

# Irony, Satire, Allegory: the Rhetoric of Postcolonial Dystopia in Nuruddin Farah's *Links* and Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, The Book of Bones*

by

Ousmane Ngom<sup>1</sup>

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences.  
University Gaston Berger of Saint-Louis, Senegal

## Abstract

This study explores the theme of dystopia in postcolonial Anglophone and Francophone African literature through *Links*, a novel by Nuruddin Farah, and *Murambi: The Book of Bones* by Boubacar Boris Diop that addresses the problem of Western intervention in Africa through the prism of postcolonial theories and psychoanalysis.

**Keywords:** restore hope, operation turquoise, discursive strategies, utopia, dystopia, post-colonialism.

## Introduction

In the context of this article, the use of the concepts of dystopia and counter-utopia as synonyms notwithstanding the nuance pointed by Sergeant who argues that dystopia “refers to the negative social visions, while the term anti-utopia [counter-utopia] should be reserved for texts specifically directed against utopia and utopian thinking” (Braga, 2006). I consider the dystopian project as counter-utopian because the construction of negative social images implies rejection, albeit implicitly, of utopian texts or visions. Hence, these concepts represent a process of deconstruction and of existing or imaginary speech present in the deconstructive text.

Thus, it is shown how in the novels at hand, irony, satire and allegory as vectors of counter-utopian rhetoric and it is postulated that these are literary construction devices used as novel writing modality that for the two novelists are devices that constitute textual strategies to write the unspeakable.

Irony is defined as a figure of speech to say, by way of mockery, just the opposite of what one does or may think (Fontanier, 1977). In this work, it is used in its discursive dimension. Then, a situation is said both sarcastically and seriously to be ironic when it is the opposite of what the situation should be or what was expected of it. Thus, “the strategic dimension of the figure” (Forget, 2001) will better emerge. Through M. H. Abrams’s definition, one understands satire as a figure that deals with a subject in a derogatory manner, evoking fun, contempt or indignation (Abrahams, 199978). Thus, satire is a double-edged sword that can be humorous without, however, aiming laughter as an end in itself. Satire can also be harsh criticism like diatribe. With its different manifestations, it remains a critical tool for novelists. Allegory is a figure of thought by which literary agents, actions, and sometimes setting have double meaning, both literal and figurative explanations.

*Murambi: The Book of Bones* by Boubacar Boris Diop and Nuruddin Farah’s *Links*, respectively published in 2000 and 2004, are framed around such painful events as the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 1993 Somali civil war. Both authors bring three childhood friends to the forefront of their stories: Jeebleh, Bile, and Seamus in Farah’s novel; Jessica, Stanley, and Cornelius in Boris’s, a viewpoint that narrate the stories.

The novels share a similar narrative pretext: the main characters return to their respective home countries after a twenty-year exile which was dictated by political and social turmoil. During these long absences, both Jeebleh and Cornelius have lost their mothers and loved ones. The comparisons they make between their past and their present, in addition to their desires to find explanations for the current domestic chaos, is the crux of the conflict that drives the narratives toward the bitter conclusions that the current situations are worse than those initially left behind.

With the interventions from the United States of America through Operation Restore Hope in Somalia and that of France through Operation Turquoise in Rwanda, the dramas that unfold in these two countries are perceived by the two heroes as a tragicomedy; hence, the authors’ significant use of sarcastic humor. In fact, the American in charge of Operation Restore Hope in *Links* and Etienne Perrin, Colonel of Operation Turquoise in *Murambi*, behave like they now are in conquered territories. The insensitivity, arrogance, contempt, and barbaric methods used against a population they are supposed to free results in irony and subversion of meanings.

Consequently, a gloomy atmosphere ensues on the pages of the novels, and is almost never alleviated by sincere and decent laughter, which the author of *Links* terms “the rare luxury of smiling” (75). Equating this seemingly simple and banal gesture of everyday social interactions with a precious and uncommon commodity is tantamount to disclosing the state of bedlam which is Somalia. Moreover, the sarcastic, helpless laugh is a unique device used to describe the strangeness of the aforementioned countries. The two novels deal with the horrors of war and, oftentimes, stage characters who will smile indecently before a shocking matter. For example, the rare instances of laughter are demonstrated through bleak situations: the exultation of bloodthirsty Interahamwe militias who discover a hiding Tutsi, or the jubilation of Somali child soldiers who fire their rifles at civilian targets chosen at random in a crowd.

The explanation for this untimely laughter, where normally one would rightly expect any other emotion inclining towards disgust and revulsion – is that the limits of indignation are surpassed by the characters, which creates a kind of emotional confusion. In this respect, Cornelius’s strange reaction is telling. Back from his long exile, he discovers that his father, a hitherto esteemed man with a great love of justice and communal symbol for inter-ethnic cohesion, turns out to be the notorious “Butcher of Murambi.” As a reaction to this tragic revelation by Jessica, Cornelius smiled, not because he is doubtful; but quite the contrary. He falls into the sort of disarray he, himself, and had noticed from people incapable of appropriate reactions to a real tragedy that beats all fiction. And for several seconds Cornelius didn’t react. Then something amazing happened: he smiled. He would often have cause to think of that smile during the weeks and months to follow. It was only then that he understood why so many survivors of the genocide had recounted their suffering to him, interrupting themselves sometimes by nodding their heads and laughing incredulously.

Cornelius’s untimely smile betrays what Pierre Vaucher terms the inanity of language (2014) before an indescribable tragedy. In the words of Chris N van der Merwe & Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, “Extreme trauma is ‘unspeakable’ precisely because of the inadequacy of language to fully convey victims’ experiences” (Coulibaly, 2014).

The author textually dramatizes the main character’s smile about the cause of his inappropriate response. His final revelation is shared in the scene where he visits the display of bones in Murambi. Contemplating the thousands of human remains, which include those of his mother and his younger sister and brother, all killed on the orders of his father, he comes to the tragic conclusion: “Nathalie Kayumba. Julienne. François. Pathetic little bits of bone. Yes, he had been right to smile during his discussion with Jessica. In a way, all of this was comical” (146).

A similar sinister atmosphere paired with untimely mirth is noted in *Links* when corpses litter the streets. The complexity of clan ties results in the desecration of human life, as Jeebleh bitterly discovers. People of the city are concerned only with those who share their bonds, so the dead who have no relatives to claim them are left for vultures and other scavengers. The atypical character of Af-Lawee magnifies the important role played by vultures in this infested environment; all done with unseemly glee. But, the apology he makes to these scavengers goes beyond the limits of decency. He sarcastically quotes a friend who seeks justice and recognition for vultures: “My cynical friend suggests that when the country is reconstituted as a functioning state, we should have a vulture as our national symbol”. This cynical friend whom he did not name is supposedly his mentor, the tyrannical Caloosha. The little importance both of them give human life is demonstrated from start to finish in the novel. These two take advantage of the civil war to enrich themselves with chokingly devious ways.

The story of France’s military intervention in Rwanda and the US intervention in Somalia is marked with corrosive irony. At war against the hegemonic “Western master narrative” (Kroll, 2007: 655) that distorts African reality, Farah and Boris produce a counter-utopian discourse that opposes the declarations of good intentions of the interventionist powers. Boubacar Boris Diop highlights the ironic nature of France’s intervention in Rwanda.

Throughout the novel, he shows France's active role from the beginning of the crisis through their logistical support to the Rwandan regular army that, in turn, supports the Interahamwe militias. The French government, as well as the international community, have for a long time denied the reality of the genocide. They invoked the duty of neutrality and the principle of non-interference as Tutsis were massacred, but fly to the rescue of their Hutu allies when power relations are reversed by the advance of the Rwandan Patriotic Front rebellion.

It is mostly the political discourse of the foreign power seeking to legitimize its action that provides a framework for the ironic commentary. France wants to intervene suddenly, so it says, to stop the crimes against the Tutsis. In her column, Jessica the Rwandan Patriotic Front spy analyzes of the situation with a smack of bitter irony:

Two thousand five hundred of their soldiers, heavily equipped, are taking up position in Goma and Bukavu in Zaïre. They're calling it Operation Turquoise. It seems to be a matter of coming to the aid of Tutsis threatened by the genocide. We'll see how they manage to save the lives of people who've been dead for such a long time. It's all a really sinister farce.

In this quotation, the artifice of the impostor<sup>2</sup> speech is obviously exposed by Jessica. Paraphrasing Lejeune, one can say that the literalness of the statement is borrowed from the opponent, but, by introducing a context shift, in either style or tone, that renders it virtually absurd, hateful or ridiculous, and implicitly expresses disagreement with the speaker (Lejeune, 1980).

Indeed, through a subversion of meanings, the troops of Operation Turquoise are welcomed by the genocide executors with gratitude and jubilation reserved for a savior. Furthermore, the free radio and television station Mille Collines illustrates itself through its sordid ways of haranguing the crowds: "My Hutu sisters, make yourselves pretty, the French soldiers are here, now's your chance, because all the Tutsi girls are dead!" (131). Exposing this matter is for the author to point out that the operation does not actually care about the victims of the genocide, instead its main goal is to smuggle the sponsors of the killings out of Rwanda to spare them a trial that would then expose France's participation in this heinous crime against humanity, as revealed in the long passage by Dr. Joseph Karekezi and Colonel Etienne Perrin of Operation Turquoise.<sup>3</sup>

Farah exposes a similar "sinister farce" through the narration of Dajaal who explains the reasons why he dug up his weapons to attack the Americans. His reasoning reveals the yawning gap between the stated intensions of Operation Restore Hope, which was presented as a peacekeeping mission, and the reality that proves the Operation to in fact be a war-ready army. Dajaal's is a story of disillusionment born from American intervention, which had first raised the hopes of the people wanting to end the civil war imposed by the two rival factions controlled by the StrongmanNorth and StrongmanSouth.

If Dajaal comes to bear a visceral grudge against the American soldiers, it is mainly because of their inappropriate behavior. The great hope that their arrival brought fades quickly by total disillusionment. Hardly had the Marines landed in Somalia when they arrested, tortured, and humiliated armless, innocent children including Qasiir, Dajaal's grandson who was ironically part of the welcoming committee.

According to Dajaal, the American-in-Charge behaves as the de facto president of Somalia, and eventually becomes worse for the country than the StrongmanSouth he came to fight. His men's lack of respect for the Somalis and their customs further buttresses this point. One of the most painful scenes in *Links*, on which most of the story is based, is the helicopter attack of the house where a peace planning meeting is being held by dignitaries and intellectuals of StrongmanSouth's clan who find themselves at odds with their leader's warmonger attitude. Dajaal narrowly escapes, but sees several of his pacifist clansmen die in front of him; and his granddaughter is struck by a crippling injury. For Dajaal, this event that happened in July triggers the infamous October-third Mogadishu battle (71).

Ines Mzali emphasizes the importance of this event as it highlights the Somali perspective on the implications of the US intervention: "Similarly, it serves to explain the local anger at the US operation and the illogical harm done to the population in the name of peacekeeping" (Mzali, 2010). Indeed, the passage is a counter-discourse that opposes the American propaganda, relayed by Western media, which juxtaposes the radiant image of American soldiers in a humanitarian mission, bringing relief to women, children and the poor, with a grim picture in which these very soldiers are chased by an enraged Somali population, the epitome of ungratefulness and gratuitous violence. This biased American perspective intentionally fails to fill the gap between the two opposing images of the watershed of the battle of Mogadishu. As Mzali contends, "most media, political debates and analyses following 'the battle of Mogadishu' underline US losses while overlooking the heavy toll on the local population and failing to mention the gradual escalation of violence that culminated in the confrontation".

Disenchantment born of the paradox between the discourse and practice of US forces awakens in Dajaal the sense of repeated history by giving the image of a Somalia trapped in a vicious whirlwind of exploitation, oppression, and violence, ending with the latest and most deadly phase as Operation Restore Hope led by the United States of America:

As one of the most ancient cities in Africa south of the Sahara, Mogadiscio had known centuries of attrition: one army leaving death and destruction in its wake, to be replaced by another and another and yet another, all equally destructive: the Arabs arrived and got some purchase on the peninsula, and after they pushed their commerce and along with the Islamic faith, they were replaced by the Italians, then the Russians, and more recently the Americans, nervous trigger-happy, shooting before they were shot at. The city became awash with guns, and the presence of gun-crazy Americans escalated the conflict to greater heights. Would Mogadiscio ever know peace? Would the city's inhabitants enjoy this commodity ever again?

On the textual level, the expression of dystopian irony is manifested through figures of speech that promote an antithetical relationship. In this register, parallelism, antiphrasis, and oxymoron as an opposition artifact are explicitly used. It is then utilized to assess losses by comparing a distressing, current situation with an old, likely less painful situation. The characters lament the remembering even tiny periods of happiness indelibly engraved in their memories.

It is worth noting, however, that these examples of tranquility are not numerous. Besides facing the death that is lurking everywhere, from historic colonization to the present narrative, Cornelius retains only an image to counterbalance the vision of spilled blood. This image is of the child playing the flute on Lake Mohazi when Simeon explains, in a style reminiscent of an initiation rite, the origins of the Rwandan nation. This image is made to feel all the more expressive because it is mentioned many times throughout the novel. The character uses it as a lifeline to stay sane in such insane times. Similarly, Jeebleh relishes with equal gusto the memory of his teenage years when he and his friend Bile could go out until late at night without the risk of being mugged.

The use of oxymoron is very expressive in this sense because it creates a duality that informs the confusion of the speaker against the evanescence of what he describes. For instance, Boris uses the qualifying phrase “such abject duplicity” (154) to describe the internal contradictions of Rwanda. Indeed, this small country has beautiful landscape and an apparently homogeneous population. Yet, it is so deeply divided by colonization which established the ethnic divide on such superficial, absurd bases. In the same vein, Simeon speaks of his brother, the Butcher of Murambi, wondering: “Joseph, who was so intelligent, was he also completely insane? Is it possible?” Jessica is the epitome of post-traumatic genocide victims, “[her] mind was always restless. Cornelius suspected a lot of violence and a secret madness about her that was almost impossible to discern at first glance”. Additionally, the expression that better describes the killers’ sentiment during the period of the genocide is “hateful joy”. In the same order of ideas, Farah’s *Links* uses parallelism to highlight the contradictions of postcolonial Somalia where dictatorship and civil war succeeded one another causing desolation and disillusionment in their wake. Thus, describing the novel, Jay-Rayon (2007) evokes “the duality systematically implemented throughout the narrative and that constitutes an intra-thematic network”.

Indeed, upon his return, Jeebleh rediscovers Somalia and clearly sees all religious, political, and social contradictions of the country: “Somalia – where the limbs of the small fry are amputated, while the warlords are treated with deference” (43). He cannot help drawing a parallel between two completely dissimilar yet decisive experiences in his life. Repeatedly threatened with death because of his political activism, he was arrested at the airport, attempting to flee the country, and was taken to prison without a trial. Several years later, he was released and taken back to the same airport to be extradited to Kenya and then to the United States without any explanation. What most puzzles Jeebleh in this double antithetical vision is the divorce between what he embodies during the two distinct experiences, a politician and a convict respectively, and the paradoxical treatment to which he is subjected.

[Jeebleh] held the two contradictory images in his mind. In one, he was dressed in a suit, being roughly handcuffed and taken in a security vehicle, sirens blaring, straight to prison; in the other, he was in rags, being driven back to the airport, to be flown to Nairobi. In one, the officers escorting him to prison were crass; in the other, the officers were epitome of courtesy. That's dictatorship for you. This is civil war for you! (10)

Pushing irony to the extreme, some passages of the two novels provoke laughter, or at least a smile in the reader. Black humor, through mockery, is used to vary the tone of the writing. The authors mean to write about violence and horror with a touch of satire. Their aim is to create some brief moments of relaxation without abandoning the seriousness of the subject. For example, in *Murambi*, though traumatic, the narration of the dramatic scene where the lives of the children Cornelius, Stanley, and Jessica are threatened is marked with a seal of humor. Even the children cannot help despite their great fear, chuckling before the buffoonery of a singular character among the arsonists who makes a spectacle before them.

It is the same in the incident in Nyamata where the prefect is abused by the leader of a band of Interahamwe he vigorously criticized for having in their passage left four Tutsi survivors. One can also note the completely insane attitude of the Interahamwe who "ran after their victims, victims they knew very well besides, begging them to stop so that they could kill them more easily" (118). In addition, a child manages to amuse the executioners while beseeching them to spare his life by swearing to them: "I won't ever be a Tutsi again" (16). Conversely, a man who sees his family die under the machetes of the Interahamwe entreats the latter to kill him too, but they laugh at him by imitating the failing and corrupt administration: "Hey! Don't bother us, you over there, baldy, you talk too much, the death office is closed, come back early this afternoon" (111). Thus, Lilyan Kestlout (2007) pertinently remarks that "Boris Diop's fierce humor slaps us when we least expect it! But are not derision and humor the shell that hides too soon shattered illusions, and too lively sensibilities?" (1119-1120) (my translation). In this respect, the author derides the genocide perpetrators, highlighting their absurd cruelty, and whatever the humorous nature of the passage, the reader is never compelled to forget the tragedy that is deeply rooted in it.

In Farah's novel, the hasty naming of the characters is often a source of humor. Generally, the narrator cares little about the civil status of secondary characters. Once introduced with the most salient aspect, often a physical trait that the character now bears a name resembling it. For instance, we are introduced to characters with unusual names like OneArm, Bucktooth, Bold-man, and Four-eye man. A character's name may also come from the character's status or behavior. For example, the commander of Restore Hope is called the American-in-Charge, abbreviated in the text in AIC, whose inverted initials evoke the CIA. He has failed in his mission to restore peace and build hope, and he stands in opposition of his name because he does not actually control the situation in Somalia. The figures of the two warlords, StrongmanNorth and StrongmanSouth, refer to the ridiculous image of a brutish man. Eatshit is the torturer who, under the regime of the Dictator, forced his torture victims do as his name suggests. All these names work in the same way by giving a shortcut to the characterization.

Also, the portrayal of the tyrannical Caloosha is remarkable buffoonery in both the character's physical characteristics and his rich, libidinous life, as well as in his derailing reasoning. Additionally, the scene where Jeebleh takes revenge on the old men of his clan is hilarious in the way he humiliates them before refusing their request. Aware of the misogynous nature of these elders, he says he will ask his wife and his daughters whether or not he must help finance the war.

The satirical expressions, through crude, intentionally direct language, and denounce the unacceptable. The satire is mainly a direct description of events and situations by narrators who refuse to twist reality, even if it breaks some morals. As the narrator of *Murambi* puts it, "Every chronicler could at least learn – something essential to his art – to call a monster by its name" (179). The narrator of *Links* reinforces the option to stick to a language that denudes reality: "badness had names and faces: those of StrongmanSouth, and of the AIC. And of course Caloosha and the Dictator too" (73). Thus, some passages of both novels are written in the manner of a pamphlet or a diatribe. In this respect, invectives and insulting exclamations abound in the stories of the two novels.

As stated by postcolonial theoreticians, the main problem of new, independent African countries is the difficulty that comes from merging institutions inherited from colonization with pre-existing, traditional ones. New leaders conserve only emptied shells of the institutions, but rest their power on the exacerbation of ethnic and tribal division. As such, there are so-called states without any nation. Ahmed I. Samater, blames this phenomenon on the ruling, petty bourgeoisie who, owing to self-interest, have "miserably failed" to keep alive the flame of "the initial wellsprings of mass enthusiasm" (1985).

Some disillusioned characters express their violent rejection of state, religious or social institutions to which they once gave credit. Indeed, the author of *Murambi* explains that the true cause of the genocide was not the full-flight destruction of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane on April 1994, but rather that its origins date back to the early days of independence with the Hutu's desire for revenge on the Tutsi minority, who had wronged them in collusion with the Belgian colonizers. He recalled that there had been at least two attempts of ethnic cleansing in 1959 and 1975 before the most horrific one in 1994.<sup>4</sup> It should also be emphasized that such events caused the exile of Cornelius whose story is singular. His mother gave birth to him while fleeing Hutu killers. During his childhood, he observed, hiding in the bushes with his two friends, traumatic and particularly violent scenes where Tutsis' lives were threatened, their houses burnt, and their livestock decimated. Yet, his mother and his siblings are ironically killed by his father during the 1994 genocide.

Indeed, "this emphasis on the real is what inspired Diop to create a reasonably straightforward narrative" (Hitchcott, 2009). That is why Cornelius resolves to write chronicles<sup>5</sup> instead of literature with the view of denouncing the genocide in sharp, bare language that looks suspiciously like the weapons used by the genocide perpetrators: "[Cornelius] would tirelessly recount the horror. With machete words, club words, words studded with nails, naked words and [...] words covered with blood and shit" (179). This is meant to be read as a metaphorical return of the foe's arm against its owner.



In both novels, discrediting institutions built around a spatial horror. For instance, many people in the fictional context of *Murambi*, fearing for their lives, seek refuge in churches, schools, and other public or worship institutions, believing in the symbolism of these places and thinking that the genocide perpetrators will never take this course of attack, knowing that God is watching and that the free and civilized world cannot remain indifferent to such a crime. That is why this novel offers, in its disclosure of dystopia, a dramatization of the collapse of religious and popular beliefs, and universal values. Jessica felt a deep pity for her friend who was brutally murdered alongside almost thirty thousand others who candidly believed they were in a safe place and protected by the sight of God in a church. Jessica posthumously retorts to Theresa with sudden violence “In those days, Theresa, God was looking elsewhere. . . .”

Stanley adds that the gaze of the so-called free and civilized world was riveted to the FIFA World Cup that was played at the time in the United States. Even Simeon, the wise, old man who symbolizes tradition, gives up everything he was once attached. The theme of dystopia culminates in this character who abandons his words of wisdom to set an “orgy of hatred” (178) against religious or cultural institutions, as perfectly demonstrated by this blasphemous song accompanied with the zither:

Ah! Imana, you astonish me, tell me what has made you so  
angry, Imana! You let all this blood pour out  
on the hills where you used to come to rest at night. Where  
do you spend your nights  
now? Ah! Imana, you amaze me! Tell me then  
what I have done to you, I do not understand your anger! (179)

Similarly, Farah is used to work out a merciless fictionalization of Somalia’s realities: “I recreated my native land in the iron words of a fiery truth that was given shape to and etched on the skin of lived history” (Farah, 1998). In *Links*, he protests against Somali traditional as well as imported institutions. Satire against state institution is built around the uniform, which from colonization to the present day, has always been not the symbol of authority and justice, but that of brutality and venality. Hence, the population never sees the state institution as the epitome of a legitimate organization whose decision is accepted as emanating from a supreme authority, but rather as the coat of a tyrant who forces people to submit. In this regard, Jeebleh’s critical look at the relationship between the population and the state authority is sharp:

We will defer only to the brute force of guns. Maybe the answer lies in the nation’s history since the days of colonialism, and later in those of the Dictator, and more recently during the presence of U.S. troops: these treacherous times have disabused us of our faith in uniformed authorities – which have proven to be redundant, corrupt, clannish, insensitive, and unjust. (8)

Jeebleh also pours his satirical bile on the traditions of his society which he considers misogynistic in nature and opportunistic in its approach. If he ousts the elders of his clan, who came seeking assistance to repair their battle tank, it is because, in his eyes, they subsume all the society's flaws. He was educated by his mother to abhor this treacherous and complex structure that waters the flowers of clan ties with pure opportunism.

Jeebleh understands that the old clansmen destroyed his mother's life by forcing her to marry a drunken punter and dishonestly blamed her for the marriage breakdown. They didn't lift a finger to help her in her most destitute moments when she was abandoned by her husband when Jeebleh was a toddler. In the same way, the elders did an about-face when Jeebleh is later imprisoned for political reasons. The height of irony is that they attempt to eliminate him after his refusal to participate in the war effort.

The weight of tradition impedes members of Somali society to the point of denying them individual emancipation. The crisis into which the country has sunk is due to this insane attachment to clan loyalty, which is more exclusive than inclusive. For example, siblings who share a mother may belong to different clans and wage war against one another. Indeed, Caloosha and Bile have the same mother, but are from different fathers who do not share the same clan. Conversely, Caloosha and Jeebleh have the same clan and would normally feel close, although they have no direct family relationship. During the dictatorship, Caloosha, the head of security had Bile and Jeebleh sentenced to death penalty for political activities. If a few years later, he drags Jeebleh out of prison to the United States despite the fact that the latter is the leader of an opposition party, it is because Caloosha does not want to spill the blood of a member of his clan, despite Jeebleh being a distant relative.

Ironically, the same Caloosha was ready to leave his half-brother to die in prison were it not for the collapse of the dictatorship, which made possible the inmates' great escape. In addition, ethnic interests is exacerbated to the point that even rescuing a dying in the street is out of the question, unless your clan membership is proven.

Similarly, Rwanda, the fictional setting of *Murambi* – institutionalizes segregation; race is mentioned on identity cards. Before the genocide, a character frustrated with the attitude of the police during controls observes that at any time “the first thing they want to know is whether you're supposed to be Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa”. What is worse is the fact that the independent state perpetuates “the self-serving fiction of ethnic differences propagated by the Belgian colonial government in Rwanda” (Kroll, 2007). These identifications are myths born out of the fanciful imagination of the colonizer who split into three groups a people that shared the same language, the same God and the same cultural practices (Kane, 1997; Diop, 2014).

Operation Turquoise establishes its headquarters at the Murambi Polytechnic School, the site of the largest killing during the genocide. Exploiting this fact is a way for the author to establish France's “impossible innocence”<sup>6</sup> in the Rwandan genocide. Indeed, the head of the operation resorts to the Interahamwe militiamen to bury the victims in mass graves where he builds volleyball court for his men to play and prepare barbecue. The tone of the revelations of this nature makes *Murambi* at once a “shocking and moving novel” (Nissim, 2010).

These insensitivities of the French military are equaled by the utter contempt of the ancient metropolitan against African leaders. The unpunctuated interior monologue of Colonel Perrin tells us much more about the secret motivations of the French system in Africa which mislead the African people into thinking they are democratically electing their leaders when, in fact, France is propping up these leaders and dictating their domestic and international policies from afar. The ploy of military intervention operations is revealed through this inner monologue that ultimately shows the little worth granted to African lives. Their fate is subject to the whims of Western interests, and the images of themselves they want to project to the world. The Colonel's interior monologue could not be a more eloquent self-exposure:

In Paris, confusion had reached a peak. Certain enthusiasts already saw us going at it with the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front] resistance fighters in the streets of Kigali, to sort this business out one on one. Others were saying: "We've messed around enough, that does it." According to the camp who were going to take it to Paris, I could order my men to strike on Kigali or to be filmed with Tutsis snatched out of the claws of the terrible Interahamwe. We'll see. I came with my heavy battery of 120mm Navy mortars and Jaguar fighter-bombers, but also with tons of cartons of powdered milk. . . .

Revealing the falsity of discourses of this kind is the hobbyhorse of *Murambi*. In this regard, Kroll says "What we discover in Diop's novel is that fiction can turn official reportage inside out to expose the motivating ideological fantasies articulated both within Rwanda and from without" ). In fact, one can mention the hateful propaganda of the exterminators who theorize the genocide; and the UN and international community that refused to acknowledge the genocide lest they should be faced with their responsibilities.

Farah's satire is regarded as stemming from the Somali oral tradition renowned as politically committed, but also layered with meanings (Bardolph). In *Links*, Farah demonstrates that the suppression of the dictatorship by a coup has only worsened the situation leaving Somalia with hardly any instituted authority. In an interview, he declared that "from having too much of a one-man government, the power pendulum in Somalia has swung 180 degrees, bringing into being too many mini-governments with anarchic self-serving tendencies" (Farah, 1998: 715). In fact, in *Links*, after its collapse, the central government is superseded by acute rivalry between the warlords StrongmanSouth and Strongman North. This highlights the lack of collaborative nation building, and how that process is plagued by intricate structures of clan and tribal relationships that take precedence over everything. To worsen this convoluted situation, Restore Hope, the mission of the United States in Somalia, is the opposite of what its name evokes.

Allegory, in both novels, is created from elements of the cosmos and the surrounding nature. It incorporates figures of thought such as metaphor, personification, metonymy, and synecdoche. Accordingly, in addition to animals, the two authors take advantage of inanimate or abstract elements, lending them to attribute living creatures to build an imagery of dystopia through the referential elements of the story as time, space, and decor.

The use of allegory enables Boubacar Boris Diop and Nuruddin Farah to arouse the reader's imagination to establish necessary connections in order to improve understanding of the related themes. Indeed, according to James Young, "the language and metaphors by which we come to events tell us as much about how the events have been grasped and organized as they do about the events themselves". For instance, to better show the Somali terror born of the use of gratuitous and inappropriate violence by the Americans, a character in *Links* recalls the tragic raid against the peace-plan meeting of dignitaries of StrongmanSouth's clan:

"The cattle terrorized, ran off mad, the donkey brayed and brayed, and the hens didn't lay eggs for several weeks. Our women noted a change in their monthly cycles, and their psyches were irreparably damaged. No time to mourn, our dead were buried the same day."  
(72-73)

Confusing the trauma of human beings and that of the livestock in the description of the aftermath of the attack serves to denounce the random violence hitting men, women, and children indiscriminately.

In both novels, vultures and stray dogs are everywhere taking part in the action. At the literal level, these shocking images of carrion devouring human corpses in the street is a realistic description to contextualize a warzone where human cannot decently bury their loved ones. But, at the literary level, the authors utilize this image to paint the picture of an appalling situation. Bestiary allegory is often used to create a comparison between parasitic animals and human characters who both exploit a conflict situation so as to thrive on their victims' misery. By way of illustration, this expressive dialogue between Cornelius and Simeon, based on a visual image:

"Above each grave we saw little puddles of blood forming, Cornelius. At night, dogs came to quench their thirst." A shiver ran through Cornelius's body. He had a fleeting image of a band of dogs drinking leisurely, by the light of the moon, the blood of the victims of Murambi.

"Monsters drinking the blood of Rwanda. I understand the symbol, Siméon Habineza." "It's not a symbol," said Siméon softly. "Our eyes saw it."

This image is particularly striking because it is built from a disgusting reality. Siméon's denial of the symbolic nature of the scene does not preclude imagery because allegory is a dual dynamic that invites the reader to discover the real meaning from a literal sense. Hence, why Cornelius still clings to his understanding: "monsters drinking the blood of Rwanda." In *Links* and in *Murambi*, animal symbolism is used by the struggling camps to negatively define each other. Caloosha is presented by his opponents as a wild beast that uses brute force during his raids; he is also identified with the vultures, and is suspected of trafficking the organs of victims. In the same way, the Hutu perpetrators of the genocide are exposed as "the Interahamwe, [who] dressed in tree bark and banana leaves, passed below the window crying like hyenas" (95). Moreover, the author reveals that "the Interahamwe wanted live meat" (49).

Conversely, to legitimize their actions, the Hutus accomplish, through a use of specific language, what Nissim terms "the allegory of obtuse and senseless hatred" (Nissim, 2010: 211). In fact, they describe the Tutsis as "Inyenzi," meaning cockroaches, whose extermination is needed to purify the Rwandan society. Calling the Tutsis degrading names allows Hutus to deny their humanity, making their extermination easier.<sup>7</sup> Thus, according to their rationale, Hutus are not killing anybody; they just get rid of invading bugs. The use of euphemistic language by the genocide perpetrators is a strategy to distance themselves from the true meaning of their actions (Samuel, 2010: 375). Indeed, the testimonies of genocide executors reveal an attempt of rationalizing, through the animal metaphor, taking away Tutsi lives. One perpetrator discloses their "work" as follows:

"But from time to time, on a street corner, you hear laughter and a joyful clapping of hands. A Tutsi that they've discovered by chance. Who came out from his hiding place too soon. They liquidate him as they go. Like a cockroach adventuring out into the middle of the courtyard and blinded by the light. They crush him under the heel of their shoe without paying any attention to him".

In *Links*, the elders of Jeebleh's clan cannot fathom why Jeebleh would risk his life defending a female dog attacked by gunmen still remain indifferent to their calls for contributing to the tribal war effort. As for the Butcher of Murambi, he prefers his dog, Taasu, to his own family whose blood he considers polluted. However, the act of Jeebleh is noble, while that of Karekezi is dictated by mere opportunism. The dog's place in both situations is important, as Jeebleh sees the clan war and, by extension, those who maintain it, as unworthy of his interest, while Karekezi considers Tutsis as less important than his dog.

The settings of the dystopian scenes in the two novels reflect a spatiality of horror. Hence, a previously mentioned public and religious buildings stripped of their image of serenity and haven of peace and turned into mass execution places. In *Murambi*, the transfiguration of the river, with all the peace that is symbolically built around water, is telling. A narrator informs that "during the genocide on this river, the Nyabarongo, they counted up to forty thousand cadavers floating at the same time.

You couldn't even see the water any more" .<sup>8</sup> A genocide survivor confides about the paradoxical psychosis of space: "I had just realized that our house now, all of a sudden, seemed to frighten us" (10). Another one reinforces with: "The city floated between life and death" (95); and a Hutu killer confirms: "For [the Tutsis], the country has become an immense trap in the space of just a few hours. Death is on the prowl" (28). Giving such horrific attributes to spatial elements proves that the characters are trapped.

Like Boris, Farah uses spatial allegory to draw the gloomiest picture of his own country. Through the novelist's pen, Somalia is portrayed as a land confined and vulnerable to all kinds of calamities. In an interview with Gray, the writer spoke of Somalia by making it equivalent to an animal: "My idea has always been to study the animal that is Somalia" (Farah & Gray, 2000). It means for him to reflect the complexity of this country that, like an untamable animal, continues to baffle the most experienced analysts. In order to make more visible the extent of disaster in his country, he juxtaposes in *Links* a string of metaphors, describing Somalia:

A poet might have described Somalia as a ship caught in a great storm without the guiding hand of a wise captain. Another might have portrayed the land as laid to waste, abandoned, the women widowed, the children orphaned, and the sick untended. A third might have depicted it as a tragic country ransacked by madmen driven by insatiable hunger for more wealth and limitless power. So many lives pointlessly cut short, so much futile violence. (*Links*)

The disastrous space of the two novels is matched only by the traumatic time. Their dark pages are the sad reflection of neocolonialism portrayed on its most ominous day. This makes characters mourn the peaceful feelings of a faraway past. The narrator of *Links* describes this state of mind as such: "In those long-gone days, the people of this country were at peace with themselves, comfortable in themselves, happy with who they were". And the narrator of *Murambi* invokes the sense of security afforded to the child Cornelius by the scenery of the lake: "Cornelius thought again of the child they had encountered on the shore of Lake Mohazi. The image of a world that nothing could destroy. The image of eternity".

The present time – civil war in Somalia and genocide in Rwanda – is the opposite of the more or less peaceful past. In the latter country, the creed is the denial of a future to the Tutsis. There is talk of exterminating them, and then inflicting such fear and shame on the survivors that none of them would tell what happened. This gives the narrator the feeling that the time of the genocide is "the tragic routine of terror". Besides, time is described as a mad character: "It was an epoch when time staggered backwards, drunk with hatred. Death came before life". Such description is a very vivid image which operates through a metonymy that reflects the killers' hateful madness on time. Attributing human characteristics to nature is neither deceitful nor unreal, because "allegory [is an] excessive, rather than inadequate, rhetorical representation." (Johnson, 2003) In addition, it is a strategy through which disparaging the bad nature of time is an indirect manner to castigate the Hutu killers who perpetrate these most iniquitous cruelties.

Returning to Somalia after an absence of twenty years, Jeebleh discovers how the civil war has negatively impacted the entire population. Survival is imperative, and this drives people to do desperate acts, making it difficult to be certain about the nature of people who have been severely tortured by the hardships of life. The sarcastic Af-Lawee makes the revelation that now serves as his guideline: “Times were [...] when you knew who was bad and who was good. Such distinctions are now blurred. We are at best good badmen, or bad badmen”.

It especially should be noted that thanks to allegory, the two novelists close their accounts on hopeful notes. Indeed, it is the observation of animal reality that builds the resolution of the main character of *Links* to the apex of killing his former torturer. His act is all the more exceptional as it is committed not only in the spirit of personal vengeance; but, also, and above all, to rid society of a scourge like Caloosha. Actually, in his hotel room, he sees two successive scenes in which a chameleon and a praying mantis prove that, despite the serious handicap of their slowness, they can turn out to be real predators whose disadvantage is mitigated by calculated tactics, feigned disinterest, and the ability to deal a fatal blow to the reckless prey. Jeebleh reveals in the following lines his strategy to overcome the powerful Caloosha who has caused him great harm and has abducted the little girls, Raasta and Makka:

The mantis bided its preying time, as slow as a sadist in its intention to torment its victim. Jeebleh couldn't help comparing the antics of a mantis lying in wait, readying itself to pounce, to the modus operandi of a man who was a foe in the likeness of a concerned friend. He would act like the mantis and wait, lying low, until he was able to rid his society of vermin like Caloosha, a canker in the soul of his years of imprisonment and exile. (89)

More than Caloosha's death, it is the return of the abducted children and the eventual discovery of his mother's tomb that restore inner peace in Jeebleh. Similarly, *Murambi* closes on the reflections that Cornelius wants to share with genocide survivors and those not yet born: “that the dead of Murambi, too, had dreams, and that their most ardent desire was for the resurrection of the living” (181). These closing lines of the novels are honest calls from the authors to all survivors regardless of their roles in the crises, to turn the page and look up to the future.

## Conclusion

Nuruddin Farah's *Links* and Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones* prove a novel's ability to efficiently handle painful historical events. Both novelists make history real by giving it a human face, blood, and flesh in a more emotive way than cold figures outlined in statistical reports. The use of expressive rhetoric mainly based on irony, satire, and allegory participates to the fiction-making mechanism that succeeds in rendering “an unrepresentableness represented, [and] an unspeakableness spoken” (Johnson, 2003: 67).

In fact, whether straight and uncluttered or figurative and indirect, the rhetoric serves to describe the painful dystopia brought about by the intricacies of neocolonialism. It is then a counter-utopian discourse that exposes the falsity of the hegemonic discourses that rationalize civil war or genocide and legitimate intervention, or lack of it, from Western powers. By casting a dystopian rhetoric against the imposter, the negationist and revisionist discourses then, even if implicitly, both Farah and Boris “suggest a utopian element of hope for the future” (Booker, 1995: 64) resting on what the ideal society should be. As such, the counter-utopian discourse lays the groundwork for another utopia whose contours are shaped by Africans themselves as opposed to the programs and policies inflicted on them by non-African nations.

## **Bibliography**

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (seventh edition). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999.

Alleman, Beda. « De l’ironie en tant que principe littéraire. » *Poétique*, n°36. Paris : Seuil, nov. 1978, pp. 385-398.

Bardolph, Jacqueline, « Nuruddin Farah : L’écriture du nomade » in *Magazine*.  
<http://www.politique-africaine.com/numeros/pdf/035121.pdf>

Braga, Di Corin. « Utopie, eutopie, dystopie, et anti-utopie » in *Rivista di filosofia* on-line [www.metabasis.it](http://www.metabasis.it) septembre 2006 an I n°2.

Benveniste, Emile. *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

Booker, M. Keith. “African Literature and the World System: Dystopian Fiction, Collective Experience, and the Postcolonial Condition” in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 26, n°4 (winter, 1995), pp. 58-75.

Claeys, Gregory. “News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia” in *History, the Journal of the Historical Association*, 2013, pp. 145-173.

Coulibaly, Bojana. “Haunting of the Return in Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Thiaroye: terre rouge* and *Murambi: le livre des ossements*” in Boubacar Camara & Ousmane Ngom coord. *Boubacar Boris Diop: une écriture déroutante* (GELL, Hors série n°1, avril 2014), pp. 27-46.

Diop, Boubacar B. *Murambi, the Book of Bones*. Trans. Fiona Mc Laughlin. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006.

Diop, Boubacar B. *Africa Beyond the Mirror*. Trans. Vera Wülfing-Leckie and Caroline Beschea-Fache. Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke, 2014 (a).



Diop, Boubacar B. & Traoré, Aminata D. *La Gloire des imposteurs. Lettres sur le Mali et l'Afrique*. Paris : Philippe Rey, 2014 (b).

Farah, Nuruddin. *Links*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2004.

Farah, Nuruddin. "A Country in Exile" in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 72, n° 4, Focus on Nuruddin Farah: The 1998 Neustadt Prize (autumn, 1998), pp. 713-715.

Farah, Nuruddin & Gray Stephen "Interview with Nuruddin Farah" in *English in Africa*, Vol. 27, n° 1 (May, 2000), 131-139.

Fontanier, Pierre. *Les Figures du discours*. Paris: Flammarion, 1977.

Gordon, Charles. "When irony becomes cynicism" *Maclean Hunter Consumer Publications* Oct.11,1999.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/docview/218541140?accountid=465>

Accessed October 15, 2015.

Forget, Danielle « L'ironie : stratégie de discours et pouvoir argumentatif » in *Études littéraires*, vol. 33, n° 1, 2001, pp. 41-54. <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/501277ar>

Hitchcott, Nicki. "Writing on Bones: Commemorating Genocide in Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi*" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.40, No. 3, Fall 2009, pp. 48-61.

Hutcheon, Linda. « Ironie, satire, parodie. Une approche pragmatique de l'ironie » in *Poétique*, n° 46, vol. 12, 1981, pp. 140-154.

Jay-Rayon, Laurence. « Traduire les réseaux métaphoriques chez Nuruddin Farah » in *Meta : Translators' Journal*, vol. 52, n° 4, 2007, pp. 839-858.

Johnson, Barbara E. "Allegory and Psychoanalysis" in *The Journal of African American History*, Winter 2003; 88, 1, pp. 66-70.

Kane, Cheikh Hamidou. « L'Écrivain francophone et les langues » in Lise Gauvin ed. *L'écrivain africain à la croisée des langues* 2<sup>ème</sup> édition 2006. Paris : Karthala, (1997), pp. 144-145.

Kesteloot, Lilyan. "Les Traces de la meute by Boubacar Boris Diop" in *The French Review*, vol. 68, n° 6 (May, 1995), pp. 1119-1120.

Kroll, Catherine. "Rwanda's Speaking Subjects: the Inescapable Affiliations of Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi*" in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 28, n° 3, 2007, pp. 655-663.

Lejeune, Philippe. « Le récit d'enfance ironique : Vallès », *Je est un autre : l'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias*. Paris: Seuil, 1980.

Moolla, Fatima Fiona. “Chapter 6: From Dissolution to Reconstruction: *Maps and Secrets, Links and Knots*” in Individualism in the Novels of Nuruddin Farah. Thesis Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of English, University of Cape Town August 2009.

Mzali, Ines. “Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Nuruddin Farah’s *Links*” in *College Literature*, 37.3, Summer 2010, pp. 84-105.

Nissim, Liana. “Ne pas écrire couché”: Boubacar Boris Diop, l’écrivain tourné vers l’avenir » in *Autres Modernités*, n° 2, oct. 2009, 196-206.

Nissim, Liana. « Vivre et écrire dans l’odeur de la mort (*L’Afrique au-delà du miroir et Murambi, le livre des ossements* de Boubacar Boris Diop) » in *Autres Modernités*, n°4, oct. 2010, p. 200-216.

Samatar, Ahmed I. “Underdevelopment in Somalia: Dictatorship without Hegemony” in *Africa Today*, Vol. 32, n° 3, Somalia: Crises of State and Society, 3rd Qtr., 1985, pp. 23-40.

Samuel, Karin “Bearing witness to Trauma: Narrative Structure and Perspective in *Murambi: The Book of Bones*” in *African Identities*, Vol. 8, n°4, November 2010, p. 365-377.

Vandendorpe, Christian. « Allégorie et interprétation » in *Poétique*, n°131. Paris: Seuil, sept. 2002, pp. 369-384.

Vaucher, Pierre. « Les espaces de non-dit chez Boubacar Boris Diop » in Boubacar Camara & Ousmane Ngom coord. *Boubacar Boris Diop: une écriture déroutante (GELL, Hors série n°1, avril 2014)*, pp. 245-266.

---

<sup>1</sup> University Gaston Berger of Saint-Louis, Senegal; Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Cf The collection of essays co-written by Boubacar Boris Diop and Aminata Dramane Traoré, *La Gloire des imposteurs. Lettres sur le Mali et l’Afrique* (2014 b) (The Glory of the impostors. Letters on Mali and Africa.) Its back-cover reads that it is about “a neo-imperial hand resumption in sub-Saharan Africa by a violent military assault posing as a moral, generous and disinterested odyssey. [...] And every conflict offers the opportunity to expose the mechanisms of the triumphant imposture.” (My translation)

<sup>3</sup> For further accounts on the role played by France in the Rwandan genocide consider Nicki Hitchcott (2009, 55-57).

<sup>4</sup> In his essay *Africa Beyond the Mirror* that covers largely the Rwandan genocide, Boubacar B. Diop insists that the first massacres of the Tutsis started as early as 1959, periodically followed by other massacres. This leads him to the conclusion that “the genocide of 1994 was not the sudden awakening of an atavistic bloodlust, but the result of several decades of systematic preparation” (2014 a, 25).

---

<sup>5</sup> Like his character, Cornelius, the author wanted to write a novel which, by its tone, does not depart from a chronicle. In fact, Liana Nissim (2009) argues that *Murambi* is a “novel so close to authentic document and marked with a valuable austerity” (206). (My translation)

<sup>6</sup> Subtitle of *Kaveena* (2006), a novel By Boubacar B. Diop that deals with the theme of neocolonialism by overwhelming the former colonial power and its local pawns through exposure of the mechanism on which rest their hegemony.

<sup>7</sup> “While the delirious cruelty of the perpetrators of this genocide is difficult to comprehend, it is not as senseless as one might think. By humiliating these innocent people before cutting them up with a machete, the killers wanted to convince themselves and especially their victims that they were not really human and that nature had erred by putting them on this earth” (Diop, 2014 a, 12).

<sup>8</sup> According to Boris, this significant act reverberates the introduction of colonial ethnography in Rwanda in the late 19th century. That led to believe that the Tutsis, because of their light complexion and refined physical traits were not indigenous Rwandan; that they originated from Egypt following the Nile to come to Rwanda. Consequently, by throwing Tutsis’ corpses in the river, the genocide perpetrators were psychologically making them take the opposite route. (Diop : 2014 a, 14).

Four years later, Boubacar Boris Diop visited Rwanda under the aegis of the "Ecrire par devoir de mémoire" project. Diop's trip led to the publication of the novel *Murambi: le livre des ossements* (2000) (*Murambi: The Book of Bones*), a fictional commemoration of the Rwandan genocide, based on the massacre that took place at the Murambi technical school. Reading the memorial text alongside the memorial museum, this article discusses the ways in which Diop's novel commemorates the extermination of around one million Rwandan people in one hundred days and, in so doing, implicates the author in the genocide. The article is published in *Irony, Satire, Allegory: The Rhetoric of Postcolonial Dystopia in Nuruddin Farah's *Links* and Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, the Book of Bones**, edited by Ousmane Ngom, (Oxford: James Currey, 2016). Ousmane Ngom. Introduction In the context of this article, the use of the concepts of dystopia and counter-utopia as synonyms notwithstanding the nuance pointed out by Sergeant who argues that dystopia "refers to the negative social visions, while the term anti-utopia [counter-utopia] should be reserved for texts specifically directed against utopia and utopian thin Boris Diop's *Murambi, The Book of Bones*. by Ousmane Ngom. This study explores the theme of dystopia in postcolonial Anglophone and Francophone African literature through *Links*, a novel by Nuruddin Farah, and *Murambi: The Book of Bones* by Boubacar Boris Diop that addresses the problem of Western intervention in Africa through the prism of postcolonial theories and psychoanalysis. Keywords: restore hope, operation turquoise, discursive strategies, utopia, dystopia, post-colonialism. Introduction.