being both a Tutsi and a Hutu himself, he is mistrusted by both ethnic groups. In 1998 the troops of the Tutsi-dominated army opened fire on his house and Hutu rebels tortured him. The scars are visible on his hands, feet and back where he was clubbed and stabbed with nails, bayonets and hammers. (44)

It is this horrifying experience that we encounter in *Sometimes in April* especially in the course of the genocide scenes that shall preoccupy us presently.

No discussion of the civil war in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 or that of Rwanda in 1994 would be complete without a reference to the heinous word and practice known as genocide. This is mainly because no other word addresses the enormity of the massacres in the two countries during the periods under review better than the concept of genocide. And it is instructive

that both *The Battle of Love* and *Sometimes in April* focus on this terrible inhuman error and disposition

Since the Rwanda experience featured a magnitude as horrendous as the original experience that brought the hateful word genocide into being, it would be necessary to start with a study of *Sometimes in April* before coming to the Biafran story in *The Battle of Love*. The first strategic mention of the word genocide in the Rwanda civil war film is that taken from a documentarist insertion bordering on a broadcast made by Bill Clinton supposedly while he was still the president of the United States of America. At the opening of what should be the beginning of *Sometimes in April*, we encounter Mr. Augustine a former soldier now a school teacher pictured presenting the Clinton address that complained about the genocide in Rwanda. Beyond talking about how the Tutsis were slain even when they were sheltered in churches and schools, the former United States President also expresses bitterness over the manner in which even the Hutus were massacred for protecting their Tutsi compatriots.

Another crucial excursion into the genocidal character of the Rwandese killings is presented through a related broadcast material. Here, we are shown participants in an international Television network programme debating what constitutes genocide in order to find out whether, and to what extent the killings in Rwanda qualify as such. After dodging Allan's question about "how many acts of genocide does it take to make genocide", Christine eventually answers the question concerning the character of genocide. Beyond recognising that "there is a legal definition" of genocide that derives essentially from the 1948 convention, Christine, the resource person in the programme frontally responds to the question: "what is an act of genocide?"... According to her,

As defined in the 1948 Genocide convention :
'The crime of genocide occurs when certain acts are committed...against members of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group... with the intent of destroying that group in whole or in part. The relevant acts include killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction to the group.

Aside the somewhat abstract restatement of the act of the 1948 Genocide Convention, Christine is forthright enough to admit that within the context of the Rwandan experience especially as it relates to the Tutsis, "based again, on the evidence, we have every reason to believe that acts of genocide have occurred". Even when the roughly one million people massacred by the Hutu extremists may not necessarily compare with the six million Jewish victims under Hitler's Germany, there is no doubt that the two instances of genocide have something in common. Agreed, Lawrence L. Langer in *Admitting the Holocaust* reminds us that "Genocide" is a term "coined in 1944 to describe the physical destruction of European Jews by the Nazis in World War II" (51), roughly fifty years after, in 1994, the world witnessed something evoking the full weight of the Jewish holocaust experience in Rwanda. For Philip Gourevitch, " the dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust" (92) Based on comments such as Gourevitch's Mary Braid of the Independent and a couple of others, Campbell states that for them, the African Hutus had proved themselves to be even worse than the wholly European Nazis" (87).

Until the Rwandan debacle, the notion of genocide was restricted almost exclusively to the fate of Jews under the

Nazis or the Kurds under Saddam Hussein's regime. However, the concept assumed a more sickening meaning with the deliberate decimation of the Tutsis in three agonizing months in 1994. In a graphic presentation of the fate that saw no less than 800,000 mostly Rwandese Tutsi butchered beyond recognition, Alan Rake records that

So many bodies have been thrown into the rivers that the water sources are polluted. Thousands corpses have been swept more than 100 miles down the Kagera river into Lake Victoria. Bodies were counted flowing into the Lake at the rate of 80 per hour. Nearly two months after the president's plane had been brought down, the killings were continuing. Local Tanzanian peasants were being paid Tshs 6.50 a day to clear up the corpses along the lake shore. Uganda declared a whole tract of the Lake Victoria shoreline a disaster area (12).

Genocide in both *The Battle of Love and Sometimes in April* took a number of identifiable patterns. Each of the films shows a conscious documentation of the identities of those to be eliminated. Similarly, there were other unorthodox means employed to isolate and massacre those who became the victims of genocides in the two films.

Although the presentation of genocide in *The Battle of Love* is slight, unlike the case with films like *Turning Point* and *Tears of the Sun*, our films under review nevertheless feature some instances of unprovoked and ill – defined killings. For instance, at the beginning of *The Battle of Love*, Major Dubem (Kanayo) reflects on the reported cases of incessant killings in the Nigerian army. Subsequently, in the course of his stocktaking, Major Dubem anticipates that a civil war is likely

to loom as a result of the killings in the North. After reflecting on their endangered position, Major Dubem's colleagues from the East urge him to leave the North with them but the major rejects the idea of secession. However, almost immediately after shunning the idea of secession danger looms. The Araba display at the residence of Major Dubem shows that the threat of war is real. We see the appearance of a very wild and drunken mob just like the several we encounter in *Sometimes in April* chanting war songs as they struggle to gain entry into Major Dubem's residence. Meanwhile, we see Habiba struggling to ward off the invaders. Luckily, the Major had taken proper refuge either in the ceiling or at the roof shortly before the mob smashed into his residence. Although, Habiba's husband survived the onslaught, there was enough to show that the type of neighbourhood patrols we witness in *Sometimes in April* are quite active in *The Battle of Love* as they move from house to house fishing out the *nyamiris* and executing them accordingly.

Concerning the massacres that preceded the birth of Biafra, Crawford Young remarks that in the wake of the May 1966 promotions in the military that saw 9 out of the 12 officers promoted as Igbo and the 24 May 1966 unification decree, "anti-Ibo pogroms began in northern cities; the official death figure was 92, with unofficial estimates of the several hundred; and many Ibo homes and businesses were razed. The ratchet of fear turned one level higher" (470). Unlike in *Turning Point* where this reality is relayed through survivors who fled the North, in *The Battle of Love*, we catch impressions of this pogrom. Regarding the pogrom of September 1967, Young notes that "nearly every Ibo lineage had lost a member in the massacres" (472).

Surviving the house-to-house search is one thing while successfully fleeing the North is another as can be seen in the

movement to the East in *The Battle of Love*. Major Dubem is sorely worried about how overnight commissioned Nigerian soldiers sworn to the protection of their country are suddenly transformed as refugees and defectors expecting death by instalments. In the Biafran war film, Major Dubem is concerned about the fact that "Roads are filled with hate-filled soldiers". As with the experience in *Sometimes in April*, Major Dubem bothers and complains in advance about the inevitable and oppressive roadblocks and checkpoints meant to fish out people from the east, especially the Igbo. At the first checkpoint/Roadblock, they record the first casualty. As a soldier makes the rounds of checking the identities of the people inside the getaway Austin 911 Lorry with the cryptic inscription ALLAH DE, one of the Igbo chaps there who could not greet properly in Hausa language and who shouted "one Nigeria" is dragged out and killed like an animal. Other roadblocks abound and even the wilds do not protect the refugees in *The Battle of Love*. A signal director of the Nigerian army gives instruction to the air force men who carry out aerial bombardment on helpless civilians and now refugee former army officers.

As in real life, the genocide in *Sometimes in April* is relayed as an event that is a product of many activities, processes and stages. They include the stockpiling of weapons, a build-up of a xenophobic disposition given mass circulation through broadcasts on the Rwandese hate Radio; compilation of death lists based mainly on one's identity as a Tutsi or Tutsi sympathiser, house to house searches, roadblocks and invasion of schools, refugee camps and so on to effect the genocide.

The thesis statement by Alan Rake of the *New African* magazine that the Rwanda civil war was nothing short of a planned genocide can be supported by events in the film *Sometimes in April*. In the Rwandese film, we see pictures of different types of ammunition procured from many countries

and the excitement with which the prime co-ordinator of the pogrom was announcing the sources of the varieties of weapons. That the film *Sometimes in April* derives from a real life nightmare can be seen in Alan Rake's documentation of the Rwandan scenario at least ten years before the film was made. According to Alan Rake's detailed description and assessment,

It was horrific genocide, but what makes it even worse is that it was systematically planned for months before the massacres occurred. The Rwandan government had been stocking up with weapons bought from international arms dealers from all over the world on the pretext that they were to be used in the war against the RPF. Thousands of weapons came from the mafias in the Soviet Union; others were even surplus from the Bosnian war and from South Africa's eager arms salesmen. (12)

After the triumphant and mischievous display of these weapons of mass destruction, the ground is perfectly prepared for the next stage. This is the stage when, according to Rake, "many of the weapons were passed onto the militias by the Rwanda government, with the full knowledge of what use they would be put to" (12).

Outside the house to house searches by the neighbourhood patrols such as the type conducted in Captain Augustin Muganza's residence, among others, we encounter killings such as that done in the compound of the female Prime Minister and those affected at roadblocks, schools and refugee camps. But without the omnibus death lists, the genocide would have been ineffective. Alan Rake sums up the actual ideological configuration of the death lists as follows:

The Hutu extremists were highly organised. They had prepared extensive death lists and disseminated them to sympathetic Hutu chiefs throughout the country, who recruited the local xenophobic hot heads into militias. These militias were extensively trained and armed with weapons imported from foreign arms dealers. (13)

Deaths at roadblocks were quite sensationally administered. At every road block occupants of vehicles were asked to disembark and identify themselves. Since virtually every Rwandese citizen carried an identity card, it was easy to trace who was Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. It is at one of such checkpoints that Xavier, one of Augustin's colleagues in the Army and a Tutsi was butchered. In fact as soon as Xavier's identity is established courtesy of the death list at the checkpoint in question, a pathetic drama ensued. Having been denied by the United Nations officers evacuating their staff and expatriates from Kigali, Xavier had no other option than to wait on his beloved friend Augustin for a rescue. It is the same Augustin that a militia man requests to use a machete to kill Xavier, failing which the man gunned Xavier down. At a similar roadblock, Honore, Augustin's broadcaster brother could not stop the brutal murder of his nephews, Augustin's children who are burnt inside Honore's Jeep because they are suspected to have Tutsi blood flowing in their veins.

At one of the several refugee campus where the Rwandese displaced are sheltered, one of the officers with a death list reads and shouts the names of those on his list. "Alphonse Virginia; Robingo, where is he?" His men round up as many as they can find. The Executioners were curious about the identity of the man whose head Jeanne, Captain Augustin's long-forgotten-as dead wife, was tending. A man in priestly collar

identifies the wounded man as a foolish truck driver who though Hutu was trying to save a Tutsi man before he got involved in an accident. This gesture whether deriving from a truthful or contrived situation saves the anonymous man from the fate awaiting others. Almost immediately, the men and women isolated as Tutsi and their Hutu sympathisers are moved out of the appropriated refugee camp to an open space where several others were already kneeling down and awaiting the Executioners. While Jeanne and two others were engaged in probing conversation to help Jeanne restore her memory, the Hutu extremists outside began their mass shooting of innocent, unarmed men and women whose only crime was probably that they bore Tutsi identity or that they were sympathetic to the Tutsi. The sound of guns murdering people in cold blood is as horribly deafening as a visual encounter with such.

Before the rowdy murderers went out to do the job they know best, the military commander who led the operation had warned the man responsible for compiling the death list to provide him with a better list. As he thunders: "I need a better list. I need more names. I need them by tomorrow". With an evocative power that reminds one of such lists in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, the viewer cannot but shudder at man's inhumanity to man. It is a scenario as horrible as whatever may have been done by the Nazis during the world war.

In a review of Terry George's award winning film, *Hotel Rwanda*, Molar Wood ponders as follows:

So, how to depict the unspeakable horror of nearly a million people hacked to pieces by machete wielding neighbours? Is there a formula for bringing genocide unflinchingly to the screen? *Hotel Rwanda* sidesteps the question, alluding to the horror instead of showing it ()

Any acquaintance with *Sometimes in April* will demonstrate that there is a palpable realism in the evocation of killings and massacres at roadblocks, schools, refugee camps and close to the United Nations' make-shift camps. Wild machete – wielding militia men come round as soon as the killings at Sainte Marie Secondary School are completed apparently to finish off the few who may have marginally survived.

The presentation of testimonies at the Arusha Tribunal in Tanzania and the open air village Tribunal somewhere in Rwanda offers the viewer with other perspectives on the character of genocide in the film *Sometimes in April*. For instance, Valentine's testimony gives a high degree of authority to the manner in which genocide was carried out in Rwanda. She implicates the interahamwes, a major factor in the rapes and killings that characterised the horrendous period between April 1994 and July 1994. On whether the leader of a particular municipality participated in the rapes and subsequent killings, Valentine states that although she "never saw him rape anybody. He didn't protect us". The leader is quoted to have told the interahamwes "Don't ever ask me anymore how a Tutsi woman tastes". Valentine continues by testifying that "I heard him say and these were his exact words: 'Tomorrow they will be killed'". The idea that come tomorrow, a certain person or group would be no more is vividly captured in a documentary on the Rwandan massacres. Of the many books on the Rwandan genocide, Molar Wood recalls as follows:

Most significant of those, perhaps, is Philip Gourevitch's 'We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families Stories from Rwanda'. One of the many stories in the book is that of Paul Rusesabagina, the Hutu Hotel manager who sheltered 1,200 Tutsis and moderate Hutus - from death by machete ()

Even when this background shapes the narrative in *Hotel Rwanda*, Valentine's testimony in *Sometimes in April* brings this reality vividly to the screen idiom. As her testimony continues: "The next day on the street an old woman told me that all the girls who had been with me had been killed. She told me I had to leave. I could barely carry my baby, but I left. I hid in a sorghum field". Of course much earlier in the film we picture how like magic the swampy forests which seemed to have swallowed refugees begin to literally exhale these survivors as the Rwanda Patriotic Front soldiers seized the reins of power. Valentine's argument that "when a person leads assassins he is also an assassin" becomes the damning testimony that indicts the leader of the Municipality where she resided and who encouraged the militia in his constituency to freely rape and murder Tutsi women hence "Don't ever ask me anymore how a Tutsi woman tastes".

From the foregoing, one can state without contradiction that there are few people who will view the genocide – suffused films, *The Battle of Love* and *Sometimes in April* without weeping. Both films have the documentarist weight of non-fictional films. They represent the often one-sided picture of the civil war experience and narrative in Africa. As already stated, it is the mismanagement of ethnic differences and tensions that has brought about the countless civil wars, often better described as genocides that have been the bane of Africa. Such a context and reasoning account for the ideological and related configuration of *The Battle of Love* and *Sometimes in April*. As pictures, they augment the verbal references to these events in the literature produced about these genocides often mislabelled civil wars. Both films justify Anna Stepanova's thesis that "the memory of the war is still alive in us, like a wound that will never heal. The years go by but literature and the theatre keep going back to the past" (qtd in Akpuda 166).

Works Cited

- Akpuda, Augustine Amanze. "The Drama on the Nigerian Civil War". *A Harvest from Tragedy: Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Civil War Literature*. Ed. Chinyere Nwahunanya Owerri: Springfield, 1997: 166-193.
- Arnold, Guy. "We are all to Blame" *New African* July/August 1994, 15.
- Campbell, Aidan. *Western Primitivism, African Ethnicity: A Study in Cultural Relations*. London: Cassell, 1997.
- Ekwuazi, Hyginus. *Film in Nigeria*. Jos: NFC, 1991.
- Gourevitch, Philip. "After the Genocide" *New Yorker* 18 Dec. 1995, 92.
- Langer, Lawrence L. *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Mukalazi, Sam. "Refugees No More?" *Africa Events*. Nov. 1990, 21-22.
- Palmer, Williams. "The Vietnam War as Film Text". *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1995: 16-60.
- Rake, Alan. "Operation Genocide". *New African*. July/August 1994, 12-14.
- Ross, Will. "Mchanganyiko" *BBC Focus on Africa*. April – June 2000, 46-48.
- Rourke, John T. *International Politics on the World Stage*. 8th edn. Guilford: McGraw Hill, 2001.
- Sometimes in April*. Dir. Peck, Raoul. Lumumba: HBO Films, 2005.
- The Battle of Love*. Dir. Simi Opeoluwa, 2000.
- Wood, Molar. "Hotel Rwanda". *Farafina*. 1 October 2005.
- Young, Crawford. *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1993. 1st Pub. 1976.