A Descent into Hell, Genocide in Two Narratives: Philip Gourevitch’s We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families and Boubacar Boris Diop’s Murambi, The Book of Bones: A Novel.
In his 1951 essay on Auschwitz, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” Theodor Adorno wrote: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” In his 1989 article, “Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory,” Elie Wiesel argues that art should be silent about the Holocaust for Auschwitz defeated both culture and art and only those who lived through it can transform it into knowledge. About art Wiesel says bluntly: “stop insulting the dead.” These views expressed by both Adorno and Wiesel mark an uneasy ethical attitude towards genocide, which is often seen as a constant cause of ethical anxiety. They both understood genocide as untranslatable and unspeakable. To them, therefore, art or imaginative literature should embrace silence. This thesis interrogates these ethical concerns in relation to the Rwandan genocide as an event and writing about the genocide as art.

Using a comparative ethical approach, this thesis examines two narratives about Rwandan genocide, namely Philip Gourevitch’s We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families (1998), a factual report, and Boubacar Boris Diop’s Murambi, the Book of Bones: A Novel (2000), to explore various ethical dimensions concerning genocidal writings as well as to engage criticisms against imaginative literature as being capable of bearing witness to genocide. This thesis raises three fundamental questions that concern ethics and writing about genocide: should or can genocide be the subject of literary enquiry? Can literature bear witness to genocide and at the same time preserve the memory of the victims? Why should literature speak if genocide is considered unspeakable?

This thesis argues that art has the psychological and ethical capabilities of capturing the horrors of genocide and must, therefore, bear witness to it. The study reveals that the literary response of the novel to the Rwandan genocide may take the reader closer to the heart of the tragedy than a factual report. The point of writing about genocide is clear: it is to increase our empathy for those affected, to see where we failed in our collective humanity and to say “never again”. Good literature has the creative and psychological power to bear witness to genocide, and at its best, it can confront and express the inexpressible.
Young Philip Gourevitch brings us a report from the killing fields of Africa that marks him as a major successor to the handful of great correspondents who have risked life and safety to bring dark truths to a world reluctant to know of them. Like the greatest war reporters, he raises the human banner in hell’s mouth, the insignia of common sense, of quiet moral authority, of blessed humor. He has the mind of a scholar along with the observative capacity of a good novelist, and he writes like an angel.

"Gourevitch’s book ranks among the best examples of the journalism of moral witness." "[An] amazing chronicle … We Wish to Inform You takes the unimaginable and renders it disturbingly, unavoidably real. For that reason alone, this book should be widely read." We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda is a 1998 non-fiction book by The New Yorker writer Philip Gourevitch about the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which an estimated 1,000,000 Tutsis and Hutus were killed. The book describes Gourevitch’s travels in Rwanda after the Rwandan genocide, in which he interviews survivors and gathers information. Gourevitch retells survivors' stories, and reflects on the meaning of the genocide. We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda is a 1998 non-fiction book by The New Yorker writer Philip Gourevitch about the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, in which an estimated 1,000,000 Tutsis and Hutus were killed. Contents. 1 Summary. The book describes Gourevitch's travels in Rwanda after the Rwandan Genocide, in which he interviews survivors and gathers information. Gourevitch retells survivors' stories, and reflects on the meaning of the genocide.