PAIN, PAINFUL MEMORIES AND THE AFRICAN PAST: A LITERATURE AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Alex Amaechi Ugwuja
Department of History and International Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

Pain and painful memories influence people's behavior, shape identities, and regulate societal emotions. It is, therefore, an essential primary source of historical reconstruction. However, given their emotive, subjective, and manipulative propensities, the use of pain and painful memories in the African historian's craft has been negligible. This study engages how scholars have approached the discourse of pain and painful memories in reconstructing African history. The study is a literature/historiographical review and, thus, privileged secondary sources. The central argument of the study is that painful memories reveal a lot about the past and are crucially relevant troves for engaging and interpreting the African past, and African historians have shown little enthusiasm in engaging this subfield. The study advances the gains that can be made in different subfields of African history by paying attention to memories as a source of historical inquiry.

Introduction

In the human body, pain is a signal that something is wrong. Pain helps to protect a damaged body part while it heals, it also reminds against a repetition of a painful experience in the future. In human societies, painful experiences have led to the establishment of structures and systems aimed at preventing a reoccurrence of experiences that produced pain. Prominent examples of structures that have arisen as a result of painful memories include the defunct League of Nations and the United Nations, among others. The first stated objective in the Charter of the United Nations is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime have brought untold sorrow to mankind."[1] Psychologists employ painful memories for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. Pain and painful memories can help to find out what went wrong and why it did.

While pain and painful memories and their utilitarian values are easier for the fields of psychology, literature, and sociology, it has been vexed and complicated in the field of history. Kathrine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone drive home this observation when they asserted that "history has been less willing to engage with memory than one might expect, whether as a methodology or a perspective from which to examine its disciplinary constitution."[2] Many reasons are responsible for the hesitance of many historians to appropriate memory as a basis for engaging the past. First, memories in the field of history have evolved from oral history, a genre of history whose claims to objectivity are contested by some mainstream practitioners. Second, memory's capacity to bridge thinking about the individual and society is considered problematic. This is because memories – painful or joyous – are tied to subjective individual recollections. Aggregating and disaggregating individual and collective memories have tended to be somewhat difficult. Historians who work with memories have often had to confront the question of the point at which individual

[1] See the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter#:~:text=The%20Charter%20of%20the%20United,force%20on%2024%20October%201945

[2] Kathrine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Introduction: Contested Pasts" in Kathrine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds). *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7.

recollections sum up to a group or national consciousness. Additionally, the field of memories seems to have been left to historians interested in the history of trauma.
Despite the popular acceptance of oral sources as veritable means of reconstructing the African past, the systematic engagement of pain and painful memories in this past has remained underutilized. A few book-length studies can be found specifically engaging this theme. In this study, I appraise the historical scholarship on pain and painful memories in Africa. I interrogate how historical scholars have approached the discourse. I seek to find how they employed pain and painful memories to tell us about the African past and how they aggregate and disaggregate individual and collective memories of pain. I also seek to discover if individual and collective memories of painful experiences correlate with group consciousness, identity formation, and nationalism in Africa. It is not my intention to explore all of these questions in each of the literature I interrogate; the point is to engage a particular study within the rubrics of one or two of these questions.

In this study, my spatial and temporal scope is sub-Saharan Africa and the twentieth century, respectively. This implies that only studies that focus on sub-Saharan Africa and in the twentieth century are privileged. The twentieth century came with multiple incidences of violence and, hence, painful memories for Africans. Beginning from the European violence against Africa, which started in the first decade of that century – the so-called wars of pacification and colonialism, which were violence exemplified. The end of colonial adventurism plunged Africa into debilitating civil wars and strife. Also, the *sui generis* phenomenon of apartheid in South Africa was born, nurtured, and expired in that century – leaving the people with what to do with its memories and legacy.

For convenience, the study is divided into five parts. Following the introduction, I appraise a representative sample of scholarship that engages the theme of pain and painful memories within the context of colonialism and its violence. Here, I focus on Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* and Nancy Rose Hunt's *A Nervous State*. In the third part, I interrogate the works that focus on independence struggles and civil wars as painful memories. In the fourth part, I consider the case of apartheid in South Africa and the genocide in Rwanda as sites and spaces for a fruitful study of pain and painful memories. The penultimate section burrows into the ways pain and painful memories apply in the history of medicine and gender fields. I conclude the essay by reflecting on the historiographical import of the various ways that scholars have employed the discourse of pain and painful memories in African history.

Colonial Violence, Pain, and Painful Memories

Franz Fanon's magnum opus, *The Wretched of the Earth,* starts us off with a conversation about colonial violence and painful memories. Dedicated to the Algerians who confronted France over their independence, it is an essential reading in decolonial scholarship in Africa. Although Fanon's work is not fully based on the theme of painful memories, its evocative analysis of the pain(s) attendant upon the colonial order, its suggestions on how to channel the painful energy of Africans, and most importantly, its seminal contributions to understanding the African post-colony makes it imperative text in African studies. Fanon's work has received a plethora of reviews and commentaries, and its inter-texts count in their hundreds, I shall, therefore, concentrate here on the part of Fanon's analysis that has significance for colonialism, pain, and painful experience.

Fanon believed that colonialism was violence in its fullest iteration and that to set the colonial system up, sustain, and nourish it, painful ruptures of the life of Africans became its currency. In the eyes of the European colonialists, Africans, their biological age notwithstanding, were all children, who needed to be brought up – whipped at times, mutilated if the occasion demanded – all for the Africans' best interest. Fanon portrays a graphic illustration of these painful occasions.

Fanon's biggest contribution to the discourse of pain and painful memories is the need for the Native to confront the cause of his pain. Violence, Fanon argued, is a 'cleansing force', it metaphorically cleanses the Natives of years of abuse and pain.[3] A lot of reasons have been adduced as to why Fanon thought like this. However, Fanon's work has often been simplistically reduced to this refrain of "violence being a cleansing force'. To sum up, Fanon's argument thusly, without moderation, does epistemological violence to the entirety of his submission. For Fanon, violence is not an end itself; it is a means to an end. The Native's employment of violence, according to Fanon, is because it is the only language that colonialism understood, and given the divisive tendencies of colonial rule, only the employment of violence at a national scale has the potential of binding the Natives together. Violence, thus, helps the Natives in building a national consciousness, especially through a liberation war, which is capable of driving away the colonizers.[4] In the Fanonian sense, pain and painful memories are a force, an energy that could be employed for higher aims. Many revolutionaries all over the world drew inspiration from Fanon's work, including the Black Panthers in the United States, but ultimately, violence as a tool for building a collective identity, whether of national or socialist identity, proved illusory since violence can only reproduce violence.[5] The important point for our purposes is that pain and painful memories could be employed for higher goals; this might not necessarily need to pass through the crucible of violence. In a way, it is a double tragedy for a people not to employ their collective pains for higher purposes and better organization of their society. The United States, for example, employed its painful memories to rework its national security architecture, creating several innovative agencies and institutions such as the Department of Homeland Security, the Directorate of National Intelligence, and the National Counterterrorism Center. In Africa, the Eastern African state of Rwanda nationally employs its painful memories of a gory genocide to reinvent itself as a nation-state. Fanon challenges African scholars and statesmen to the usefulness of colonial pains, and he advances violence as its instrument of rechanneling.

It should be pointed out, however, that Fanon interviewed none of the Africans whose experiences he used in extrapolating his theory. Though this owed in part to his failing health and the urgency of publishing the work before he expired[6], it is most unlikely, given his style of writing and the period in which he wrote, that he would have gone to the field to quarry the memories of the Natives about whom he wrote. Besides, the events about which he wrote were just beginning to unfold and, hence, contemporaneous. Nonetheless, his thesis has much importance for the Africans.

Influenced by Conrad, Webber, and Fanon, Nancy Rose Hunt in *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* interestingly bridges memories and medical history. Here, as with other historical reconstructions based on memories, Hunt is confronted

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[3] Fanon*, The Wretched of the Earth*, 23

[4] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 57.

[5] Edmund Burke III," Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth" *Deadalus,* 105 (1) (1976), 127-135.

[6] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1-251

with the question of how best to utilize the memories of colonial rule and its aftermaths in the Congo. She resists entering the history of the Congo from what Meghan Vaughan has called pornography of violence.[7] This is because, in her view, to "seek a narrative entry through "The Horror! The Horror" would unleash catastrophe logic and efface much else."[8] Consequently, Hunt employs a different use for memories by engaging them to attend to "perceptions, moods, and capacities to wonder and move."[9] Given that many scholars have recently begun to rescript imperial violence as genocide, Hunt thinks that comparative tallying of incidences, as productive as they may be, would never be adequate to weigh harm and in the case of the Congo (and much of African history teaching and text) conduced to teleology with two hinges. Following Nietzsche's dictum that historical excess is detrimental to life, Hunt elects to combine memories of *events* with the *afterward*. This, in her view, "enables tender complexities and surprises. Circumventing the ungainly word from the trauma registers, from the aftermath and its condescending counterpart resilience, enables something fresh."[10] Hunt informs us that it is not always easy to decide what to do with the painful past. "Who felt the weight of the painful pasts? She asked, "The Congolese did not forget. Songs signal awareness of an older rubber-working generation tell of memories remaining visible, noticed, and heard". "Memories were not singular: the monstrous, the wry, and the enchanting mingled. Some tell of charms producing victories, enabling wonders amid death and cruelty. Others wrote of music and feasting during a time and space of violence. All was never broken…whether through insurgency, a white man's feasts, or music-making, much remembering kept catastrophic logic at bay."[11]

The *afterward* as a theme is central to Hunt's memorialization of the Congo nervousness, and through it, she explores the themes of anti-colonial struggles as represented in Maria Nkoi, an ambiguous figure who denied any connections to insurrectionist activities when she was caught. Hunt weaves into the persona of Maria Nkoi, the object of local memory, as she is reputed to have healing power with knowledge of herbs and trees.[12] Also explored were issues of low fertility, sex, sexuality, reproduction, and healing practices such as the Likili, a charm widely used against infertility in the region. However, Hunt resists the temptation of 'indulging' in a pornography of violence and a retelling of the horrors and pains of colonial Congo beyond the first chapter of her book. Her somewhat ambivalent treatment of painful experiences appears somewhat escapist. Nevertheless, the entire chapters of the book have unresolved painful memories haunting them. Resilience is another significant theme in Hunt's book. Rather than bemoan the cyclic agonies of the Congolese from the colonial period to Lumumba's assassination and the civil war, Hunt chooses to tell the story of remedies, resilience, and motion, suggesting that through pains, more can be learned about human resilience and adaptability.

Irma Taddia began his reflection on the value of African memories of colonialism by probing some questions. Given that, as I have observed above, individual memory is a subjective

[7] Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015),
[8] Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press), 1
[9] Hunt, *A Nervous State*, 1
[10] Hunt, *A Nervous State,* 4
[11]Hunt, *A Nervous State,* 244
[12] Hunt, *A Nervous State,* 60-75

category, a single individual recollecting the past in the light of his own experience. Taddia rhetorically asks how such subjective data can be integrated into historical research, which aims at objectivity. Besides this, there is a greater challenge of interpretation, given the passage of time between the events and their recollection by the individual interviewee. Often, the interviewees interpret their experience in the light of later developments, making such data overtly present. Taddia informs that he navigates these challenges by not tampering with collected data, preferring that they be read in their expressive immediacy "for that which they tell us directly."[13] With this in mind, Taddia proceeds to comment on his fieldwork experiences – in collecting and collating memories of Italian colonialism in Africa – Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, 1936-1941. For the Italians, especially after the Fascist period when Italians repressed the colonial period, "deeming it a historical experience to be erased."[14] Taddia sets before himself the task of building a historical trove out of the short-lived experiences of Italian colonists in East Africa. For what they are worth, they show the real reasons for Italian adventure in East Africa – to stem the tide of unemployment at home. Themes of the limitations of Italian colonial power, lack of organization as well as private and public corruption were also evinced. Thus, memories can be used to query and disaggregate personal truths from officialdom.

Taddia's decade-long conducting of interviews in East Africa leads him to see a lot of value in the use of memories for historical reconstruction. He submits that "through the recording of his own life experience and the production of direct testimonies, the African 'common man' has become the protagonist of historical narration."[15] Against the charge that memories radicalize and personalize history. He notes: "The oral documents I have transcribed in ex-Italian East Africa do not support the argument that personal memories of the 'common man' necessarily provide an alternative view to that of official documents."[16] Taddia further opines that "Colonized Africans also offer 'positive' recollections of colonialism. Colonialism produced rebellions and oppositions, but it also produced collaborations, adaptations, and consensus, not through politics alone, but through the creation of a new cultural identity that emerges from the social as well as political conditioning of the colonized."[17] It follows that the painful experiences of Africans in the colonial period are not monothematic. It can, therefore, be used to engage the good and bad sides of colonial rule in Africa.

Wars of Independence, Civil Wars, and Painful Memories in Africa

Given the violence that colonialism represented, as well as the divide-and-rule ploys of the European colonists in Africa and, importantly, the crop of leaders that mounted the saddle of leadership in postcolonial Africa, civil wars were somewhat inevitability. From Central Africa to the Horn of Africa, West and Southern Africa wars raged on the continent. Although a lot of studies exist on the civil wars in Africa, only a very few of these works historicize these wars from the perspective of pain and painful memories. Moreover, the few studies that engage the theme of pain and painful memories are published in journals and as chapters in books. Nevertheless, the ways that these authors have approached the subject matter are deserving of a historiographical review.

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[13] Irma Taddia, "Italian/African Memories of Colonialism" in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (eds), *Italian Colonialism* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 211.
[14] Taddia, " Italian/African Memories of Colonialism", 210
[15] Taddia, " Italian/African Memories of Colonialism" 216
[16] Taddia, " Italian/African Memories of Colonialism" 218
[17] Taddia, " Italian/African Memories of Colonialism" 218

In the discourse of independence revolts/civil wars and their connections to the memories, the Mau Mau in Kenya appears to have received more traction. As Susan L. Carruthers has noted, “Kenya possesses a body of literature on revolt unique in the continent of Africa: a substantial corpus of memoirs, autobiographies, and thinly fictionalized participant accounts by men – and occasionally women – who struggled against colonial rule in the 1950s in a movement the British called the Mau Mau.”[18] Among authors who have worked on the memories of the Mau Mau, Marshal Clough’s study is important because it is significantly based on memories and politics in Kenya’s Mau Mau. Clough’s study shows how memories are contested by the political class and the ‘common man.’ Since Kenya’s independence, the Kenya state wanted to appropriate the Mau Mau into its usable historical memory.[19] Despite that, many of those who eventually clinched political authority were collaborators and unsympathetic to the struggle in the 1950s. Myriads of memoirists, thus, use their lived experiences of the Mau Mau to write their version of the past, and sometimes they take the liberty to comment on the present state of affairs, which, as in the case of most African states, falls far below expectation. Clough shows how memories and the attendant “historiography of the Mau Mau has unsettled the state’s vision of a Kenya untroubled by radical politics.”[20] In other words, the memories of Mau Mau haunt the postcolonial Kenyan state. The memoirists are keen to show what armed revolt achieved in the past, and given the disconnects between expectations and realities on the ground, the memoirists make the government jittery. This is another relevance of painful memories, albeit political. Clough’s most significant contribution, however, is in the ‘laundering’ of the memoirists’ accounts, which had been oppugned and consigned to the trash bin of history because of their subjective mien. Clough demonstrates how the Mau Mau memoirists can augment academic historiographically, even if they do not resolve outstanding interpretational disputes.

In postcolonial Africa, the Nigerian Civil War was one of the most gruesome civil wars, and it marked a watershed in Africa – buttressing the problems of colonially imposed modernity in the continent. The war was a long-drawn strife that lasted nearly thirty months (from July 1967 to January 1970). Ostensibly a ‘domestic’ conflict, in a strictly narrow sense, the war was, according to Gary Blank, “an intense international” conflict, engaging both world opinion and world powers.” Onwuka Njoku captures the staggering implications of the war when he contends that “the civil war, which convulsed the country for 30 months, was a collective human tragedy of sobering proportions. It brought the country to the brink of disintegration and left in a trail of reckless destruction of human beings and materials in Igboland, its central theatre”.[21]As expected, such a phenomenal tragedy has generated serious academic discourse and engaged the scholarly attention of not only historians – professional and amateur alike – but also scholars of other cognates as well as some seemingly disparate disciplines. Surprising studies that engage the theme of this war and painful memories can be counted on the fingertips. One of these works is Egodi Uchendu’s work, which engages the war from the lenses of the memories of interviewees who were children during the war. She discovers that while the sentiments of Biafra’s children initially favored war because of

[18] Susan L. Carruthers, “Mau Mau Memoirs: History Memory and Politics by Marshall S. Clough”. *International Affairs* 74 (2) (1998), 450-451
Marshal Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 450
[19] Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*, 3
[20] Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs,* 64.
[21] Onwuka N. Njoku, “Foreward” in Paul Obi – Ani, *Post – Civil War Political and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland, 1970 – 1983* (Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers, 2009), vii

Biafra's massive propaganda, as the war wore on, Biafran children began to reconsider their stand.[22] Children who did not understand the import of Biafra's declaration of war suffered immensely in the period – pains arising from hunger and starvation, loss of parents and loved ones, hovering death, etc. Uchendu posits that child survivors of the war do not, decades after the war, have a unified narrative of the war, but most remember it as thirty months of pain and fear. These painful memories of the war and the afterward –systematic retributive politics of postwar Nigeria were to etch in the minds of these interviewees an ambivalent view of the Nigerian state. Uchendu's work, published as a journal article, does not probe for answers to any of the questions that I mapped out in the introduction, but one anyone can take away from her study is that despite the polythematic narratives of the child survivors, the war produced in their feelings of group consciousness – either as Biafrans or Igbo.

Edylne Anugwom explores the theme of memories and collective imaginaries further. She links the Igbo imagination of socio-political marginalization to the group's collective memories of the Nigerian civil war. She submits that based on her interviewees' recollections, Biafra may be past, but it is a past that never passes away since it is recounted by a collective that considers it pregnant with respect to national life.[23]
Dostin Mulapo Lakika has studied the memories of veterans of the Second Congo War. However, unlike most studies on veterans' memories of the wars in which they participated as active veterans, Lakika's study is interesting because it engages the veterans of the Second Congo War in the context of the space offered to them by the South African government after the war. In other words, the veterans who formed the subject of Lakika's study were removed from the environment in which the war happened. This type of research and the way it has used memories raises a couple of questions: Is there a significant difference in the ways that veterans tell of their memories of war when recollected outside the nation-state in which the war was fought? Does moving away reduce the pain? First, Lakika informs us that the experience of the veterans in the war was not monothematic; not all of their experiences in the war were painful ones.[24] They had essentially entered the military to express their masculinity, given that the colonial system in the Congo had built the military as a masculine machine. Children grew up believing that entrance into the military was the highest expression of masculinity. Thus, the veterans, Lakika informs us, were willing to accept their painful memories as direct consequences of their free volition to join the army. In South Africa, where many of the veterans moved to after the war, they could not employ their military capital the way they could have done if they were in the Congo, they still reacted vehemently against situations that they felt intimidated them and reduced their masculinity. Lakika's contribution to the discourse of memories, veterans, and war is the suggestion that there is a strong connection between gender/masculinity and the ways that war-induced pains are felt in Africa.

Memories of Apartheid and the Rwandan Genocide
With regards to memories, no themes have elicited more interest than those on apartheid and the Rwandan genocide. The explosion in recollections of memory and even the

[22] Egodi Uchendu, "Recollections of Childhood Experiences during the Nigerian Civil War". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 77 (3) (2007), 416.
[23] Edlyne Anugwom, "Memory as a Social Burden: Collective Remembrance of the Biafran War and Imaginations of Socio-Political Marginalization in Contemporary Nigeria" in A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (eds). *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970* (New York: Rutledge, 2017).
[24] Dostin Mulopo Lakika, "Living the Past in the Present: A Reconstruction of the Memories of War and Violence of Former Congolese Soldiers Living in South Africa. A Doctoral Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, 2019.

commodification of such memories in South Africa has been termed the 'memory boom.' Ali Khangela and Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu relate this development as symptomatic of a society that emerged from years of conflict and repression.[25] It should be noted, nevertheless, that most of the studies that emerged in South Africa on the theme of memories aim at truth and reconciliation; many of these works primarily seek to use memories for public and community healing. They often contain no theoretical or empirical explorations of the uses of pain and painful memories beyond community healing and national reconciliation. Interestingly, while there have been effusive outpouring and contestations about memories in South Africa, Rwandans seem to approach their national debacle through intentional forgetfulness.

A couple of studies have engaged post-apartheid memories from prisms removed from reconciliation. One such work is Ali Khangela and Sifiso Mxolisi's *Public History and Culture in South Africa: Memorialisation and Liberation Heritage Site in Johannesburg and the Township Space,* which satisfies many scholarly curiosities about memories in South Africa. Memories of apartheid, whether painful or 'pleasant' were employed to reconstruct various historical projects of the state, such as the nexus between the Sharpeville Massacres, its National Day of Remembrance, and the construction of two memorials in Sharpeville and Langa.[26] Other specific memories quarried were those of the Soweto uprising, the place of memories in visual and dramatic art, as well as its impact on traditional forms of storytelling. Other scholars who have engaged memories in South Africa outside public healing and reconciliation include L. Bremner, A.E. Coombes, and P. Frankel, etc.[27]

Memories of the Rwandan genocide formed the trove for the reconstruction of the history of events of 1994. John A. Berry and Carol Pott Berry use testimonies and memories of private individuals who survived the genocide to tell the story of how Rwanda found itself on that path.[28] Thus, as I noted in the introduction, pain is used to find what and where things began to go wrong. It should be noted that John A. Berry and Carol Pott Berry's study employed what Nancy Hunt has called the *catastrophe logic*[29], which seems to permeate much of the analysis and inferences of the book. Nonetheless, the relevance of the book cannot be gainsaid as it engages some of the questions of the relevance of memories in historical reconstruction.

Furthermore, Stephanie Wolfe, Mathew Kane, and Tawia Ansah have a wonderful book themed on justice and memory within Rwanda. The authors explore how justice and memory are understood within the context of the Rwandan genocide through the memories of those who experienced the genocide and its aftermath.[30] Hopefully, this work, which comprises

[25] Ali Khangela and Sifiso Mxolisi, *Public History and Culture in South Africa: Memorialization, Heritage and Liberation Sites in Johannesburg and the Township Space* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 5.
[26] Khangela and Mxolisi, *Public History and Culture in South Africa,* 18.
[27] L. Bremner, "Memory, Nation Building and Post-Apartheid City: The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburh", in L. Bremner (ed) *Writing the City into Being: Essays on Johannesburg* (Johannesburg: Sue Publishers, 2004); A.E. Coombes, Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa-History After Aparheid (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2003); P. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre* (Wits University press, 2010)
[28] John A. Berry and Carol Pott Berry, *Memories of a Genocide* (Johannesburg: Skyline Press, 2016)
[29] Hunt has employed the term 'catastrophe logic' to describe the recontructions of history
[30] Stephanie Wolfe, Mathew Kane and Tawia Ansah (eds). *In the Shadow of Genocide: Justice and Memory within Rwanda* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

thirteen chapters, opens up the space for more academic discourses on memories in Rwanda. What we can safely submit concerning the historiography of memories in South Africa and Rwanda is that memories are crucial to state building. It would appear that the memorialization of the horrors of apartheid gave rise to affirmative action in South Africa, which is somewhat responsible for South Africa's youth's entitlement mentality. And in the case of Rwanda, memories of the genocide have remained under-expressed. Like a keg of gunpowder, it may become explosive in the future, with serious potential to affect the significant strides in post–aproity nation-building efforts.

Medicine, Gender, Pain, and Painful Memories

A significant area in which historians have engaged the genre of memories is the field of medicine and gender. Julie Livingston's *Improvising Medicine* is perhaps the most elegant example of exploring the depths of pain and its social dimensions.[31] Though anthropological in approach, Livingston presents a compelling story that shows many social dimensions of pain. Set in a particularly demanding social space: the cancer ward at Princess Marina Hospital in Gaborone, Botswana, Livingston tells a story of the problems of suffering, of pain, of caretaking, of relationship—as they play out. Biomedicine at PMH is locally contextualized, even as it is linked to a global system of knowledge and clinical practice.[32] Hospital ethnography in sub-Saharan Africa contributes to a small but emergent literature. Carolyn Sargent writes that even though much has been written on biomedicine in other parts of the world, fewer works exist on hospitals in resource-poor countries or on specialized institutions such as the Princess Marina Hospital for oncology patients. "Cancers in much of sub-Saharan Africa," she notes, "represent diseases distinct from those bearing the same name in other biomedical systems. Because late-stage diagnosis is common, cancers are often visible and disfiguring as well as unlikely to respond to such treatment as is available." Livingstone, thus, plots the stories of cancer and much later AIDS victims to reveal deeper things about pain in Africa. Importantly, the chapter on pain and laughter adds substantially to our understanding of how pain may be understood as a social phenomenon. Livingston challenges our reception of some of the well-known works on pain as a highly individual experience, one that transcends language. In contrast, the cases she presented suggest that pain is felt both individually and collectively. "Family, nurses, and friends seem to embody the pain collectively, visibly sharing the patient's suffering. The local meanings of pain for dying cancer patients are elaborated by a historical consideration of stoicism, including colonial perspectives on Botswana. The analysis of laughter as a response to pain by sufferers and by spectators, witnessing pain, is another significant dimension of this discussion."[33] Historiographically, what can historians make out of an ethnography of pain? Do cultural variations affect the way Africans feel pain - both individually and as a collective? What role does technological underdevelopment play in feelings of pain and its management in Africa? Livingston's interesting work hardly reckoned with recollections of painful memories but instead privileged an in-situ analysis of the pains; however, a prospective researcher who seeks answers to the above posers would certainly help to make better sense of the social aspects of pain.

Finally, another juicy angle to examine the issue of pain and painful memories in Africa is the discourse of widowhood practices and female body mutilation. Alice Behrendt and

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[31] Julie Livingston, *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

[32] Carolyn Sargent, "Review of Improvising Medicine. Julie Livingston, Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.", *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 30 (4) (2016), 228.

[33] Sargent, "Review of Improvising Medicine, 228.

Steffen Moritz have done an excellent study that links posttraumatic stress disorder and memory problems to female genital mutilation in Senegal.[34] In Africa, women who undergo genital mutilation are known to undergo severe pains that haunt them for life, as well as negatively impact their mental health and ability to cope with post-traumatic life. Although international pressure, mostly from international non-governmental organizations, is pressuring African governments to ban and enforce the ban on these practices[35], few works exist that interrogate the historical relevance of the recollections of the painful memories of the victims of female genital mutilation. A couple of researchers but hardly historians have attempted to study what the pains and memories of female gender mutilation tell us about personhood, patriarchy, and individual agency in Africa.

Widowhood practices provide yet another vent for exploring the theme of pain and painful memories in Africa. This entails the excruciatingly painful and dehumanizing conditions that women are subjected to when they lose their husbands. Among the Igbo and many other West African ethnic groups, women are often suspected of killing or being partly responsible for their husband's death, and to prove to the world that they are not complicit in the death of their husbands, they are forced to undergo torturous rituals, which include beatings, swearing oaths, and drinking water washed off their dead spouse's body.[36] How do we productively engage the painful memories of these dismal conditions that women are subjected to? What do these painful memories tell us about these societies?

Conclusion

Like history itself, memory is contested. The contestation is not because there is a laid-down model for remembering the past but because memories reveal certain presuppositions about the relationship between the past and the present, which have both historical and political purchase. Individuals and groups do not embark on certain actions if not for remembering the past in certain ways, to put it simply. Unlike other forms of memories, painful memories are complex and complicated in their uses for academic purposes. This is because people who underwent painful experiences most times prefer selective amnesia and suppression of the events leading to the pains as a coping mechanism, and even when they open up, care is always taken to manage the interview process, lest the interviewees relapse into a fit of remembered horror. Yet recollections of pain and painful memories are crucial for understanding aspects of the African past. As noted in the introduction, pain and painful memories are pointers to what went wrong in a community, and they can serve other remediation purposes as well.

In this essay, I attempted to review how scholars have approached the discourse of pain and painful memories in Africa. I calibrated this discourse and the ways that scholars have approached it into four folds. First, I looked at the colonial rule and painful memories, engaging the seminal work of Frantz Fanon as Nancy Rose Hunt's Nervous Congo. I also interrogated the works that focus on independence struggles and civil wars as painful memories, reflecting on the Mau Mau and the Congolese and Nigeria-Civil War and how

[34] Alice Behrendt and Steffen Moritz, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Memory Problems after Femal Gender Mutilation", *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 162 (2005), 1000-1002

[35] Efua Dorkenoo, "Combating Female Genital Mutilation: An Agenda for the Next Decade. *Women Studies Quarterly*, 27 (1/2), (1999), 87-97.

[36] Chima J. Korieh, "Widowhood Practices among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria", Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy History, University of Bergen, Norway, 1996.

scholars have engaged the painful memories associated with these wars. Apartheid in South Africa and the Rwandan genocide provide vents for underscoring painful memories in Africa. I noted that South Africans who witnessed apartheid have been effusive in rendering the painful memories of their dark national history and have even commoditized these memories. The same is not the case for Rwandans, who appear ambivalent about coming out with their individualized painful memories of their national debacle. Perhaps the suddenness of massacres explains this situation. In any event, I argued that these painful memories reveal a lot about the past. Finally, I engaged how scholars in the field of medical history and gender have approached pain and painful memories; the phenomena of ill health, female genital mutilation, and widowhood practices were examined as sites and spaces for pain and painful memories. In conclusion, I submit that painful memories are crucially relevant troves for engaging and interpreting the African past, even though African historians have shown little enthusiasm in engaging this subfield.