

“LIFE HUNG ON A WORD”: SHIBBOLETHS AND GENOCIDE
IN DANTICAT’S *THE FARMING OF BONES*, WIESEL’S *NIGHT*,
AND COURTEMANCHE’S *A SUNDAY AT THE POOL IN KIGALI*

by

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This thesis explores how shibboleths, or cultural passwords, function as markers to signify identity and group membership status among coexisting ethnic groups. Specifically, shibboleths are critical for identity detection in genocidal conflicts where a particular ethnic group is targeted for mass extermination by another group. As shibboleths demarcate identity by analyzing performative characteristics that are difficult to imitate, such as linguistic patterns, ethnic backgrounds, or facial features, they are overwhelmingly successful at detecting outsiders by members of an assailant group who naturally exhibit those characteristics. Examples of shibboleths being implemented in pass/fail identity tests are illustrated in the works of Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*, Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, and Gil Courtemanche’s *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. These literary works explore examples of linguistic shibboleths in the Parsley Massacre in the Dominican Republic in 1937, legally classified shibboleths in the Holocaust in Europe from 1941 to 1945, and phenotypical shibboleths in the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, respectively. Considering the role of shibboleths in genocides through a literary lens humanizes the countless number of victims from these conflicts and creates a self-reflexive appreciation for the underlying factors that allow conflict to culminate in genocidal violence.

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by

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the millions of people who died, suffered, and lost loved ones during the genocides that are described in this thesis. It is our responsibility to preserve the humanity of the victims of these horrific events, and to honor those who lost their lives at the hands of misguided people in power. May we honor them, remember them, and carry the weight of their loss in our daily decisions so as not to allow history to be repeated.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I examine instances of identity tests being implemented by groups in power to identify, target, and exterminate ethnic minorities in three genocides in the twentieth century: the Parsley Massacre in the Dominican Republic in 1937, the Holocaust in Europe from 1941 to 1945, and the Rwandan genocide in 1994. These acts of genocide are described in the literary works of Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998), Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1958), and Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* (2000), respectively. The selected literary works comprise historical fiction and non-fictional memoirs, illustrating true events that occurred during these horrific acts of violence and presenting literary fodder for researching the use of identity tests in violent group conflicts. Through discourse on the effects of identity tests, I will demonstrate how the use of "shibboleths," or sociocultural passwords indicating group membership and identity, are implemented in a range of methods and formats to subjugate targeted minority groups and propagate ethnocide. Additionally, I will investigate "passing" as a tool for survival in which targeted minorities perform and appropriate characteristics of the assailant group in order to avoid violence and death. Finally, I will argue that shibboleth identity tests are dangerous, yet deceptively common, methods of "Othering" that aggravate the relationships between social groups with distinctive qualities. While this thesis will focus on events from the twentieth century, understanding shibboleths and the dangerous use of identity tests as weapons is critical to developing modern solutions to twenty-first century issues.

My research method employs an interdisciplinary approach, implementing scholarship from sociology, anthropology, political science, history, psychology, linguistics, and comparative literature. While extensive scholarly deliberation exists in the fields of ethnic groups, boundaries, and interethnic conflict, there is very little that focuses on shibboleth

markers and identity tests as deadly weapons used in genocide. Further, the function of postcolonial literatures as vehicles for humanizing victims of genocide warrants deeper research and discussion. My thesis will address the gaps in understanding shibboleths in identity tests, as well demonstrate how literary works focusing on genocide can illustrate the function of shibboleth tests in postcolonial interethnic conflicts.

Chapter One will introduce the term “shibboleth,” including its origins and scholarly research of its application in identity tests within intergroup conflict. This chapter will provide historical, sociological, anthropological, and linguistic backgrounds for understanding why humans identify and classify themselves in groups, as well as how intergroup relations can lead to violence, and even genocide in the worst cases. I will define genocide and discuss how shibboleth identity tests work as weapons to distinguish insiders from outsiders in these events. I will also introduce the concept of passing as a means of performing different identity traits in order to gain privilege, power, or simply survive in the wake of genocide. This brief introduction provides the foundation for subsequent discussion about the role of shibboleths and identity tests in the works of Danticat, Wiesel, and Courtemanche.

Chapter Two will develop the significance of linguistic shibboleths through Danticat’s historical fiction *The Farming of Bones*. This chapter will analyze the Parsley Massacre that occurred in 1937 in the Dominican Republic between Spanish-speaking Dominicans and Creole-speaking Haitians, killing between 12,000 and 35,000 in less than one week. I will discuss the factors of socioeconomic class, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalist protectionism that fueled the shibboleth identity test forcing Haitians to say the word *perejil* for parsley, similar to how an ancient group known as the Ephraimites were forced to pronounce the Hebrew word *shibboleth* in the biblical book of Judges. I will also examine the function of official government-issued

documentation as a shibboleth identity indicator, particularly in regards to government-issued identity papers used to both empower and disempower members of groups experiencing intercultural conflict.

Chapter Three will expand the shibboleth concept beyond linguistics to include government-sanctioned shibboleths and physical manifestations of ethnic identity. Here I will focus on the yellow Star of David badges that Jews were forced to wear as symbols of their religious and ethnic identities during Nazi German occupation in Europe as described in Wiesel's *Night*. I will also discuss how badges, numerical tattoos, dehumanization practices, and inmate clothing were used to distinguish Jews during the Holocaust as examples of legally classified shibboleths. Further, I will introduce physical and bodily characteristics as shibboleths in regards to the "selection" process experienced by Jews in Nazi concentration camps.

Chapter Four will combine categorizations of shibboleths and identity tests by analyzing the Rwandan Genocide as described in Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. Courtemanche's semi-autobiographical historical fiction portrays the conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi groups in 1994, which was heavily driven by government-issued identity cards and phenotypical expressions of genes, resulting in the deaths of between 800,000 and two million Rwandans. In connection to the previous two literary works, Courtemanche's novel describes the use of government documentation, stereotypes of physical characteristics, and class oppression in shibboleth identity tests to annihilate a group of people. While the Parsley Massacre and the Holocaust were carried out by groups in power against minorities, the Rwandan Genocide occurred as an inverse scenario in which a disenfranchised majority group initiated a grassroots campaign to eradicate a privileged minority, both of whom shared similar ethnic heritages.

I will conclude this thesis by relating the genocides of the twentieth century to international issues that still loom in the present day. I wish to impart on readers that appreciating the implications of shibboleth identity tests ultimately affects whether interethnic conflicts and genocides are repeated or avoided in the future. Understanding the power and prevalence of shibboleths in communities living among groups with conflicting values necessitates deeper research into these phenomena. Failure to perform this analysis contributes to the risk that members of any nation could repeat history's brutal oppression against marginalized populations in the form of genocide. On a broader scale, a lack of understanding the daily presence of shibboleths puts communities at risk of oppressing ethnic minorities, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Marginalization burdens minority groups with the feeling of being pressured to "pass" within a dominant sociocultural and political sphere that otherwise excludes them.

CHAPTER ONE:

SHIBBOLETHS, IDENTITY TESTS, AND PASSING

“...only those who know how to pronounce *shibboleth* are granted passage and, indeed, life.”

— Jacques Derrida, *Shibboleth*

Humans naturally group themselves with other individuals to form communities based on shared spaces, identities, and cultural values. Identity and acceptance are fundamental aspects of the human experience and are critical for both psychological and spiritual well-being. However, the coexistence of groups with conflicting goals and values often leads to intergroup conflict. The United Nations defines genocide as “targeted actions aimed at the destruction of particular groups of people,” whether “in whole or in part,” particularly when committed against “a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (“Genocide”). Donatien Nikuze echoes, “Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of an entire group of human beings” (316). Ethnicity and nationality are among the most fundamental elements of identity that unify people, yet they also highlight differences and can result in tension, violence, and in the most extreme cases, genocide. Frances Stewart states, “Group identities arise partly from individuals’ own perceptions of membership of and identity with a particular group—that is, the self-perceptions of those in the group—but they are also determined by perceptions of those outside the group about others” (7). In other words, groups are defined just as much by insider membership as they are by outsiders—those who do not “belong” play a significant role in the shaping of groups as well.

Cultural differences undoubtedly shape the conflicts that beget violence between different ethnic groups, both presently and in historical examples. In his hypothesis of “the clash of civilizations,” Samuel Huntington argues:

[T]he fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural....the principle conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

(100)

Genocide can culminate between a core group in power and a peripheral group that is oppressed. Of the many reasons why interethnic conflict arises, mobilization of victimized groups against privileged groups has occurred throughout history, as witnessed with the Rwandan Genocide. In reverse cases, the privileged group may instigate violence out of fear of losing power. Systematic campaigns of genocide have been implemented historically to suppress opposition and maintain power, as demonstrated by Nazi Germans and the Holocaust (Stewart 12). Stewart observes that large-scale group mobilization resulting in violence and genocide is widely incited by serious grievances at mass levels, particularly when developed and exacerbated over time (12). Additionally, influential leadership emphasizes the characteristic identities that are worth fighting for in these conflicts, whether it be belonging to a particular ethnicity, nationality, or religion, and motivates group mobilization through propaganda that “sells” the importance of the valued identity (Stewart 12). This leadership propaganda works just as fervently to dehumanize and demonize the marginalized group being victimized.

In order to target outsiders, the insider group must have clear profiles of what characterizes an insider as well as an outsider. Additionally, they must have set benchmarks for determining who belongs in either of these binary classifications. Fredrik Barth defines ethnic groups as being “largely biologically self-perpetuating,” sharing “fundamental cultural values,

realized in overt unity and cultural forms,” exhibiting “a field of communication and interaction,” and comprising “a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order” (10-11). Further, Barth observes that “the classification of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting the particular traits of the culture,” making cultural performance a critical component of identification, both as an individual and as a group (12). Lastly, ethnic groups must be situated within larger multiethnic systems by maintaining stable, significant cultural differences that are standardized to the extent that “every member of a group must be highly stereotyped” (Barth 19). With *inclusion* being as paramount to group identity as *exclusion*, groups committing genocide must discern outsiders from insiders by devising tests to detect identity markers. The outcome of these identity tests is either to pass or to fail. The consequences vary, but the stakes are extremely high in cases of genocide where a group is targeted for exhibiting certain characteristics, regardless of whether or not the victim identifies with the target group. The risk of death yields the greatest motivation to pass identity tests.

Identity tests are predicated on the existence of “overt signals or signs,” which Barth describes as “diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life” (14). If belonging to a group requires members to present themselves in particular manners or perform in specific ways, then implementing a litmus test to gage those qualities in individuals can detect outsiders who do not meet the group’s identity criteria. Identity tests were critical weapons in the killings committed during the Parsley Massacre, the Holocaust, and the Rwandan Genocide, as the works presented in this thesis illustrate. Tim McNamara states, “The aim of the test in other words is to restrict access to rights and privilege to those who belong to a certain group, and to detect those who are

making false claims, that is, are trying to ‘pass’ as insiders” (361). The element of identity that must be exhibited or performed in order to pass an identity test has been termed a “shibboleth,” which indicates a password that is relatively difficult or impossible for non-members to imitate. These pass/fail tests prove whether or not an individual belongs to a particular group as a result of their ability to perform the shibboleth convincingly.

Merriam-Webster defines the term “shibboleth” as “a use of language regarded as distinctive of a particular group,” or, more broadly, “a custom or usage regarded as distinguishing one group from others” (“Shibboleth”). The term gained its meaning as a culturally symbolic password from the biblical conflict between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites in the Old Testament:

Jephthah then called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The Gileadites struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, “You Gileadites are renegades from Ephraim and Manasseh.” The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he replied, “No,” they said, “All right, say ‘Shibboleth.’” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

(New International Bible, Judges 12:4-6)

The conflict between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites occurred more than 3,000 years ago, yet it endures as an allegory to the simplistic power of shibboleth identity tests and their function in interethnic conflicts. This deadly massacre created a lasting precedent for interethnic conflicts that followed, particularly those employing an identity test to detect and exterminate an

undesirable group—hence the prominence of the term “shibboleth” in this field of study. Jacques Derrida observes that the Hebrew word *shibboleth* has a number of literal meanings, such as “river, stream, ear of grain, olive-twig,” with different interpretations among different Hebrew-speaking groups (409). Derrida states that the term’s association with being a password arose through its use as a weapon strategy: “It was used during or after war, at the crossing of a border under watch. The word mattered less for its meaning than for the way in which it was pronounced” (399). This demonstration of one’s linguistic heritage, and by extension an individual’s group identity, effectively marks the individual being tested as either belonging to the dominant group or as an outsider belonging to an enemy group.

Shibboleth identity tests are immensely effective due to the difficulty of overcoming one’s native, instinctive sense of self, even under the intense pressure of avoiding harm. In the case of the Parsley Massacre, Creole-speaking Haitians were forced to pronounce the Spanish word *perejil*; during the Holocaust, Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David badge in their public lives; and with the Rwandan Genocide, Tutsis were identified by arbitrary classifications of physical traits and official identity cards to mark them as targets. Derrida describes shibboleth identity tests as being “discriminative, decisive and divisive,” effectively distinguishing group members based on traits that are difficult or impossible to imitate or conceal (404). Derrida notes, “It does not suffice to know the difference, one must be capable of it, one must be able to do it, or know how to do it—and doing here means *marking*” (404). A shibboleth’s protection for an individual being tested is elusive to outsiders in that knowing the password, or even knowing how it *should* be performed, does not suffice; one must accurately and convincingly exhibit or perform the identity marker to someone who understands it natively. As many may appreciate, it is difficult to convince a native speaker of your authenticity when

speaking with a forged accent, just as it is difficult to pass as a “local” when you are not familiar with local norms and customs. Linda Schlossberg aptly notes, “A convincing performance...requires not just culture but skill; the seams must not show” (6).

The shibboleth identity marker that is being analyzed dwarfs in significance compared to the political purpose of requiring certain suspects to perform as a means of detecting target group members. According to Derrida, “As with *shibboleth*, the meaning of the word matters less than, let us say, its signifying form once it becomes a password, a mark of belonging, a manifestation of an alliance” (396). McNamara adds, “The test as such is not in itself the problem; it is all a question of the context of its use” (356). By weaponizing the subconscious elements that shape how individuals exhibit and perform group identities, groups in power are able to use shibboleth identity tests to control passage at both tangible and intangible borders. Physical boundaries, such as the Dajabón River separating Haiti from the Dominican Republic, can serve as sites of conflict for power struggles between ethnic groups. However, some borders demarcating core groups from peripheral ones cannot be seen, such as the removal of citizenship and other civil and social rights from Jews by German Nazis to handicap them from functioning in civic society. McNamara claims that shibboleth identity tests aspire to target and exclude undesirable social groups, constituting “an absolute barrier” (357). The political nature of shibboleth identity tests necessitates the existence of dominant groups attempting to cripple and eradicate marginalized groups they deem unworthy and undesirable. This oppression often motivates the targeted groups to attempt to pass as belonging to the dominant group, either to save their lives in times of conflict, or to gain privilege and power from which they are otherwise excluded.

When a minority group is disproportionately marginalized and oppressed within a particular society, it occupies the extreme position of becoming a pariah group. Barth states:

The boundaries of pariah groups are most strongly maintained by the excluding host population, and they are often forced to make use of *easily noticeable diacritica* to advertise their identity.... When pariahs attempt to *pass* into the larger society, the culture of the host population is generally well known; thus the problem is reduced to a question of escaping the *stigmata of disability* by dissociating with the pariah community and faking another origin. (31, emphasis mine)

By extension of existing in the periphery of the hegemonic culture, the pariah group's identity becomes circumscribed within the dominant group's social and cultural definitions. The dominant group controls the majority of social institutions, including the laws that control minorities as well as the way in which history is recorded for posterity. When individuals belong to a pariah group and bear the "stigmata of disability" within a social framework set by the hegemony, they may choose one of several paths. First, they may accept their minority status and accommodate the dominant group's power and privilege at the cost of remaining a pariah in society. Second, they may emphasize their ethnic identity and pursue new positions and patterns to challenge the hegemonic group's dominance. Third, they may face pressures and opportunities to abandon their minority ethnic status in favor of attempting to pass as members of the group in power, either temporarily or by permanently altering their identities as a result.

The term "passing" inherently demarcates a sense of mobility, of moving forward. At identity test checkpoints, the individual under scrutiny is subject to a pass or fail outcome. To fail is to regress in status, unable to move forward and halted from further progress. To pass is to succeed with the opportunity to move forward, yet can incur the cost of the individual becoming disloyal to his or her own community, and challenging the principles of one's own authenticity. However, when the outcome of failing the shibboleth identity test is death or harm, the

motivation to pass is far greater than that of individuals performing different versions of themselves to achieve self-realization or privileged positions. Schlossberg observes that “passing can mean the difference between life and death, community and isolation,” adding that targeted minorities may attempt to pass within hegemonic cultures to achieve the status of “being a citizen and human being” (4). The concept of passing raises questions about the fluidity of identity, as well as the permeability of a group’s membrane for adding or removing members.

Within the insider-outsider binary, complications arise when individuals exist within liminal spaces of identity that do not necessarily match the stereotypical characteristics of either conflicting group. Barth states, “Thus there will be variations between members, some showing many and some showing few characteristics. Particularly where people change their identity, this creates ambiguity since ethnic membership is at once a question of source of origin as well as of current identity” (29). For example, Jewish identity is largely undetectable by physical appearance alone, hence the Third Reich’s requirement for Jews to wear the yellow Star of David badge to differentiate them from non-discriminated groups; without the shibboleth marker, Jews could easily pass undetected as non-Jews. Schlossberg states, “[P]assing blurs the carefully marked lines of race, gender, and class, calling attention to the ways in which identity categories intersect, overlap, construct, and deconstruct one another” (2).

In the following chapters, I explore the prevalence of shibboleths as identity markers in the works of Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*, Wiesel’s *Night*, and Courtemanche’s *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. Each of these literary works is a paradigm of how shibboleths can be weaponized within interethnic conflict to detect, target, and exterminate members of a targeted ethnic group. I have carefully selected these works to present a range of themes related to ethnic trauma and decentering hegemonic cores. Each instance of genocide within these novels is

unique to the particular groups and sociological factors that cultivated it. However, I have chosen to analyze these events as an assemblage to holistically present a spectrum of how shibboleths and genocide are presented in twentieth-century literature. Each example brings a unique case for consideration that partners with the other genocidal events to further my argument that shibboleth identity tests have been and continue to be deadly weapons in interethnic conflicts. For example, while the Holocaust is globally recognized for its unprecedented loss of life, the Parsley Massacre is more obscure and is less commonly acknowledged. Where the Rwandan Genocide arose from grassroots mobilization, the Holocaust was a government-sanctioned machine of systematic annihilation. As the Parsley Massacre resulted from a privileged hegemony attempting to retain power by killing a marginalized group, the Rwandan Genocide conversely involved a marginalized group attempting to remove a privileged minority from power. Discussion of the power of shibboleth identity tests is not complete without the combined examples of these events, as well as the complementary works of literature that illustrate them. In tandem, these narratives create a complementary analysis of the role of shibboleths in intergroup conflict during twentieth-century genocides while drawing relevance to present-day global issues and events.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE FARMING OF BONES, THE PARSLEY MASSACRE, AND LINGUISTIC SHIBBOLETHS

“A border is a veil not many people can wear.”

— Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*

The powerful role of linguistic shibboleths in genocide has been exemplified in history by the Parsley Massacre, an intergroup conflict occurring in the Dominican Republic from October 2-8, 1937. Over the course of one week, upwards of 20,000 Haitians and Dominicans were murdered under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, nicknamed “El Jefe” for “chief” and often referred to simply as the Generalissimo (Palash Ghosh, *International Business Times*). Trujillo promoted Dominican nationalism and ethnocentrism lighter-skinned Dominicans with ethnic backgrounds from Spain, conversely condemning darker-skinned Haitian immigrants who purportedly “muddled” the country’s national identity and economy (Ghosh). Haitian immigrants were then considered a pariah group and became targeted for genocidal violence.

The name “Parsley Massacre” arose from the shibboleth identity test used by Dominicans to identify Haitian emigrants at border crossings before killing them. Targeted individuals were forced to pronounce the word *perejil*, meaning “parsley” in Spanish, to test their linguistic patterns and prove themselves to be either Spanish-speaking Dominicans or Creole-speaking Haitians. Those who could effectively pronounce the Spanish word’s linguistic phonetics would pass the test, while those who failed were detected as outsiders and faced violent repercussions. In her novel *The Farming of Bones*, Edwidge Danticat employs symbolism and figurative language to restore voices and acknowledgement to the Haitian victims of the Parsley Massacre, and to prevent the tragedy of this massive loss of human life from being forgotten by posterity.

Differing from the works of Wiesel and Courtemanche, Danticat's novel is a work of historical fiction, granting her the artistic license to portray events that occurred on a massive scale with selective focus and illustrative humanity that reminds readers of the value of human life.

The Farming of Bones is a fictional first-person narrative following a young Haitian woman named Amabelle Désir, a domestic worker in the home of a prominent Dominican military officer. Like many Haitians working in the Dominican Republic, Amabelle has emigrated from her homeland to seek employment in their prosperous neighboring nation, landing in the township of Alegría. However, Susana Vega-González states, "The rejection and hostility [Haitians] fall prey to because of their darker skin and their foreign condition give rise to a deep feeling of uprootedness" (58). Many of the poor Haitians working as domestic servants and plantation braceros comprise the impoverished class termed *vwayajè*, or wayfarers, who "don't belong anywhere" due to their transient status (Danticat 56). Semia Harbawi states, "Amabelle belongs to a group of Haitian pariahs hovering on the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a purgatorial twilight zone of banishment and oppression," an effect that is promulgated by Trujillo's 1929 treaty to "staunch the unceasing 'minatory' influx of Haitians" (38). Even individuals born and raised in the Dominican Republic are not considered insiders if they exhibit Haitian ethnic heritage. A Haitian woman tells Amabelle, "To them we are always foreigners, even if our granmèmès' granmèmès were born in this country" (Danticat 69).

When Amabelle's employer Señor Pico kills a young *bracero* by hitting him with his car and does not stop nor express any concern, the Haitians working on the plantation begin to lose trust for the Dominicans. With mounting rumors of Haitians being murdered by Dominican soldiers under Trujillo's orders, the Haitian workers begin to fear for their lives since they belong to a poor, unprotected group being targeted for their skin color, nationality, and immigrant status.

As the killings become widespread and systematic, the government's genocidal intentions of eliminating Haitians from the Dominican Republic are realized. Danticat names the other visceral epithets attributed to the Parsley Massacre, including the Dominicans' "El Corte—the cutting" and the Haitian's "kout kouto, a stabbing, like a single knife wound" (299). While Dominicans and Haitians may refer to the massacre by different names in their languages of Spanish and Creole, both nations acknowledge the barbarity of the bloodshed that occurred more than eighty years ago.

Trujillo's dictatorship promulgated prejudice against Haitians, known as *antihaitianismo*, or anti-Haitianism, that was rooted in Dominican nationalism and was committed to eliminating the perceived threats of Haitian immigrants within the regressing Dominican economy. In one particular speech at the border town of Dajabón, Trujillo announced his plan for the impending massacre to his constituents:

I have seen, investigated and inquired about the needs of the population. To the Dominicans who were complaining of the depredations by Haitians living among them, thefts of cattle, provisions, fruit, etc., and were thus prevented from enjoying in peace the products of their labor, I have responded, "I will fix this." And we have already begun to remedy the situation. Three hundred Haitians are now dead in [the city of] Bánica. This remedy will continue. (qtd. in Ghosh)

The Farming of Bones centralizes Trujillo's dictatorship as the driving conflict of the novel's plot. As a work of historical fiction, events and characterizations are based on the true nature of the Parsley Massacre and the ethical decisions that people faced during that time. Amabelle must weigh the decision of staying with the wealthy Dominican family she serves, or fleeing with her fiancé Sebastien. At first she believes, "This could not touch people like me.... [We] were giving

labor to the land. The Dominicans needed the sugar from the cane for their *cafecitos* and *dulce de leche*. They needed the money from the cane” (Danticat 140). However, her choice becomes critical when they realize “the Generalissimo, along with a border commission, had given orders to have all Haitians killed” (Danticat 114). As a means of survival, Amabelle bands together with other refugees to attempt to return to Haiti and avoid being murdered by the host country that has decidedly targeted them for genocide.

The interethnic conflict between Dominicans and Haitians was exacerbated by the use of shibboleths and identity tests as an attempt to annihilate all Haitians on the Dominican side of the island of Hispaniola. Primarily, the Spanish word *perejil* transformed into a linguistic shibboleth and a weapon for Dominican soldiers to perform identity tests on suspected Haitians. In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle narrates, “Many had heard rumors of groups of Haitians being killed in the night because they could not manage to trill their ‘r’ and utter a throaty ‘j’ to ask for parsley, to say *perejil*” (Danticat 114). Since French- and Creole-speaking Haitians were accustomed to very different linguistic phonetics, it was difficult, if not impossible, for many of them to pronounce the word *perejil* properly on demand, resulting in thousands of deaths during the government-sanctioned genocide (Ghosh). Harbawi adds, “Consequently, parsley becomes the shibboleth...where it is a kind of password distinguishing those who could say this word from those who could not, with the aim to eradicate the defeated” (55).

Jan-Petter Blom contends that “language barriers are instrumental in generating the ethnic picture,” making the linguistic differences between the Creole-speaking Haitians and the Spanish-speaking Dominicans “idioms of identification,” or shibboleths, that allow one group to easily identify members of the other group when language is exchanged (83). As such, the Dominican dictatorship was not the only entity to fear—civilians were also instructed to capture

Haitians and bring them to the soldiers to be killed. Janice Spleth explains that whether genocide arises as a government or grassroots initiative, in many cases “brutalities [are] committed by individuals, often against neighbors,” generating conflicts that pit members of the same community against one another in violent combat (148).

Amabelle experiences the shibboleth identity test in *The Farming of Bones* when she and a group of Haitians attempt to flee the Dominican Republic by crossing the Dajabón River, but are targeted by soldiers at the border. The group attempts to pass undetected: “We tried to mix, wanting to appear like confused visitors from the interior campos rather than the frightened maroons that we were” (Danticat 189). However, as Danticat prodigiously states, “A border is a veil not many people can wear,” and they are unsuccessful with this performance (264). Their dark complexions attract two soldiers who “waved parsley sprigs in front of [their] faces,” saying “Tell us what this is.... Que diga perejil” (Danticat 193). Amabelle narrates, “At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to, I could have said the word properly...even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue” (Danticat 193). Before Amabelle is able to attempt to pronounce the fateful shibboleth, the soldiers stuff her mouth with parsley and proceed to beat her due to her presumed Haitian identity based on her dark complexion (Danticat 193). In contrast, the two Dominican sisters who join Amabelle’s survivalist group can pass the shibboleth test effortlessly as a result of their native fluency in Spanish: “If they were asked to say ‘perejil,’ they could say it with ease. In most of our mouths, their names would be tinged or even translated into Kreyòl” (Danticat 183). This linguistic shibboleth identity test is deceptively simple, yet deadly in its prowess to detect outsiders who are not native to the Spanish language.

Amabelle learns the origin of the parsley shibboleth test from her mistress. Señora Valencia narrates that Trujillo once oversaw plantation fields and wanted to capture a Haitian worker who escaped into a nearby field where parsley was growing. He told the man, “If you tell me where you are, I’ll let you live, but if you make me find you, I’ll take your life” (Danticat 304). The man called out his location based on what was growing in the field, yelling “twigo” for *trigo*, and “pewegil” for *perejil* (Danticat 304). Hearing the Haitian’s mispronunciation of the Spanish terms led the Generalissimo to realize, “Your people did not trill their *r* the way we do, or pronounce the jota.... On this island, you walk too far and people speak a different language. Their own words reveal who belongs on what side” (Danticat 304). This folkloric explanation for the use of parsley as a shibboleth is rooted in the prejudice that Dominicans felt towards Haitians as a result of Trujillo’s *antihaitianismo* propaganda and incitation of genocide.

Parsley becomes a prominent symbol in *The Farming of Bones*, both as a useful herb for everyday life and as a demarcation between insiders and outsiders. Amabelle narrates, “We used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country” (Danticat 203). Within this interethnic conflict, parsley takes on a new meaning to represent not only cleansing the body, but ethnic cleansing as well. Amabelle narrates, “We used pèsi, perejil, parsley...to wash a new infant’s hair for the first time and—along with boiled orange leaves—a corpse’s remains one final time” (Danticat 62). This further symbolizes parsley as a veil between life and death, juxtaposing the renewal of Dominicans attempting to restore their national eminence against the killing of Haitians who seemingly compromise their national identity. The ordinary nature of the herb reminds us that racism and prejudice are equally commonplace and seemingly innocuous to those who practice them.

Language takes on a dual meaning in *The Farming of Bones*, functioning as both “a healing tool against oppression and oblivion” and “a destructive agent that strongly determines the immigrants’ lives,” according to Vega-González (62). As a prescriptive tool, language enables Haitians to assert their legitimacy and gives names and voices to the victims who may otherwise be forgotten. The novel’s first sentence, “His name is Sebastien Onius,” establishes the novel as a dedication to humanizing the thousands of Haitians who were namelessly and facelessly slaughtered like livestock during the massacre (Danticat 1). Sebastien, Amabelle’s fiancé, is killed during *El Corte*, and his death cripples her and his mother emotionally for the rest of their lives. The ripple effect of the loss of this one life multiplies the impact of the thousands killed during the massacre. Vega-González states, “Danticat’s narrative act is thus an attempt to honor the thousands of unburied victims by rescuing them from oblivion and providing them with lasting memory rendered through their literary inscription” (55). Language is also used to reject oppression and rebel against genocide. When Amabelle’s fellow refugee Odette dies at the river, she whispers the Creole word for parsley, *pèsi*, with her final breath as “a provocation, a challenge, a dare” (Danticat 203). Amabelle is invigorated by this rebellious act against *antihaitianismo*, stating, “You ask for perejil, I give you more” (Danticat 203). By refusing to attempt to pronounce the word *perajil* to appease Dominican authorities, Haitians symbolically assert the worthiness of their human lives and the validity of their Creole language.

As a destructive weapon, language is also used to promote racist propaganda and enables shibboleth identity tests that result in death for Haitians who cannot mimic Spanish phonetics. Trujillo’s incendiary words blame Haitians for the Dominican Republic’s regressing economy, and translate into *antihaitianismo* propaganda language that is echoed by Dominican constituents throughout the novel. For example, when the genocide is over, Amabelle visits a former friend,

Father Romain, who has since been detrimentally brainwashed by Trujillo's propaganda and suffers from permanent mental disabilities as a result of the violence. He senselessly parrots the Generalissimo, reciting:

Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? [Haitians] once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will ever be cane to cut.... Our problem is one of dominion. Tell me, does anyone like to have their house flooded with visitors, to the point that the visitors replace their own children? How can a country be ours if we are in smaller numbers than the outsiders? Those of us who love our country are taking measures to keep it our own.... We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians. In three generations, our children and grandchildren will have their blood completely tainted unless we defend ourselves now. (Danticat 260-261)

The power of language as propaganda is evident in each instance of genocide discussed in this thesis. The Parsley Massacre is not unique in that its nonviolent origins as hate speech evolved into unimaginable brutality between members of ethnic groups that once coexisted peacefully. Language has the capacity to transform relationships for better or for worse, and when leaders use their platform to inspire racial hatred in their followers, violence can develop as a seemingly justified means to solve complicated issues with no clear peaceable solutions.

The Farming of Bones is titled after the Haitian phrase *travay tè pou zo* for harvesting sugar cane due to the bone-like appearance and brittle density of the tall cane stalks (Danticat 55). The name also metaphorically represents the thousands of Haitians who were murdered during the Parsley Massacre and were slaughtered with the same machetes used to harvest the sugar cane. Harbawi observes that the "bones" of harvested cane symbolically represents Trujillo

as he “manipulates Haitians’ black bodies as reservoirs of racial stereotypes and dichotomies, which he wants to consolidate so as to reinforce his people’s self-image as racially/politically superior” (52). In the novel, bones are symbolic of the “rememory” that is “left over by traumatic events such as the tormenting throbbing of the joint in Amabelle’s weak knee (resulting from a mob lynching), which becomes an implacable reminder of the massacre” (Harbawi 40).

Amabelle bears the physical scars of *El Corte* as well: “Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament” (Danticat 227). Even as one of the relatively fortunate survivors, Amabelle is permanently transformed by the trauma she has suffered; the physical brokenness of her body mirrors the emotional and psychological burdens that will haunt her for the rest of her life. Her pain and grief illustrate the human suffering that genocide perpetrates on a wider scale than the tragic death toll alone—families and loved ones of victims must suffer as well, plaguing subsequent generations of ethnic groups with trauma that cannot easily be absolved.

Sugar and coffee are also prominent symbols in the novel, representing the toil of Haitian workers who produce the luxuries, yet are never able to access the fruits of their labor. Amabelle frequently brings *cafecitos* to her mistress on command before the Parsley Massacre occurs, but the delicacy is rarely indulged on members of the *vwayajè* working class. In an unprecedented moment of generosity, Señora Valencia invites the cane workers to join her for a *cafecito*, and the coffee must be “rationed carefully, controlling the supply so everyone who wanted to could have at least a sip” (Danticat 115). However, when Señor Pico discovers that their imported orchid-patterned tea set was used by Haitian braceros, he destroys the china, effectively abolishing any potential contact between his luxuries and the working-class Haitians he deems unworthy of his social standing (Danticat 116).

As Danticat's novel illustrates, many of the victims of this massacre were Haitian *braceros* and domestic workers who immigrated to the Dominican Republic for employment prospects. According to Ghosh, most murders during the Parsley Massacre were carried out by "Dominican soldiers and civilians wielding machetes, bayonets and rifles" and specifically targeted "dark-skinned Dominican[s] suspected of being Haitian." Agreeing with many other scholars, Ghosh classifies the massacre as genocide due to the Dominican intention to eradicate all Haitians within their national boundaries:

The killings had a decided racial angle, hence the term "genocide" favored by some scholars who studied the massacre. Dominicans, like many Latin American societies, were ruled by a white Spanish elite who lorded over a population principally comprised of mixed-race mulattoes or those who were of mixed European-Amerindian blood.

Haitians, in contrast, were overwhelmingly of unmixed black African heritage. (Ghosh) Some scholars attribute Trujillo's extremism to "pure racism as the major driving force" (Ghosh). Others claim that his motives may have been to expand Dominican territory or to eradicate the threat of Haitian insurgents who wanted to overthrow him due to paranoia over retaining his position of power (Ghosh).

While national identity was the primary driving factor for targeting victims during the Parsley Massacre, skin color was also critical in determining *why* and *how* individuals were targeted. Not every Dominican soldier checked identity papers or performed shibboleth linguistic tests before killing suspected Haitians; simply being dark complexioned was sometimes sufficient for incurring the soldiers' deadly force. Amabelle narrates the common practice of using ethnic background as an identifier for targeting outsiders: "[The Dominican] was black like the nun who came to re-dress his wounds. He'd been mistaken for one of us and had received a

machete blow across the back of his neck for it. There were many like him” (Danticat 217). Danticat’s use of symbolism emphasizes how “race, as a category, is highly problematic,” bolstering her theme of non-binary liminal identities and the farce of attempting to categorize individuals by qualifications that often blur the lines between ethnic groups and national identities (Spleth 148).

Spleth describes how Danticat “attacks the racism of the 1937 massacre of her people by offering key episodes and images that similarly promote connectedness and refute the binary myth of racial difference,” such as through the symbolism of the wealthy Dominican family’s light- and dark-skinned twins (147). When Amabelle helps deliver her mistress Señora Valencia’s twins, a boy and a girl named Rafael and Rosalinda, they are surprised at the difference in appearance: Rafael’s complexion is a “cherimoya milk color,” while his sister’s is a “deep bronze” (Danticat 11). Valencia looks at Amabelle with concern, saying, “My poor love, what if she’s mistaken for one of your people?” (Danticat 12). Preferring to think of her daughter as a descendant from the island’s original population rather than a Haitian outsider, Valencia refers to Rosalinda as her “Indian princess” and her son a “Spanish prince,” setting the tone for anti-black racism that culminates in genocide in the novel (Danticat 29).

The use of twins as a trope represents the difficult and competitive coexistence between Haitians and Dominicans (Harbawi 53). Although Rafael is presumably the larger and stronger twin, he dies suddenly before the babies are days old. Doctor Javier describes the common occurrence of one twin killing the other in the womb, or one sacrificing itself to give the other more strength for survival (Danticat 19). While Rosalinda was given a family name, baby Rafi was named for the Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo, described as embodying “the epitome of a dyed-in-the-wool nationalism” (Harbawi 53). Harbawi states, “That is why Danticat makes Rafi,

Trujillo's namesake, die: it is meant to claim that the traditional male nationalist ideal is bound to be dispensed with" (53). Rosalinda is described as a "chameleon" who must develop adaptability and resilience to survive (Danticat 11). The strong and favored light-skinned son represents the dominant nation of Dominicans, while the chameleonic dark-skinned daughter symbolizes Haitians who must adapt to survive amid the patriarchal nationalism that threatens their existence on the island of Hispaniola. Just as Rafi's shadow "would no doubt follow his sister all her life," so too does the shadow of Dominican hostilities cloud Haitian history.

Borders and liminal spaces are prevalent themes in *The Farming of Bones*, and Danticat employs water as a powerful metaphor for fluidity and blurring boundaries. Vega-González notes that water metaphors can be traced back to "Haitian Africanisms perceiving water as a 'gateway' separating the world of the living from that of the dead," acting as "a dualistic metaphor of both healing and destruction" (57). Corpses were often deposited into the Dajabón River, known as the Massacre River even before the Parsley Massacre after the Spaniards killed the French buccaneers in 1728 (Danticat 91). The river serves as both a physical and metaphorical boundary between Haitians and Dominicans, symbolizing the dangerous threat of the two groups crossing into the other's territory, economy, and political sovereignty. The Dajabón is also the site where Amabelle's parents die when she is a child. Helplessly watching them drown traumatizes her and haunts her dreams night after night. Her ritual dream state of revisiting her parents' deaths at the river foreshadows the liminal existence she will adopt after crossing the same river to escape death and losing her fiancé Sebastien to the Parsley Massacre. The river symbolizes death and violence as a site where countless bodies are swept away to deteriorate in anonymity.

Water also acts as a healing force in *The Farming of Bones*. Amabelle's fellow refugee, Tibon, relays his story of survival after jumping off a cliff and landing in the ocean to escape soldiers who lined up Haitians to murder them on the edge of the cliff (Danticat 173-175). In this example, water represents safety and protection, providing an escape from certain death and allowing Tibon to outwit his assailants. Remembering Sebastien, Amabelle wonders, "Perhaps there was water to greet his last fall, to fold around him and embrace him like a feather-filled mattress," mirroring the metaphorical sanctuary of water from Tibon's tale (Danticat 282). Two decades after the Parsley Massacre ends, Amabelle returns to Alegría to confront Señora Valencia, and to revisit the waterfall cave where she and Sebastien first made love. Valencia takes her there as a favor, saying, "When we were children, you were always drawn to water, Amabelle, streams, lakes, rivers, waterfalls in all their power" (Danticat 302). The novel concludes with Amabelle returning to the Dajabón, removing her clothes, and floating in the water that became the resting place for so many lost lives. She symbolically performs a self-baptism, reposing "like a newborn in a washbasin"—a simile for rebirth, healing, and cleansing that she so desperately needs after the trauma she has suffered.

Another symbol of liminality and fluidity in the novel is the kite. Harbawi states, "The kite best embodies the ethos of indeterminacy, given that it is made to scud and hover in limbo, dangling between earth and sky," representing the "Haitian immigrants' predicament" (46). By extension, the kite symbolizes the Haitian immigrants' freedom from Dominican oppression. Not only is it a fragile construction, but its condition is precarious—its fate is controlled by natural elements and the person holding the kite's string, who in the case of the Parsley Massacre is Trujillo (Harbawi 46). The motif is first mentioned by Sebastien to Amabelle in his sleep; he murmurs that he wishes to fly a kite, perhaps representing his desire to return to his home in

Haiti (Danticat 67). While his mind is still sound before the massacre, Father Romain teaches children in the village of Alegría how to fly kites, serving as a valued community leader providing hope and encouragement. After witnessing his kite-flying class, Amabelle felt “he had given me what I had come for, a fresh measure of hope” (Danticat 74). Despite the psychological damage he suffers after being tortured by Trujillo’s soldiers, Father Romain is still holding on to a kite when Amabelle visits him later in the novel (Danticat 260). The stationary kite gripped in his hands rather than flying in the air symbolizes how hope lies in the hands of the survivors, issuing a message that they must work to improve the conditions of their people for the future.

Orchids are another prominent symbol in the novel, representing hybridity and peace between members of different groups. Spleth states, “[Orchids] require an unusual echo-system and cannot survive without the presence of a certain parasite. The orchid’s beauty depends therefore on the symbiotic relationship between guest and host” (148). Señora Valencia’s father Papi is proud of his thriving orchid garden, featuring forty-eight species and “including a special hybrid with wide feathery petals” (Danticat 80). Papi’s hybrid orchids symbolize the harmony that once existed and could exist again between Haitians and Dominicans. When baby Rafael dies, Señora Valencia decorates his small coffin with colorful orchids, giving it “a whirl of colors, one seeping into the other, like a sky full of twisted rainbows” (Danticat 92). Just as the paint’s individual colors are blurred into one another, so too are the histories and cultures of both Haitians and Dominicans, making orchids a symbol of the symbiotic relationship they must adopt to move forward peaceably in the future.

Above all, Danticat accomplishes several critical tasks in *The Farming of Bones*. By memorializing the thousands of victims of the Parsley Massacre, she also challenges the genocidal event’s obscurity in historical memory. Felicia Persaud describes the Parsley Massacre

as “the [twentieth] century’s least-remembered [act] of genocide,” warranting remembrance in the arts, humanities, and social sciences so as not to be eclipsed by more widely-recognized genocides (qtd. in Ghosh). Additionally, Danticat cautions readers against racist patriotism that can lead to members of the same community committing acts of violence against each other. Spleth states, “Genocide Studies have long recognized the ineffectiveness of classical social science approaches either in raising awareness about the magnitude of suffering that results from genocide or in creating a climate in which such behavior can be avoided by future generations” (148). Conversely, literature situates readers in the time, place, and cultural moment of interethnic conflict, allowing authors to tell stories that humanize the victims and explore the psychological pitfalls that engender genocide. In celebration of Danticat’s efforts, Harbawi states, “Memorialisation acts as a periapt to ward off the devastating effects of literal/psychic death: invisibility and oblivion,” which *The Farming of Bones* no doubt accomplishes (37).

Danticat’s historical fiction effectively portrays the depth of genocidal tragedy through humanizing characterizations and emotional plot points. For example, when Amabelle accidentally smothers her companion Odette while helping her cross the river, Amabelle suffers another psychological impediment that will haunt her for the rest of her life. The Parsley Massacre leads her to inadvertently commit manslaughter, for which she struggles to forgive herself. Only Odette’s first name is recorded in a priest’s death toll ledger since Amabelle does not know her surname, making her one of many victims who risk anonymity in death. As she sees Odette’s body piled up for a mass burial, Amabelle thinks, “No farewell could be enough” (Danticat 205). The humanity expressed in Amabelle’s guilt and despair over taking another human’s life illustrates the polar opposite of the lack of humanity of the genocide. This poignant moment in *The Farming of Bones* allows readers to dwell on the solemnity of one human ending

another's life, which compounds the disaster of losing thousands of lives during the Parsley Massacre. This humanizing effect has the powerful opportunity to transform how this event in history is perceived and remembered, and reminds readers that the sanctity of human life overpowers the politics of interethnic conflict.

Danticat writes, "Men with names never truly die. It is only the nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air" (Danticat 282). Her writing expresses awareness of the multitude of victims who fell into anonymity, and recognizes this tragedy as a result of genocide. She writes, "There were no graves, no markers. If we tried to dance on graves, we would be dancing on air" (Danticat 270). Through powerful figurative language and poignant symbolism, *The Farming of Bones* imparts cultural consciousness of how racism can escalate into government-sanctioned genocide against entire ethnic groups. By illustrating how linguistic shibboleth identity tests function in genocidal events, Danticat's novel joins the legions of efforts that seek to eradicate racism and prevent interethnic conflicts from escalating into violence.

CHAPTER THREE:

NIGHT, THE HOLOCAUST, AND LEGALLY CLASSIFIED SHIBBOLETHS

“To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”

— Elie Wiesel, *Night*

While physical appearance and linguistic markers can act as external indicators of ethnicity, some minority populations physically resemble the hegemonic group so closely that external indices are imposed to set them apart during intergroup conflict. The treatment of Jews during the Holocaust exemplifies the use of legally classified shibboleths to detect and target victims for genocide. From 1941 to 1945, more than six million Jews, or two-thirds of the European Jewish population, were executed by the Third Reich of Germany, which was systematically facilitated by a number of government statutes and extermination programs. Many Jews were forced to wear yellow badges on their clothing featuring the Star of David—a culturally symbolic shibboleth that clearly labeled them in society and was a key factor in humiliating discriminatory practices (“Jewish Badge,” *U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum*). The use of legally classified shibboleths continued in Nazi concentration camps, including numerical tattoos on prisoners’ forearms and clothing that classified inmates according to complex charts (“Tattoos and Numbers,” *USHHM*). Further, Jews faced cruel “selections” in which SS officers analyzed prisoners to distinguish the strong from the weak, forcing inmates to attempt to “pass” by performing the qualities that Nazis valued (“Killing Centers,” *USHHM*). These government-sanctioned shibboleths systematically dehumanized millions of Jews during the most devastating genocide of the twentieth century.

At the age of fifteen, Elie Wiesel experienced the horrors of the Holocaust firsthand, including each of the shibboleths described. Wiesel’s memoir *Night* vividly illustrates the use of

yellow badges, numerical tattoos, prisoner clothing, and selection processes to legally classify Jews and inmates. *Night* relays Wiesel's eye-witness experiences, making him an authentic and reliable source of Holocaust survivorship. *Night* differs from the works of Danticat and Courtemanche in that Wiesel relays his firsthand survivor testimony through a non-fiction memoir. Wiesel combines themes of memory, suffering, loss of humanity and morality, and the abandonment of hope and faith to create a powerful narrative with a call for remembrance and for future generations to prevent history from being repeated. He has been described as a messenger to mankind for his testimony of the horrors of the Holocaust, and for his activism demanding both remembrance of the victims and the responsibility to prevent anti-Semitism and genocide from afflicting future generations.

Just as Rafael Trujillo incited the Parsley Massacre with his incendiary *antihaitianismo*, Adolf Hitler used his leadership platform to promote antisemitism, which led to the philosophy behind the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question." Randall Bytwerk explains that Nazi propaganda was founded on the argument that Jews were determined to destroy Germans, and that exterminating Jews was "a necessary defensive measure" in "a matter of 'life and death'" (38). The result was a gradual culture shift from apathy to distaste for Jews in Germany. Eventually, Jews were perceived as "subhuman" and stripped of their German citizenship, making them a pariah group on the margins of society. Bytwerk observes that genocide seemed more justified when it was modeled as a government-sanctioned response to a perceived national crisis, stating, "In a war against 'subhumans,' murder became easier" (38). Matthew Gibney notes that citizenship removal is characteristic of only the most authoritarian states, explaining, "The Nazi regime notoriously stripped Jews of citizenship in the 1930s and 1940s, ensuring that

all those sent to concentration camps could not be described as German.... [They] did so only after first making Jews second-class citizens by depriving them of previously-held rights” (29). Bytwerk adds, “[It] was not necessary to persuade the population actively to support genocide.... It was enough if most citizens were willing to accept the idea in the back of their minds” (56). Germans were enough aware of what was happening to Jews that they did not want to know specific details about how it was being carried out; most looked in the other direction rather than resisting the Fuhrer’s eugenics program. These significant historical events were unfolding on a global stage while Wiesel was a child, unaware of what lay before him.

Night details how German Gestapos gradually oppress and degrade Jews in Wiesel’s hometown, first with yellow badges and eventually with cattle cars to concentration camps. Germany progressively redacts Romanian Jews’ civil freedoms throughout the spring of 1944: Jews are forbidden from leaving their homes, owning valuables, and patronizing many places of business or worship (Wiesel 10-11). Two ghettos are created in Sighet, imprisoning the Jewish community and isolating them under German watch. Wiesel notes how his Jewish community is slow to realize the danger of their circumstances, stating, “People thought this was a good thing. We would no longer have to look at all those hostile faces, endure those hate-filled stares. No more fear. No more anguish. We would live among Jews, among brothers” (12). Wiesel’s family and community perceive these edicts as acceptable inconveniences rather than preambles to the danger that lies ahead. As the weeks pass, they even grow accustomed to the oppression. Wiesel recalls, “People’s morale was not so bad: we were beginning to get used to the situation. There were those who even voiced optimism” (20). Like the fable of the frog that allows itself to be boiled to death in a pan as the water gradually heats, Jews in Wiesel’s community idly withstand gradual infringements upon their liberties until the Nazis’ control reaches the point of no return.

The requirement for Jews to wear yellow badges featuring the Star of David One is one of the numerous Nazi statutes imposed, forcing Wiesel and his Jewish community to distinguish themselves as members of a pariah population and creating an unquestionable shibboleth to differentiate Jews from other citizenry. These yellow badges are culturally symbolic shibboleths—legally sanctioned “scarlet letters” that externalize Jewish identity for the purpose of the assailant group to easily detect their targeted victims. Gibney states, “[A nation’s act of] exclusion is the product of long-held ideas of national self-determination or habits of national chauvinism,” adding that removing citizenship from members of pariah groups denies them access to “*privileges, voice, and security*” (32-33). By instituting the use of Star of David badges as shibboleths in civil society, the Nazi state laid the foundation for genocide and established a system for qualifying Jews as targets, first through discrimination and later through systematic murder. According to Dana Greene and James Peacock:

During the Nazi period, secular European Jews found that the Nazi State chose few Jewish religious symbols as labeling devices for all Jews. All were forced to wear the yellow Star of David that made them subject to a variety of victimizations and eventually to the gas chambers. Regardless of religious belief or practice, these symbols identified who was Jewish and subjected them all to a common fate.... The Nazis abstracted these symbols from their original Judaic context and universalized them to apply to all Jews.

They also made these symbols the objects of shame, harassment, and intimidation. (92)

Wiesel’s father is seemingly unalarmed by the new yellow badge mandate, casually stating, “The yellow star? So what? It’s not lethal” (Wiesel 11). Wiesel retrospectively laments, “Poor Father! Of what then did you die?” (11).

As previously discussed, hegemonic groups inflicting genocide often implement government-sanctioned processes to classify other ethnic groups in order to retain their dominance and power. These legal institutions create and rely on shibboleths to function with deadly force. Nazi ideology was principled on anti-Semitic racial theories that were manifested into official legislation known as the Nuremberg Race Laws. According to “Nuremberg Race Laws,” “Jews in Germany were not easy to identify by sight. Many had given up traditional practices and appearances and had integrated into the mainstream of society,” which necessitated measurable benchmarks for distinguishing members of the dominant and pariah groups. With no valid scientific basis to define Jews as a race, Nazi legislators used arbitrary standards of family genealogy and ancestral religious identities to classify individuals as Jews, regardless of their religious or cultural ties (“Nuremberg”). The Nuremberg Race Laws were implemented to codify outsiders from the privileged and protected “Aryan” race, whom Nazis defined as citizens of “German or kindred blood,” presumably of northern European ancestry (“Nuremberg”). These laws are evidence of how shibboleths can be strategically implemented through government-sanctioned institutions, masquerading genocide as an ethical initiative behind a legal façade.

In response to the issue of Jewish identity being difficult or impossible to detect by appearance alone, the Nazi propaganda minister Josef Goebbels suggested the need for a “general distinguishing mark”—a shibboleth—for German Jews in 1938 (“Jewish Badge”). As a result, the yellow Star of David badge inscribed with the word “Jew” became compulsory for all Jews six years of age or older in Germany and annexed territories (“Jewish Badge”). The Nazis’ obsession with classification continued in the concentration camps where they implemented a more complex identification system that used colors to categorize inmates; for example, red indicated a political prisoner and green indicated a criminal, while letters could be added to

indicate the nationality of non-German Jews, such as “P” for Polish prisoners (“Jewish Badge”). Every aspect of the “Final Solution” sought to destroy Jewish identity and reduce inmates to the subhuman creatures Nazis believed them to be. After having numerous shibboleths imposed on them to classify them according to German values, Jews were frequently required to perform and present themselves in favorable ways that would allow them to pass selection tests. The litmus test for passing versus failing was often indecipherable to inmates, yet passing was critical to surviving in the camps. Failure to appease an SS officer’s arbitrary value system could result in being shot, sent to the crematorium, directed to the gas chambers, or used in deadly experiments.

Selection tests first appear in *Night* when the eighty Jews who share Wiesel’s cattle car arrive at Auschwitz. Wiesel and his father are ominously warned by an inmate to lie about their ages: rather than fifteen, Wiesel is instructed to claim he is eighteen, and his fifty-year-old father must profess to be forty (30). When questioned, Wiesel obediently lies to the notorious Dr. Mengele, stating that he is eighteen, in good health, and a farmer rather than a student (31-32). The forgery pays off—Wiesel and his father pass the first selection test and are sent to the barracks rather than the crematorium. Readers, through Wiesel’s perspective, learn that certain attributes—age, sex, virility, demeanor—all act as shibboleths when being tested by SS officers. These scenes in *Night* portray the confusion and disorientation of being an inmate at a Nazi concentration camp, as well as the fear of losing one’s loved ones amidst the death and chaos. Predicting these high-stakes identity tests through Wiesel’s first-person perspective allows readers to empathize with the prisoners’ bewilderment of not knowing which characteristics the Nazis will favor for survival versus those that will condemn inmates to death. One learns what it takes to pass selection through the trial and error of others, which the reader experiences vicariously through Wiesel’s narrative.

In the next selection test, Wiesel and his fellow inmates are instructed to remove all clothing, stripping them of their former identities and completely dehumanizing them. The inmates' heads are shaved and they are forced into prison garb, removing their individuality from their appearances and rendering them a sea of sameness. The Nazis perfected a process for systematically dehumanizing masses of individuals. Wiesel writes, "In a few seconds, we had ceased to be men" (37). The inmates' only ties to their previous lives are their surviving family members and their memories. By removing external evidence of human dignity, an inmate is reduced to "a creature of flesh and bone, a human being with a body and a belly" (39). As SS officers assess the men, the inmates face another selection process. Wiesel wonders, "If vigor was that appreciated, perhaps one should try to appear sturdy?" (35). *Night* poignantly describes Wiesel's attempts to understand the many shibboleths that are being tested during recurring selections by SS officers, leaving him and other inmates to try to perform desirable characteristics so that they may pass, and ultimately, survive.

The inmates' humanity is further abolished when they are forcefully tattooed with numerical identity codes to replace their names and signify their prisoner statuses to SS officers. Due to the practice of removing clothing before murdering prisoners, bodies can only be identified by permanent tattoos on the arms, unless they are burned ("Tattoos and Numbers"). This practice was only implemented at Auschwitz, making Wiesel a critical reservoir for the human impact of this type of shibboleth. After he receives the numbered tattoo on his arm, Wiesel expresses, "I became A-7713. From then on, I had no other name" (42). Sandu Frunzã states, "Reduced to a mere number, Wiesel discovers that only memory can help him reclaim his humanity. The importance of the name has been discussed extensively in Judaism. It is connected to the name of God, and the significance of man created in God's image"

(“Celebrating a Storyteller” 109). Nazis developed multiple series of numbers and codes to decipher the type of prisoner classification, date of internment, and gender (“Tattoos and Numbers”). Like the Star of David badges, the numerical tattoos act as shibboleths identifying and targeting Jewish prisoners of Auschwitz to those seeking to eradicate them.

The tattooed numbers on inmates’ arms work in tandem with the vitality of their physical appearance for the SS officers to pass judgment during selection tests. An inmate who appears morbidly frail and despondent is often labeled as a *Muselmann* and is deemed “good for the crematorium” (Wiesel 70). The night before a scheduled selection, Wiesel worries about the “death or reprieve” verdict, and wonders, “How would [my father] pass selection? He had aged so much...” (70). Wiesel’s barrack leader provides sage advice and encouragement for the inmates preparing for the trial of selection, stating, “I hope you will all pass. But you must try to increase your chances. Before you go into the next room, try to move your limbs, give yourself some color. Don’t walk slowly, run!” (71). Terrified of being judged as a *Muselmann*, Wiesel runs hard when his moment of appraisal comes, afraid to appear “too weak,” “too skinny,” or “good for the ovens” (72). The SS officers’ judgment during selections is decisive, final, and fatal. When Dr. Mengele does not write down an inmate’s number, he passes the shibboleth test and lives another day. However, those who are deemed *Muselmänner* are quickly murdered for their inability to appear strong and healthy under conditions that are designed to destroy the human body. While inmates face enormous pressure to perform physically during selection, their presentation is not always convincing enough to pass the SS officers’ shibboleth tests. The tattoos on their arms remind them of how Nazis do not perceive them to be human beings, just as the yellow badges ostracized them from society before arriving at the camps.

Relatively few Jewish victims of the Holocaust were able to pass shibboleth tests on multiple fronts, yet those who did received unparalleled privilege. For example, one of Wiesel's acquaintances, a young French woman, notably "looked Jewish, though she passed for 'Aryan'" (52). The woman explains to him:

Am I Jewish...? Yes, I am. From an observant family. During the Occupation, I had false papers and passed as Aryan. And that was how I was assigned to a forced labor unit.

When they deported me to Germany, I eluded being sent to a concentration camp. At the depot, nobody knew that I spoke German; it would have aroused suspicion. (54)

The French woman possesses the privilege of passing selection on multiple fronts. First, she benefits from physical characteristics that the assailant group determines to be acceptable. Second, she employs forged documentation to pass the legal system instigated by the Third Reich to detect Jews and other "undesirable" groups. Third, she is able to conceal her speech patterns to avoid raising suspicion about her Jewish identity. McNamara states, "Accent and dialect shift, and language shift in immigrant contexts, can be understood in part as an attempt to shed the distinguishing features of otherness in the watchful world of Shibboleth consciousness" (355). By satisfactorily performing the characteristics of non-Jewish identity in the eyes of the Nazis, the French woman represents the volatility of shibboleth tests. Despite being inherently difficult to defeat, shibboleth tests provide an opportunity for few privileged participants to pass undetected. Wiesel recalls immediately before the camp's liberation, "[T]he confusion was great—countless Jews had been passing as non-Jews" (114). As the Third Reich became destabilized by Allied forces, so too did the effectiveness of their shibboleth tests—more Jews passing detection represented the impending conclusion of Nazi Germany's tyranny.

Night follows Wiesel's physical and spiritual transformations in the wake of the traumatic experiences he endures during the Holocaust. His memories effectively illustrate the human cost of genocide and the danger of shibboleth identity tests when employed by dominant groups excluding and exterminating minority groups. Frunză states, "By analyzing *Night*...we discover a picture in which, in the conditions of the death camps, humans enter a process of full dehumanization" ("Ethics, Memory, and Religion" 97). Wiesel's innocence is lost quickly when he and his family arrive at Auschwitz. After brutal treatment by the Gestapo and Hungarian police during the train ride, the group finally realizes the severity of their circumstances. Wiesel evokes this powerful moment of realization through metaphor as he writes, "The beloved objects that we had carried with us from place to place were now left behind in the wagon and, with them, finally, our illusions" (29). The material necessities they packed so carefully for the unknown journey symbolize the normalcy that they left behind in Sighet, and, by extension, their former selves. In Auschwitz and Buchenwald, families are dismembered, humanity is defiled, and each person's morality is challenged in unimaginable ways, resulting in permanently transformed identities for the precious few who survive.

Wiesel's relationship with faith and God is challenged by the lack of humanity and morality he witnesses during his internment at the concentration camps. Wiesel states, "The student of Talmud, the child I was, had been consumed by the flames. All that was left was a shape that resembled me" (37). As all signs of civility, mercy, and humanity dissipate from his reality, Wiesel attempts to make sense of the suffering around him in the camp without God. Colin Davis observes, "The central tension of [*Night*] derives from its carefully ordered account of the breakdown of order.... The narrator tries to understand, but his story does not make sense" (294). Wiesel is deeply struck by the death of a young "angel-faced" boy who, being too

lightweight to have his neck broken by hanging, suffocates at the rope for more than half an hour while fellow prisoners are forced to watch. A man cries, “For God’s sake, where is God?” to which Wiesel replies, “This is where—hanging here from the gallows” (65). Employing metaphor to describe the trauma, as well as his alienation from God, Wiesel writes, “That night, the soup tasted of corpses” (65). Wiesel’s identity transformation enters a stage of rebellion against God. He states, “I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man... I no longer accepted God’s silence” (68-69).

Wiesel’s devolving hope and faith in God illustrates how many Jews faced the trial of spiritual morality in addition to the selection tests. The most pivotal challenge Wiesel faces is retaining his own humanity through his relationship with his father, his only known surviving family member. The barbaric treatment in the concentration camps engenders a survivalist mentality in the inmates, often pitting loved ones against one another in the fight for survival. A fellow inmate advises Wiesel, “In this place, it is every man for himself, and you cannot think of others. Not even your father. In this place, there is no such thing as father, brother, friend. Each of us lives and dies alone” (110). In times of extreme depravation, Wiesel succumbs to this belief, and by extension, complies with the Nazi mentality that the weak must be discarded. As Davis states, “The narrator’s sense of devastation when looking back on his father’s death is explained by the guilty knowledge that he has consented to it and even desired it, as he comes to realize that [caring for] his father...actually diminishes his own chances of survival” (293).

Wiesel is terrified of succumbing to the desire to abandon or harm his own father—a tragedy that happens to a fellow inmate named Rabbi Eliahu, whose son leaves him behind as he weakens during a death march between camps (91). Wiesel is further mortified when he

witnesses a son kill his own father over a piece of bread, representing the ultimate degradation of humanity due to the Nazis' pressures of survival (102). Preserving the sanctity of the father-son relationship becomes the paramount litmus test for preserving one's humanity in Wiesel's endurance of the concentration camps. One of Wiesel's greatest morality tests occurs when he and his father are separated during a death march in the freezing snow: Wiesel thinks, "If only I didn't find him! If only I were relieved of this responsibility, I could use all my strength to fight for my own survival, to take care of only myself...Instantly, I felt ashamed" (106). When they are reunited, Wiesel feels a pang of resentment for the burden of care demanded by his beloved father's existence—an involuntary reaction to his circumstances that fuels more shame and inner turmoil. Wiesel assesses himself: "Just like Rabbi Eliahu's son, I had not passed the test" (107).

Wiesel's relationship with his father is his only connection to his previous life, and by extension, his humanity. Frunză states, "His father is his strongest tie to his lost past, the person who animates his desire to live and gives him strength to do so. In *Night*, the ethical order and all human situations are filtered through his powerful relationship with his father" ("Ethics" 98). Frunză observes that the pivotal switch from familial protection to self-preservation creates tragedy for both father and son, transforming the individuals through their own helplessness and suffering:

Eliezer becomes a representative for the many anonymous people who lack the power to react, to carry out their desire to help others. The character struggles with the competing interests of self-preservation and conscience, of accepting the dehumanization or obeying his father. Inside Eliezer faces a super-human battle between two desires: the desire to keep his humanity and the desire to survive. ("Ethics" 98)

When Wiesel secretly wishes to be rid of the burden of his father's care, he is forced to recognize his inadvertent assent to Nazism through the belief that strength validates human life (Davis 293). Davis states, "One of the greatest cruelties of the concentration camps was in the way they forced the prisoners to become complicit with their prosecutors by accepting their values; in the struggle for survival the weak must be abandoned" (293). While *Night* illustrates the pain and guilt Wiesel experienced over his father's death, the work actively memorializes his father's life while demonstrating the dehumanizing byproducts of genocide that can often reduce family members and allies to competitors in the fight for survival.

While *Night* accomplishes much in the realm of Holocaust and genocide literature, perhaps its greatest achievement is demonstrating the power of memory. Through his craft of the survivor narrative, as well as his use of symbolism, imagery, and metaphor, Wiesel retaliates against Nazi Germany's attempts to not only exterminate Jews, but to remove all evidence of their existence from history and culture. In his preface to the new translation of *Night*, he states, "It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women, and children, but also against Jewish religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, therefore Jewish memory" (viii). Wiesel's memoir is a powerful assertion that Jewish memory lives on and cannot be eradicated. He proclaims, "Never shall I forget that night.... Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.... Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.... Never" (Wiesel 34).

In his preface, Wiesel describes himself as "a witness who believes he has a moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory" (viii). He states:

For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead *and* for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time. (xv)

Night is a contribution to all humanity, illustrating how ordinary, well-meaning citizens can inadvertently support genocidal atrocities through ambivalence toward leaders and policies that perpetuate racism. Wiesel's memoir advocates for the sanctity of human life and the need for acceptance among coexisting groups. Despite being subjected to countless shibboleth tests employing yellow badges, tattooed numbers, prison garb, and physical assessments called selections, Wiesel reclaims his humanity through the endurance of memory. *Night* commands future generations to repudiate ethnocentrism and anti-Semitism, and implores mankind to prevent genocide from occurring again.

CHAPTER FOUR:

A SUNDAY AT THE POOL IN KIGALI, THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE, AND PHENOTYPICAL SHIBBOLETHS

“...life hung on a word, a whim, a desire, a nose too fine or a leg too long.”

— Gil Courtemanche, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*

With the critical role that ethnic difference plays in many genocidal conflicts, physical traits can act as phenotypical shibboleths to promote racial classifications and discrimination. Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Rwandan Genocide demonstrated the deadly impacts of phenotypical shibboleths and the subsequent government-issued identity cards that were used as legally classified shibboleths, much like the Jews' yellow badges during the Holocaust. The Rwandan Genocide occurred over the course of three months in 1994 between two warring ethnic groups, the Hutus and the Tutsis. This conflict presented a different type of power struggle than either the Parsley Massacre or the Holocaust—rather than a group in power eradicating a marginalized group to *retain* power, the Rwandan Genocide arose from a disenfranchised majority exterminating a privileged minority in order to *gain* political and social power that they had previously been denied. According to Charles André, after European colonizers introduced pseudoscientific classifications to the Rwandan populations and expressed favoritism toward the Tutsis for privileged positions, interethnic conflict between the groups gradually intensified to violence throughout the twentieth century until the culminating tragedies of civil war and genocide (280). It is estimated that between 800,000 and two million Rwandans were killed during this event (André 281).

Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* blends the narrative qualities of *The Farming of Bones* and *Night* to describe the events of the Rwandan Genocide. As an eye-witness

bystander, Courtemanche provides a detailed historical narrative similar to Wiesel's testament; however, since he was not himself a member of a targeted group, his literary work adopts a more global viewpoint than Wiesel's individual survivor testimony. By constructing a semibiographical, yet fictional narrative, Courtemanche adopts the same creative license as Danticat to develop humanized characters who convey the atrocity of the genocide through impactful literary techniques. In his preface, Courtemanche states:

This novel is fiction. But it is also a chronicle and eye-witness report. The characters all existed in reality, and in almost every case I have used their real names. The novelist has given them lives, acts and words that summarize or symbolize what the journalist observed while in their company. If I have taken the liberty of inventing a little, I have done so the better to convey the human quality of the murdered men and women. Those who planned and carried out the genocide are identified in this book by their true names. Some readers may attribute certain scenes of violence and cruelty to an overactive imagination. They will be sadly mistaken.

Robert Eaglestone observes that Courtemanche combines his complementary professions as a journalist and novelist to accurately express the horrors of the Rwandan Genocide while eliciting empathy for the countless victims through creative narrative (78). *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* follows a male protagonist named Bernard Valcourt who is characterized after Courtemanche himself. As a journalist and documentary filmmaker, Valcourt journeys to Rwanda to set up a television station. When his efforts fall short of success, he remains in Rwanda as a Canadian expatriate bystander as the civil war breaks out. Eaglestone describes Courtemanche's novel as a form of "engaged literature that [seeks] to influence, explain, and educate," giving the narrative "wider engagement with the political and global issues" (84).

The broader, global perspective of Courtemanche's novel addresses European colonial influences on ethnic perceptions in Rwanda, which laid the foundation for phenotypical shibboleths that sparked civil war and genocide. According to André, during European colonization in the nineteenth century, the "myth of ancient Ethiopian ancestry and racial superiority of the Tutsis" was born (278). One British explorer described the Hutus as a "primitive race" distinguished by "the true curly-headed, flab-nosed, pouched-mouthed Negro," compared to the Tutsis whom he judged as "far superior" and "descended from the best blood of Abyssinia" (André 278). Nikuze states, "These definitions of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa were calculated to ridicule and dehumanize some individuals and praise others" (318). He adds, "These stereotypes were intended to divide and cause hatred, jealousy, and animosity between the populations" (Nikuze 319). These early pseudoscientific characterizations of ethnicity as visible, measurable phenotypical traits created entrenched division between the coexisting peoples of Rwanda and provoked discrimination against the Hutus. André states, "Before the arrival of the Belgians, Tutsi and Hutu people did not see each other as different races, but both sides soon incorporated the racial question in their discourse and justification of violence" (281). During this period, European colonists and missionaries defined Tutsis as a non-African race with Caucasian ethnic origins, characterizing them as outsiders in Rwanda (Nikuze 317). While European colonization is not solely responsible for the Rwandan Genocide, its catalytic role in straining intergroup relations cannot be overstated.

During Belgian occupation, scientists developed a specific classification system of Rwandan ethnic groups that adhered to the pseudoscience of phrenology, which is defined as "the study of the conformation of the skull based on the belief that it is indicative of mental faculties and character" ("Phrenology"). By defining "stereotypical anatomic-anthropological

features,” craniofacial and body measurements were used as litmus tests for defining ethnic group membership and classifying the entire Rwandan population as either Tutsi, Hutu, Twa, or Naturalized citizens (André 278). As a result, Tutsis were favored by European colonizers due to the perception that their qualities of elongated features, eye and skin color, and narrow noses resembled white European physical features (André 278). The fact that this classification system was not formally abolished until 1997 suggests that the belief that racial characteristics can be physically measured and classified has not quite yet become an outdated concept (André 278). Michael Keren maintains, “European racism has not been diminished with African independence or with globalization” (33). Phrenology’s pseudoscientific beliefs support the concept that the externally represented physical traits expressed by a person’s genotype, or phenotypical traits, can act as a shibboleth for defining ethnic group membership during intergroup conflicts (“Phenotype”).

To formalize the ethnic identities ascribed by the Belgian classification system, Rwandans were issued racial identity cards starting in 1933 that listed their ethnic groups, as well as other information such as their professions, spouses’ names, and their children’s names (André 278-279). These identity cards became so ubiquitous that they were used to assess each person’s value and status in society, creating a shibboleth marker that was assessed within dominant cultural practices. Nikuze states, “In Rwanda, identity cards served as an ethnic recording system and these universally assigned cards, which individuals were obligated to carry at all times, forced all Rwandans to publicly declare their ethnic groups” (319). Further, Nikuze notes, “The identity card was the Rwandese version of the Star of David,” emphasizing its role as a segregation tool and an identifying marker for government officials to restrict freedoms for Tutsis and ostracize them as a pariah population (319). These legally classified shibboleths

concretely defined social status for Rwandans based on the arbitrary racial classification system. After the identity cards were issued, Tutsis comprised about fifteen percent of the Rwandan population, and Hutus accounted for the majority (Courtemanche 16). The ethnic phenotypical traits and the official identity cards worked in tandem as shibboleths for various identity tests, ranging from discrimination in administrative positions to determining the victims of genocide.

Despite the polarizing classification system, ethnic group identification was complicated by intermarriages and children born to parents from different racial classes. *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* develops multiple characters whose exist in a liminal space of ethnic identity. For example, Courtemanche describes a non-binary Rwandan journalist, stating, “Léo is a caricature of all this: Hutu father, Tutsi mother. Tutsi body, Hutu heart.... Country talk, clothes of a fashionable Parisian. Skin of a Black, ambitions of a White” (10). Additionally, Valcourt’s lover Gentille embodies the arbitrariness of the classification system through the dissonance between her ethnic background and her phenotypical traits. While her identity card points to a Hutu ethnic heritage, her physical appearance forbids her from passing as a Hutu due to Gentille having stereotypical Tutsi traits. Although he considers himself an “enlightened humanist” who does not believe in the phrenological classifications, Valcourt is forced to admit, “If an anthropologist needed a photograph to illustrate the archetype of the Tutsi woman, he would have shown him Gentille’s” (32-33). However, “Gentille really was a Hutu according to her identity card. But he still didn’t believe her” (Courtemanche 32). Valcourt, like other Rwandans who encounter Gentille, assumes she has obtained forged papers through surreptitious means and is attempting to present herself as a Hutu to protect herself from violence against Tutsis (Courtemanche 33). Gentille represents a complicated conundrum of passing: the identities she present conflict with one another, making it difficult or impossible to pass as a member of either ethnic group.

Courtemanche explains Gentile's incongruent ethnic identity by going back in time to trace her family's genetic history. Generations earlier, Gentile's great-great-grandfather Kawa is presented with a book by a respected Belgian doctor whose observations transform his perception of Hutu identity. The Belgian claims:

The Hutu, a poor farmer, is short and squat and has the nose characteristic of the negroid race. He is good natured by naïve, coarse and unintelligent. The Hutu is deceitful and lazy, and quick to take offence. He is a typical Negro. The Tutsi, a nomadic cattle grazier, is tall and slender. His skin is light brown on account of his northern origins. He is intelligent and skillful at trade. He has a sparkling wit and a pleasant disposition.

(Courtemanche 23)

Kawa and his family members all possess Hutu identity cards, yet he fears that these "scarlet letters" will prevent them from attending good schools or achieving professional success in life (Courtemanche 27). A mystic advises Kawa, "Your children and the children of your children, as long as they live in the land of the hills, must change their skins like snakes and their colour like chameleons.... They will be what they are not, otherwise they will suffer from being what they are" (Courtemanche 27). Kawa becomes determined to furtively change his family's ethnic classification from Hutu to Tutsi by altering their official identity cards and manipulating the gene pools of his descendants.

Intent on helping his children become prosperous, Kawa trades his wealth in exchange for Tutsi sons- and daughters-in-law for his children to marry as a means of infusing certain physical traits into his family's genetic pool. Courtemanche writes, "He wanted them slimmer and taller than average, as long and sinuous as snakes, hoping that the Tutsi blood would kill the Hutu blood" (27). As subsequent generations are cultivated to express phenotypical Tutsi traits,

members of Kawa's family continue to be plagued by identity cards marking them as Hutus. Kawa's attempt to bribe their burgomaster into issuing "new identity papers transforming Kawa's Hutus into Tutsis" turns out to be a fruitless endeavor (Courtemanche 28). However, the gradual progression of descendants presenting more Tutsi-like phenotypical traits serves them in the civil sphere where appearance is valued more than ethnic identity cards. Unfortunately, by the time Gentille is born, cultural values have shifted dramatically—rather than granting disproportionate privileges to Tutsis, Hutus are now resentful of Tutsi elitism and discriminate against them violently. In a political environment unforeseen by her ancestors, Gentille now clings to her Hutu identity card as her only form of protection from Hutu violence against Tutsis. Despite the identity card acting as a Hutu shibboleth "password" for Rwandan identity tests, Gentille's archetypal features condemn her suffer the fate of others matching the Tutsi qualities of the colonial classification system.

The shibboleths used to target victims during the Rwandan Genocide illustrate the critical function of dehumanization within genocidal conflicts. Nikuze states, "Dehumanization denies persons individual identities and is a necessary precursor to genocide as it renders pity for the 'other' impossible and positions the extermination of such others as a rational action" (319). The prevalence of referring to Tutsis as *inyenzi*, or "cockroaches," reduced men, women, and children to a population of harmful pests to be exterminated, rather than civilians who are included in the hegemonic culture (Nikuze 319). Propaganda funneled through print media such as *Kangura*, radio such as *Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM), and Hutu civilian and political hate groups promoted violence against Tutsis as a means to restore Hutu power (Nikuze 319). Militant Hutu groups, known as *interahamwes*, publicized "The Hutu Ten Commandments," which acted as incendiary propaganda instructing Hutus to ostracize Tutsis

and “stand united, in solidarity” and “stand firm and vigilant against their common enemy: the Tutsi,” calling any Hutu in opposition a traitor of the cause (“The Hutu Ten Commandments,” *Kangura*). In *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, militiamen describe the mass killings as “cleansing the capital,” demonstrating the extent of Tutsi dehumanization and how deeply this pariah population was hated by the Hutus (Courtemanche 213).

Courtemanche illustrates how propaganda dangerously fuels interethnic conflict, stating, “Propaganda is as powerful as heroin; it surreptitiously dissolves all capacity to think” (253). For example, Valcourt’s friend Cyprien states, “Hate comes to you with birth. They teach it to you in the cradles they rock you to sleep in. At school, in the street, at the bar, at the stadium, the Hutus have heard and learned only one lesson—the Tutsi is an insect that has to be stamped out” (Courtemanche 90). Cyprien warns Valcourt and Gentille when the government’s militant groups begin organizing, distributing machetes and machine guns to neighborhoods, and preparing lists of targets, including the names of government-labeled Tutsis and Hutu members of opposition parties (Courtemanche 84). Courtemanche states, “[N]ever, in their worst excesses of hatred, had they ever imagined that anyone could kill the way one hoes a garden to get rid of weeds. The hoeing, the work, had begun” (86). Courtemanche illustrates how commonplace hate speech and anti-Tutsi propaganda is in Rwanda during the interethnic civil war by quoting a radio program that declares, “The work has only begun. This time we mustn’t stop before it’s finished.... We must eradicate the enemy.... This is Radio Mille-Collines, free radio-television, the voice of freedom and democracy” (212). The work to be carried out includes setting up roadblocks to identify and kill Tutsis, systematically attacking neighborhoods and communities with named Tutsis, and replacing Tutsis in positions of power with Hutus after effectively eradicating the Tutsi ethnic group (Courtemanche 163).

In order for the Rwandan Genocide to be carried out by Hutus against Tutsis, identity tests were implemented to scrutinize the shibboleths performed and presented by Rwandan citizens as a part of their daily lives. Like Haitians being forced to pronounce *perejil*, Rwandans were stopped at roadblocks throughout the country and forced to validate their ethnic identities to *interahamwes*. Nikuze states, “At the roadblocks, identity cards made it easy for the killers to know who was a Tutsi or Hutu. An identity card with the word Tutsi was like a death certificate. To facilitate the work of the killers, lists and names of the victims had been drawn beforehand” (321). *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* describes the Hutu militiamen “throwing up roadblocks and checking the identity of anyone passing” and “roaming the streets with papers, filling them with marks after asking whether the houses were Tutsi or Hutu” (Courtemanche 83). Additionally, Nikuze confirms, “Since the government had already established the names and addresses of nearly all Tutsi living in Rwanda, the killers were able to go door to door and slaughter the Tutsi” (324). With an ad hoc census of the Tutsi populations in each area in hand, the killing began with government-directed precision. According to Courtemanche, “they never mistook their targets” (83).

Neighbors, friends, and family members could not always be trusted allies during the Rwandan Genocide. Nikuze states, “During the genocide, Tutsi women married to Hutu were also killed. Killers argued that they would produce Tutsi children, regardless of the ethnic group of their husbands. Some of these women were even killed by their own Hutu husbands” (321). Courtemanche illustrates the barbarity of family members turning on one another through Gentille’s uncle Georges, a man who was formerly labeled a Tutsi and becomes the head of a commune of *interahamwes*, only to kill his own Tutsi niece, Alice (Courtemanche 190). Valcourt narrates, “[Georges] bought a Hutu identity card twenty years ago and eats pig-meat and

spaghetti every day so as not to be thin like a Tutsi” (Courtemanche 190). Georges exemplifies the method of passing as an identity test during the Rwandan Genocide: by obtaining a falsified identity card and manipulating his body to obscure any perceived phenotypical Tutsi traits, Georges is able to embody a new identity and pass as a Hutu during the conflict. His forgery also illustrates the arbitrariness of the connection between one’s physical appearance, official identity cards, and their ethnic background or heritage in this context. Courtemanche further develops the concept of choice for performing and presenting one’s identity as a means of passing through Georges’ sister Simone, who “refuses to become a Hutu” despite the danger that looms for Tutsis (Courtemanche 191). Her perceived agency of choice suggests that the Rwandans’ ethnic identities are mutable for those whose appearances exist in the liminal space between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic classifications, allowing them flexibility to determine how they wish to present their ethnic identities.

As the Rwandan Genocide progresses in *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, the importance of phenotypical Tutsi traits appear to outweigh the shibboleth of holding a Hutu identity card. Colonel Athanase, a member of the High Command, is quoted as commanding Hutu soldiers, “And don’t trust identity papers, use your heads.... If they’re tall, if they’re thin, if they’re pale, they’re Tutsis, cockroaches we must wipe off the face of the earth” (Courtemanche 205). Simply looking like a Tutsi could be perceived as a deadly violation to the *interahamwe*. Courtemanche makes this point clear by emphasizing that many soldiers who examined identity cards could not read, forcing them to visually rely on stereotypical phenotypical shibboleths to detect Tutsis (208). Further, Courtemanche eloquently describes, “Increasingly, in Kigali and even more in the countryside, life hung on a word, a whim, a desire, a nose too fine or a leg too long” (33). Astonishingly, the Hutu militia becomes even more lackadaisical with their identity tests due to

the high number of victims lying in hospitals and in the streets—Courtemanche writes, “Their method of selection showed incontrovertible logic: someone with a machete wound could only be a rebel and was finished off” (219). The phenotypical shibboleths of a stereotypical Hutu or Tutsi appearance often dictated an individual’s fate when placed in the hands of the *interahamwe*, particularly during roadblock identity tests and systematic attacks on pre-identified Tutsi homes and neighborhoods.

Despite the emphasis on using identity cards as shibboleths for passing roadblock identity tests, having a Hutu identity card like Gentille was often insufficient on its own for a person to pass if their phenotypical Tutsi traits trumped the identity cards as more important shibboleths. In social and business interactions, Gentille is often called a “dirty Tutsi” and an *inkotanyi* based on her stereotypical Tutsi characteristics, forcing her to bear visible phenotypical shibboleths at all times (Courtemanche 5). To combat public misperceptions, she declares, “I’m a real Hutu. I’ve got papers to prove it. I’m afraid of being taken for an *inkotanyi*” (31). However, her friend Cyprien warns Gentille, “You’ve got a Hutu card because you bought it or you slept with an official, but at a roadblock, when you’re intercepted by a gang of little Hutus as black as night, they’re not going to look at your card” (Courtemanche 89). Cyprien’s premonition becomes reality when Gentille and Valcourt are stopped at a military roadblock and are forced to show their documentation. Upon reviewing Gentille’s seemingly discordant identity card, a soldier proclaims, “False papers, false papers! Whores, just whores seducing even our friends. Go, go, but that one, we’ll get her when you’re [Valcourt] not there to protect her” (Courtemanche 209). Valcourt’s privileged position as a white male Canadian expatriate with a press pass is the only shield that can temporarily protect Gentille from Hutu violence against her for her archetypal Tutsi phenotypical shibboleths.

Gentille's fate as an archetypal characterization of victims of genocide is finally sealed when she and Valcourt are separated by the *interahamwe* toward the novel's conclusion. Despite the terrorizations happening around them, the couple attempt to build a family through a clandestine wedding ceremony, and by adopting the only surviving child of their deceased friends, whom they name Émérita after another friend who is slain during the genocide. As the three of them attempt to flee to Nairobi, they are stopped at a final roadblock to have their identity papers checked. In a few moments, their lives are destroyed—even Valcourt's privileged status cannot save the woman and child he loves:

[The soldiers] were only interested in Gentille, who explained that she was Valcourt's wife. Five soldiers surrounded her, passing her papers from one to another. The more she protested, the more they laughed. False papers. Her face, her legs told them she was a Tutsi. False marriage. No one had signed marriage papers. Émérita, whom Gentille was holding by the hand, was howling. Oh yes, she was their daughter, but by adoption. The soldiers laughed harder still. (Courtemanche 229)

As Gentille and Émérita are taken hostage by the *interahamwe*, Courtemanche's novel portrays the heartbreaking loss that is familiar to the genre of genocide literature. Just as Amabelle loses her fiancé and Wiesel loses his family, the protagonist Valcourt suffers the loss of his loved ones. Keren states, "We are led into the genocide very slowly, and with every step it becomes clearer how helpless she [Gentille] is and how useless Valcourt becomes" (29). Valcourt's helplessness to save lives acts as a metaphorical extension of Courtemanche's frustration with the inability of developed nations to deter the Rwandan Genocide.

A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali is a valuable work of genocide literature for its analysis of the role of bystanders, both on an individual scale and a broader political scale for developed

nations. Courtemanche is critical of the inefficacy of international aid, particularly by his own country Canada and other Western nations. He also scorns the lack of media coverage in developed nations as failing to elicit responses of outrage to the atrocities committed during the Rwandan Genocide. He writes, “It takes ten thousand dead Africans to furrow the brow of even one left-leaning White. Even ten thousand’s not enough” (111). Courtemanche describes Canada as a “naturally slothful and uncourageous” country, which is symbolically manifested in Valcourt’s meek and helpless character (141). Further, he states, “...all the killers in [Rwanda] loved Canada, such a worthy country in its silence, its refusal to take sides” (171). Courtemanche addresses how African issues often feel far removed to developed nations, fostering apathy that prevents effective resources from reaching African nations when they face historical tragedy.

According to Keren, Courtemanche’s novel portrays “real people killing other real people” rather than faceless villains committing atrocities far away in the “heart of darkness,” to allegorize Joseph Conrad’s 1902 novella (24). Intentionally written for Western audiences, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* effectively humanizes the victims of the Rwandan Genocide in ways that media coverage did not in the twentieth century. Keren states, “By telling the Rwandan story from Valcourt’s angle, Courtemanche puts a mirror to his own face—and to ours” (26). Keren adds that the novel reorients the massive Rwandan death toll from a local matter to a global issue, transforming the Rwandan Genocide into “an integral part of our political world” (29). Western readers are able to empathize with African victims who exhibit relatable human qualities and experiences. By countering the myth that Africa is a remote continent devoid of humanity, Courtemanche’s novel makes the Rwandan Genocide real and tangible for readers who cannot imagine such horrors happening in their own nations.

While Courtemanche is careful not to solely blame one particular group of people for the Rwandan Genocide, his narrative illustrates how well-meaning individuals are inevitably the perpetrators of genocide. To warn readers who may consider themselves too rational to fall into the ploy of genocide, a priest named Father Louis acts as a mouthpiece for connecting the Rwandan Genocide to the Holocaust:

Those killers weren't out of their minds. There were a few neurotics, like Hitler, but without reasonable people, without hundreds of thousands of believers, good, reasonable Christians, none of these sores of humanity would have worsened to the point they did. People who butcher human beings by spearing and slashing with bayonets are all upright, respectable folk. And when circumstances don't lead to war they close their eyes to injustice—no, they organize injustice. And when they don't organize it, they tolerate it, encourage it, abet and finance it. (Courtemanche 161)

Once the killing has ceased, Valcourt meditates that the Rwandan Genocide cannot be blamed on a single participant: the Hutu assailants followed instructions from the government; the government acted on of cultural perceptions of ethnic identities; those cultural perceptions were shaped by “Belgian priests who sowed the seeds of a kind of tropical Nazism”; and “the United Nations stood by and let negroes kill other negroes” (Courtemanche 252). However, Courtemanche critically observes that developed nations established the root issue of phrenology and the ethnic classification system, and developed nations also failed to intervene despite being aware of the magnitude of violence unfolding in Rwanda. Like the other works discussed previously, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* acts as a cautionary tale to humanity about the slippery slope of ethnocentrism and nationalism, and how otherwise sensible individuals can become complicit in the tragedy of genocide if they do not actively work against its root causes.

Courtemanche employs several symbols in the novel to emphasize the nature of humanity when interethnic conflict occurs. For example, the titular pool at the Hôtel des Mille-Collines is a political setting at the beginning of the novel, acting as a congregation site for all socioeconomic classes ranging from wealthy international experts and aid workers to corrupt politicians and impoverished prostitutes (Courtemanche 1). Jackdaws, ravens, and buzzards encircle the pool, foreshadowing that death and violence will soon descend upon Rwanda (Courtemanche 2). By the end of the novel, refugees have drunk all the water from the hotel's pool, eaten the birds, and used the hotel's furniture for firewood to stay alive, symbolizing the degradation of humanity that occurs during genocidal events (Courtemanche 236). The only thing left unscathed is a fig tree "whose luxuriant beauty stood like a foil for the idiocy of men" (Courtemanche 236). When Gentile dies, her body is buried under the fig tree that shades the hotel swimming pool, connecting her character's innocent archetype to the fig tree's symbolism of hope and resilience against the atrocities committed during the Rwandan Genocide.

Despite Valcourt's inability to save Gentile or effect meaningful change in Kigali, he is committed to using his journalist platform to record his eyewitness testimony for Western audiences to understand what happened in Rwanda. Keren notes that despite Valcourt's futile attempts to challenge corrupt officials and demand justice, "Valcourt nevertheless believes that he must continue recording the events so they are not forgotten. Courtemanche is aware that this minimalist task is less than heroic and that its success cannot be assured" (38). Regardless, Courtemanche writes, "He would write for those willing to read, speak to those willing to lend an ear, even half an ear, but that was all" (117). This mirrors Courtemanche's own motivation to humanize Rwandan victims and consecrate their stories in the form of historical fiction. In his dedication, Courtemanche names his Rwandan friends who were "swept away in the maelstrom,"

including Gentile and other individuals who appear in the novel, stating, “I have tried to speak for you...I hope I have not failed you” (“Dedication”). Just as *The Farming of Bones* centered on Amabelle preserving the memory of her fiancé Sebastien, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* memorializes countless victims by humanizing Valcourt’s young wife. By personifying Gentile and other victims of the Rwandan Genocide, Courtemanche facilitates empathy for the horrors of these crimes against humanity to a greater degree than statistics or newsreels alone can convey. He writes, “[Gentile’s] disappearance would mean that her death was just one of a hundred thousand other deaths, like a drop of water in a sea of nameless and faceless tragedies.... Valcourt knew he would not be able to live unless he could write the story of her death” (235). Through the achievement of Courtemanche’s novel, readers can appreciate how deeply entrenched cultural perceptions about ethnic identities can result in genocide, particularly through the use of phenotypical and legally-classified shibboleths.

CONCLUSION:

MODERN RELEVANCE AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SHIBBOLETHS

“The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”

— Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”

While genocide can feel alien and far removed from our realities, it is sadly not an artifact of ancient history. The genocides discussed in this thesis deeply impacted the twenty-first century and continue to have modern implications. They occurred so recently that some survivors are still alive today. International relations, politics, economies, cultures, and livelihoods have all been shaped by these powerful moments in history, and yet we risk losing the lessons learned from them if we do not proactively identify and recognize the human elements that can allow genocide to precipitate over time. The interconnectivity of the modern era has the potential to exacerbate interethnic conflicts to an even greater extent than those in the past. Specifically, the Parsley Massacre, Holocaust, and Rwandan Genocide occurred before the technological capacity of the Information Age became widely accessible on a global scale. In the twenty-first century, humans and nations are more interconnected than ever, creating both opportunities and challenges for intercultural communication and understanding.

Research suggests that national and ethnic differences are accounting for an increasingly greater number of violent conflicts globally. According to Stewart, “seven out of ten of the poorest countries in the world are undergoing or have recently experienced some sort of civil war” (4). The harm of interethnic violence is clear, particularly for developing nations. Stewart explains, “Today, mobilization along group identity lines has become the single most important source of violent conflict.... Data on conflict show a major increase in the proportion of all conflicts that are labeled as ‘ethnic’: from 15 per cent in 1953 to nearly 60 per cent by 2005” (7). This observation supports Samuel Huntington’s hypothesis that modern conflicts will hinge on

cultural differences between “groups of different civilizations,” rather than independent countries warring over national borders (100). To elucidate the damages that are at stake, Stewart implores:

In addition to the direct injuries and loss of life...violent organized conflict is also a major cause of poverty, often leading to economic regress, with much the highest incidence of such conflict found in the poorest countries in the world. Seeking a way of preventing these conflicts is thus of paramount importance. (3)

In order to prevent genocide, it is critical for modern citizens and nation states to recognize the systemic inequalities that lead to group mobilization and violence so that measures can be implemented to safeguard against such outcomes.

Genocide is an extreme form of interethnic conflict that manifests over time from forms of cultural status inequalities. Arnim Langer and Graham Brown define cultural status inequalities as “perceived or actual differences in the treatment, public recognition or status of different groups’ cultural norms, practices, symbols and customs” (42). By ascribing lower levels of recognition and integration of marginalized groups into the dominant culture, these groups possess fewer rights, privileges, and accesses. While these inequalities do not always lead to violence, they are inevitably the foundational prerequisites for tragic violence such as genocide. Acknowledging the danger of unequal treatment of marginalized populations, particularly in cases of interethnic conflicts, is critical for preventing genocide from culminating. According to Langer and Brown, many nations fall under the seemingly innocuous threat of promoting cultural status inequalities when “the state is associated *primarily although not exclusively* with one cultural group,” and “where one or more particular groups are afforded an explicitly lower status in society but the state does not seek to eradicate the culture altogether” (43).

To avoid cultural status inequalities, Langer and Brown advise state-sanctioned integration of different ethnic groups that is measurably equal to that of other groups, thus diminishing cultural imbalances (44). For example, adopting multiple official languages increases the cultural statuses of the groups that speak each language and improves those individuals' prospects of employment and validation in society (46). Belgium provides a strong example of this neutrality, promoting equal visibility of its citizens with checks and balances for officially recognizing major ethnic groups' varying languages and practices (44). Langer and Brown observe that a nation's formal, informal, and symbolic cultural status inequalities can be categorized by recognition of religious observation, language, and ethnocultural practices (53). Without implementing policies and practices that explicitly integrate and validate members of different ethnic groups, it becomes more likely for cultural status inequalities to arise. As the discussed examples of genocide have demonstrated, these inequalities can over time become fodder for group mobilization and intergroup violence to emerge due to the significant connection between identity and group membership (Langer and Brown 53).

While policies and practices of inclusion for multiple ethnic groups are implemented in many modern countries, they can sometimes act as superficial masks concealing deeper levels of social inequality. The role of shibboleths in identity tests is critical for identifying these inequalities. Like the shibboleths discussed in this thesis, modern shibboleths include signals or passwords that indicate group identity and membership, resulting in either acceptance or rejection by the dominant hegemony. For example, a Sikh wearing a turban, an American Indian consuming peyote, or a Muslim eating a *halal* meal can act as modern shibboleths to ascribe group identities within a dominant culture, which may be acceptable "as long as the inequalities of wealth and power are left unchallenged" (Langer and Brown 45). Identities related to sexual

orientation, gender expression, and physical and mental disabilities have become increasingly visible in the twenty-first century, which prompts a plethora of opportunities for individuals on these spectra to perform their identities through shibboleths within identity tests in society. Claire McKinney states, “Passing denotes when a person assumes a group identity that, if certain information became public knowledge, would otherwise be denied them interpersonally and institutionally” (167). The concept of passing in terms of pariah populations avoiding death and violence in genocidal conflicts assumes that the individual being tested performs characteristics of the assailant group as a means of survival, and by extension denies their true natural identity. Modern shibboleths performed by individuals who identify as having a disability, being transgender, or having non-heteronormative sexual orientations can demonstrate similar motivations in situations where they need to avoid violent retaliation or prejudice for their identities. However, passing in these cases can also carry a positive connotation when individuals actively perform their identities as a means of self-realization and self-determination, rather than out of fear of discrimination.

As previously discussed, the psychological value of identity in relation to one’s acceptance within a group is significant enough that individuals are prepared to fight for it. When group identities are not validated and accepted, or in cases of overt discrimination, oppressed groups can be motivated to assemble and instigate violent conflict, as in the case of the Rwandan Genocide. Conversely, as in the cases of the Holocaust and the Parsley Massacre, dominant hegemonic groups may seek to retain their power and privileges by acting against marginalized groups, thus preventing those groups’ ability to challenge prevailing societal norms. In order to prevent genocidal conflicts, it is essential that the macro level of policies and the micro level of social practices align to embrace and validate coexisting ethnic groups simultaneously.

The works of Danticat, Wiesel, and Courtemanche are important examples of the powerful role of literature in genocide studies. Eyewitness testimonies grant readers personal perspectives on historical events, while fictionalized narratives eloquently humanize victims to transform them from nameless bodies into relatable human beings. Studies of genocide from disciplines such as history and sociology often view death tolls and cultural factors in the aggregate, focusing on massive numbers of victims that are difficult to comprehend. However, viewing genocide through a literary lens allows readers to empathize with victims and view them as human beings with vivid lives much like their own. The process of experiencing such literature can often be self-reflexive, allowing readers to appreciate that genocide is not merely a third world issue, but in fact can emerge in virtually any nation at any point in time.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach from multiple sciences allows us to consider the dangerous commonality of shibboleths in marking identities and group membership, as well as how shibboleths function in pass/fail identity tests in genocidal conflicts. *The Farming of Bones*, *Night*, and *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* memorialize the victims of genocide while advocating for posterity to prevent genocide from ever occurring again. Frunză states, “[Memory] is more than a simple communication from past to future; it is also an ethical way of assuming responsibility for the horrors humankind experienced during the twentieth century” (“Ethics” 95). As the works discussed in this thesis demonstrate, it is critically important for humanity to remember the cultural factors that lead to genocide, as well as to memorialize the countless lives that have already been lost, in order to prevent genocide from assailing future generations.

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