Conglomerate memory and cosmopolitanism

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Abstract
Under what conditions do countries and cultures considered radically different find a basis for allegiance and kinship? What part does memory play in this process? This article responds to these questions in two ways: 1) Through Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt, I propose that when an other appears in empathetic discourses that both honor difference and cite shared human experiences, seemingly irreconcilable people can develop a sense of mutual responsibility and 2) Conglomerate memory, memories that fuse together others through common pains, contributes to such an appearance. To illustrate this point, I turn to Congolese voices as they are articulated in online American discourses; although currently, authors of online texts typically rely on traditional narrative forms that position Central Africa as incommensurate to Western civilizations, the Internet’s worldwide accessibility and intertextual capacities render it a place primed for developing international collectives by connecting memories while maintaining difference.

Keywords: memory; intercultural communication; Levinas; online media; cosmopolitanism

“We cannot be fully human alone. We are made for interdependence.”—Desmond Tutu, God Has a Dream

In the event of disbanding borders and becoming citizens of the world, we pause—mid-pivot—before facing radical alterity. Clenching and rocking, our footing suspended, it occurs to us that there is something terrifying about the ceaseless obligation to the Other, the abiding memory of that responsibility, and the vulnerability necessary for fulfilling it. An old Bantu myth about the Amazimu captures this moment:

She catches sight of the unrecognizable figure of the Amazimu outlined by the light of the moon, and hastens for cover as he moves inward. She plunges forth into the dark, pounds against the earth, crawls across rugged terrain, and puts between them a labyrinthine path—it does not elude him. He latches on like a shadow. There is little left to do when overtaken by the Amazimu. He emerges from the brush and steps into a clearing. She peers closer into his face, one of curious contours and a foreign form, and with the flicker of his expression, the encounter becomes uncanny: the Amazimu, though alien, is familiar. In this intimate space, she discovers that her history has always been entwined with his. She has denied the bond, shut her eyes to it, and dragged her brethren across jagged, rigid...
surfaces in a vain attempt to break from it. And now, the battered body before her begins to turn in fear of her, as if she were distorted, her body wrecked, and her spirit spotted. As if she, too, were the Amazimu.1

Even in an age of globalization wherein borders become less like barriers, as this myth illuminates, we are accustomed to avoiding worlds that seem “incommensurate” with our own.2 In view of this, many scholars, artists, and activists seek a means through which to intervene and disrupt mindsets sown by hierarchal prejudices and carve a space for the Amazimu to appear as kin. As part of that effort, I ask: How can radical others become neighbors? In what ways can language bend relationships and close them into an ethical encounter? To what extent do our current modes of interaction enable a coming closer? Given the powerful scope of virtual communities and an era in which public opinions of different nations and cultures ripen under the electronic glow of Internet news, blogs, and social media, online discourses in particular are useful for this movement. While digital media may be the means for distributing inappropriate or inaccurate representations of others, thereby broadening the gap between alterns, it also provides opportunity for an opposite effect: it has reconciling potential owing to its fairly ubiquitous presence in the world. With the Internet increasingly becoming a primary if not the most pervasive source of information, further analyses of the widely circulated interpretations of others and how those interpretations promote, challenge, or complicate certain power relations are important in light of establishing compassionate transnational collectives.

“Collective” here does not apply Emile Durkheim’s concept of the conscience collective wherein “the totality of beliefs and sentiments [are common] to the average citizens of the same society.”3 Nor does “collective” here refer to an “interplay of identity and alterity” through which an individual negotiates the contingencies of his or her self.4 While the first stance blends otherness into an unviable consistency, the second position presumes that alterity is valuable solely in an egoistic sense: the other is an instrument that serves in defining what does or does not pertain to one’s particular being. As an alternative approach to the critical study of alterity and public memory (particularly transcultural and transnational memory), “collective” within this context embodies a Levinasian ethic.5 Although fundamentally transcendent, Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy encourages political thought that accounts for the other qua other and is devoid of the dilution of difference or the exploitation of it.6 He proposes to “[think] the Other-in-the-Same [l’Autre-dans-le-Meme] without thinking the Other [l’Autre] as an other Same.”7 Being “in-the-Same” for Levinas does not suggest assimilation, but rather that the Other “disturbs or awakens the Same” or “troubles the Same, or inspires the Same” or “the Same desires the Other, or awaits him.” For Levinas, there is unconditional separation in terms of alterity, but there is also a shared obligation to the Other. This omnipresent, gently despotic drive to be for the Other, always heedful of the Other’s absolute otherness, is the response to a primary ethical call: it is the thing that binds us all in collectivity. With an other’s alterity intact, the “collective” thus signifies the unconstrained possibilities for affiliations, assumes a mutual ethical responsibility toward the other, and admits equivalent capacities to fulfill that responsibility.8

In this article, at the intersection of Levinas’ philosophy and Hannah Arendt’s theorization of appearing in the polis, I argue that responsibility for a certain other emerges within an agonistic space; one concentrates on accounting for the other whose touch is most prominent. Because discussions among virtual communities are largely accessible to varied global audiences, realizing this space online is a promising way of bringing others into close proximity and refashioning transnational relationships from being opposed to the other to being for the other. Success in advocating for an affiliation based on this reciprocated regard/obligation depends on memories of the other that are saturated with articulate appeals to empathy. As Johannes Fabian contends, our capacity to account for the other hangs on whether or not there exists shared memory.9 I insist that through empathy, this sharing can exist without collapsing the other into sameness and makes possible cosmopolitan politics. That is to say, a Levinasian ethics made flesh in the political realm challenges the monochromatic universality associated with philosophical conceptions of “cosmopolitanism.”10 It rather corresponds with what Judith Butler
proposes cosmopolitanism should concern itself with: universal commitment to challenging the terms of universality and finding ways to acknowledge those excluded from already existing universalities, “who have not entitlement to occupy the place of the ‘who’, but who nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them.”

To establish these claims, I apply Levinas’ and Arendt’s work to representations of Congolese people in online American discourses. I begin by explaining how the appearance of the radical other occurs in a space of memory-making where people meet competing ethical obligations. The second section clarifies that for the voice of the other to be perceptible, and for the call of the other to surpass those also vying for attention, the other’s appearance must make empathetic appeals; empathy establishes a relationship based on difference and shared humanity. Interweaving histories and experiences is a rhetorically effective way to accomplish this. The third section names this memory-making that unites without wiping away difference as conglomerate memory. I conclude by exploring the possibilities and promise of thinking politically according to a Levinasian ethic, acknowledging an other’s alterity, and moving toward mutual responsibility and care.

THE RADICAL OTHER APPEARS

This section describes how an other appears in public, and proposes that the manner of that appearance influences how we regard and respond to the other. I begin by reviewing Levinas’s explanation of how an ethical call is sensed in social interactions. Then, through Arendt’s interpretation of the polis, I consider how the appearance of the other occurs in a competitive, memory-making space, pinned next to rival calls and obligations. To illustrate the material effects of these dynamics, I analyze how the Congolese appear in online American discourses in such a way that flattens Congolese expression and dulls American-Congolese affiliations. I conclude this section by suggesting that the violence that defines a one-dimensional view of Central Africa is not grounds for establishing Congolese as the United States’ untouchable others; instead, those violent experiences may serve as grounds for shared memory and transnational kinship.

The urge to be-for-the-other is awakened by an encounter with the Other in the world, what Levinas calls the encounter with “the face.” While the face bridges transcendent ethics and social interactions between subjects, it remains somewhat ethereal. The face of the other has affective, mobilizing power, but “shows [itself] only by [its] trace” (p. 346).

Feeling into the expression of the other, coming into being-for-the-other, is interpreted by Levinas as touch, a caress that interrupts being-for-oneself, that overwhelms the body with the presence of the other. The tenderness of that touch, the depth to which it submerges a subject into the service of an other, is contingent upon proximity between others. The “horizon of contact” is not of primary importance here. Being touched by the expression of the other does not require the physical presence of the other; immediacy is intermediated by empathy. Therefore, how one touches and is touched is a matter that concerns what expressions are most affective.

If it is not possible to trace an expression through a body-to-body meeting, the expression of the other can be made in language. When one articulates, one is opened to the other, one uncovers oneself, one abandons the shelter of anonymity to cry out, Here I am! Expression of the other in this way occurs in the movement of voice. “Saying” is thus a form of self-disclosure in the sense that in saying, one appears as other and shares his or her wounded bodily experience. Hannah Arendt draws a similar connection between speaking and appearing in her reading of the polis. Arendt considers the polis an indefinite space, constructed wherever and for whatever there is need or desire; it is a place in which its participants “[can] show who they really [are].” As it is also a place of
“organized remembrance,” the *polis* is where men are remembered as they are seen and as their expressions are experienced:

It assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men.20

As a space of acting—of speaking, of appearing, and of becoming—the *polis* is where memories are made and where a collective comes into being.21 Because events are real “only when others [see] them, [judge] them, [remember] them,” if the face of the other (and by extension, the call of the Other) is ever to be recognized in close proximity to one whom the other calls, the expression must thrive within the throbbing atmosphere of the *polis*.22

Just as Arendt argues that the *polis* is a space for sharing ideas and acting and speaking together, it is also a place “permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was best of all.”23 Memory-making, stamping the infinite responsibility for an other at the forefront of collective political thought, would hence be a cutting critical process. The call of the radical other—foreign to the collective within which one is trying to belong—is thrown into a cluster of obligations and calls; it must, to come closest in proximity to the obliging subject, ring most audibly. As remembering stems from the judgments made amid a rivalry of various experiences and contending histories, the vitality of the call of the other depends on its success in being situated as the voice of the other in most addressable need.

Bearing in mind that the *polis* is both a competitive space and a space where the other’s expression makes possible shared memory and touch, Levinas and Arendt provide a lens through which to gauge the affective intensity of the language used to convey the experience of the radical other. Not only in content but also in form, the way in which the face of the other is traced, and the conditions under which the other appears in discourse, is crucial to assembling a collectivity that honors difference. Along these lines, I turn toward recent American online representations of violence in Central Africa, the region that houses those whom the United States typically regards as untouchable others. A critique of the trends in reporting and depicting human rights abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) opens authors of digital media to new ways of sharing experiences, which inch (memories of) different countries into close proximity with each other. The collective that can form as a result is one wherein those that dwell “take the bread out of [their] own mouths to nourish the hunger of another with [their] own fasting.”24 Such a collective is an alternative to those that make use of the other for constructing more constrained notions of identity and strict limits for affiliations. As the following examples demonstrate, American journalists frequently relate the other in terms of the latter: although they beat forth with good intentions, they take up life in the DRC as an exemplary negation of life in the West. This perspective constantly evoked online reifies the association of barbaric Africa as America’s object of pity rather than a counterpart.

The eastern border of the DR Congo has been swallowed up by rebel warfare for almost two decades. Particularly devastating to the region is the sexual violence that primarily women and girls are subjected to by militia, who consider rape and torture as merely the debris of their political struggle or some who view their brutality as therapeutic.25 Masika Katsuva (2013), a middle-class, formally educated mother of four and the wife of a successful businessman, faced the brunt of Congolese warfare on the early morning of October 29, 1999. After over 20 soldiers ran-sacked the Katsuva house, they dismembered Masika’s husband, forced her to cannibalize him, and raped her.26

Masika’s story is ineffable, its horrors unspeakable, and it is, distressingly enough, an exemplification of what terror Congolese citizens face and the desecration of their basic human dignity. Unsurprisingly, the experience of the Katsuvas and others like it attract a storm of media representations, most of which can be found littered across the digital archives, accessible to the saucer-eyed crowds of Western civilization. Filmmaker Fione Lloyd-Davies portrayed Masika Katsuva’s trauma in a news article which was published on CNN’s website in November 2011. Lloyd-Davies’s report suggests that Masika’s frightening endurance of the vicious rape culture thriving in a
number of military groups is somewhat the standard for Congolese women: “Like so many women survivors, she too was rejected when she and her two teenage daughters were raped by militia men.” Her retelling of the events surrounding Masika’s husband’s death and Masika’s survival is but a small fraction of the prose, sputtered across the screen in a single sentence: “Her husband was murdered in front of her, chopped up and she was forced to eat his private parts.” It would be fair to suggest that however alarming Masika Katsuva’s account is, her experience is one that is commonly, albeit shyly, disclosed in Western media. In the year previous to Lloyd-Davies’s article, for example, in a similar cursory manner, Delphine Minoui (2011) of The Daily Beast published a piece that surveyed abuses endured by rape survivors: “On the road, several women were killed and the others were forced to eat the dead women’s flesh.” These pieces’ broad strokes rehash abductions, gang rape, torture, sometimes cannibalism, and following a victim’s escape, her being shunned by her community while she suffers from an unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease.

More generally, reports on the state of the Congo consistently adhere to illustrations of the inhumane acts of violence, corpses scattered about streets, and themes of “evil” run rampant among “tribes” in an “exotic” land. MotherJones circulated a video online created by animator Mark Fiore (2012) that epitomizes this trend. During the video, the narrator’s daunting, at times quivering, voice describes “too many horrors to mention” in verse. The tightly laced rhyme scheme renders Fiore’s treatment of Western complicity in the Congo eerily similar to a children’s poem; his depiction of the DRC—including piles of African bodies, swarms of flies surrounding sad children in torn clothes, knee deep in muck, with skeletons strewn about at their feet—stands in stark contrast to the well-dressed white man pressing a phone to his ear while leaning back in a desk chair in front of a computer screen.

This coverage of the conflict in Congo indicates that even though journalists are not necessarily inaccurate in their reporting, their mediation of the events parrots traditionally caustic stereotypes about Africans, rendering them the West’s incommensurate others; and, given the breadth of the worldwide web and the opportunity it provides reporters and bloggers for hitching older stories to newer ones through hyperlinks, repetitions of specious frameworks is especially damaging to transnational affiliations. Contrary to such assumptions, the social phenomena regularly believed to be exclusively African may actually be common grounds from which citizens and institutions can construct affiliations that are too often deemed unfeasible. Take cannibalism, which is clearly not something inherent in the cultures of the “extreme other” Africa. Despite reports from missionaries, travelers, and explorers, there is no evidence to suggest that cannibalism was or is a regular cultural practice; if it occurs as it has in the Congo’s recent history, it is regarded as it is regarded in the West: as taboo. Indeed, although tales of the Amazimu exist, they had conventionally depicted white colonists as the beasts from which to run.

I make no suggestion here that journalists’ portrayal of violence in the Congo is erroneous or somehow exaggerated. That said, it is still troubling that the mediated expressions of civilian struggles and retellings of stories such as Masika’s fall into the “conventional, formulaic plot structures we normally use to narrate the past.” Reports of Congolese conflict continue to shape Africans as dangerous and tribal, qualities always pitted against the so-called civility of the Western world. Even in cases wherein journalists spend time in the field, they relay their discoveries in a way that reapplys myths about Africa or in a way that paints what is universally considered wicked as specifically or exceptionally African problems. Ultimately, the expressions of radical others is flattened into pre-established notions of their otherness; transnational affiliations are at best left anemic.

APPEARING WITH AND BEING-FOR-THE-OTHER

The preceding section elaborates on the connection between the appearance of an other and a sense of responsibility for an other. The last part of the first section raises an important question: What form of appearing renders the call to an other sense-able and compelling? In the following section, I discuss how composing transnational memories is productive toward this end. Even though online American discourses typically accentuates the gulf between the West and the DRC, digital media offers opportunities to establish common
histories and shared experiences that position the United States and the DRC as affected partners.

Although globalized discourses may bode well for shrinking spaces between individuals and cultivating intimacies previously truncated by geographical and cultural barriers, it also warrants concern for its tendency to overwhelm publics. The bigness of globalization may anesthetize the effects of a radical other’s touch. Media, however, enables a witnessing that reawakens bodies to the call of an other. The Internet particularly is, as a “mass cultural mechanism,” capable of fostering alliances even in cases of extreme difference. The Internet’s abundance should not be defined according to the quantity of information made available online but according to its movement across many channels of communication and its infiltration into everyday life (digital archives are shared on various virtual sites and are also broadcasted on television or radio news, and even relied upon during deliberations in political arenas). It provides vast grounds for memory-making where there is not only an audience but also innumerable audiences and not just a space in which others can appear but spaces in which others can reappear anew. Online discourses announce and make room for bringing those presumed irreconcilably different within reach, close enough to touch.

Clearly, readers and text users have recognized and utilized the inventive and authorial potential of online discourses. As a new generation of “active readers,” citizens of virtual communities have mastered the art of “[taking] an existing text and [adding] to it...[and] because they write in a networked computer environment the commented-on blog...can link to the active reader’s text, incorporating it into the ongoing discussion.” In other words, the public has already made use of the Internet as an agonistic space—the polis—wherein individual views and histories compete toward the construction of a shared consciousness. This begs the question as to why journalists, in addition to reeducating publics from dominant constructions of history, a cosmopolitan can emerge from such movements and, by giving voice to a national memory blocked from dominant constructions of history, a cosmopolitan within a nation can develop, too.

Transnational memory is an effective means through which to accomplish this. Rather than quarantining events of different countries and experiences of different people—keeping them several clicks and pages away from Home—authors should look for opportunities to combine the wounds of one nation with the troubling memories of more local suffering. Doing so could edge a radical other closer, within the realm of touch, and ultimately make audible the call to the Other. An ethical global cosmopolitan can emerge from such movements and, by giving voice to a national memory blocked from dominant constructions of history, a cosmopolitan within a nation can develop, too.

What I propose here, simply put, is a revolutionary reconceptualization of how online interfaces function in global discourses. Whose experiences are remembered and who is involved in the process of remembrance are crucial questions related to power, and although electronic media has become vastly popular for obtaining and circulating
discourses of memory, these forms of communication are still overwrought by issues related to exclusive forms of unity. Not all who are affected by histories of conflict have equal access to media that form and transmit memories of their experiences. As part of an effort to decolonize memory-making, low-cost, widely distributed online spaces are the most available means through which marginalized voices can participate in archival practices.\textsuperscript{43} The intertextual nature of digital discourses that appear in these spaces—the innumerable combinations of links, references, menus, and page-to-page patterns—make available not only multiple genealogies of history but also multiple constructions of inter- and intra-national affiliations.\textsuperscript{44} That said, excluded voices, once the “contingent limit of universalization” expected to conform to an already-made universal, can find through these discourses a means to challenge conventional interpretations of “cosmopolitan.”\textsuperscript{45} More open-access public spaces have the potential to bring about the cosmopolitan for which Butler advocates: an ideal that remains in question, without dissolving difference through assimilation; an ideal constructed by integrating a vibrant diversity of testimony and memory (and their infinite cross-cultural connections).

Consider for instance that while the Congo currently suffers from occupation by rebel troops who commit horrific crimes, recurrent violations of human rights—equally grotesque—are part of recent American racialist history. What kind of affect would flood American readers at the discovery that the soldiers who attacked Masika and her family are akin to the folk of the early- to mid-20th century American South? That the Amazimu can have white skin, talk with a charming drawl, and sport straw skimmers or flower-print dresses? That theirs, too, is the heart of darkness?

The notion of drawing parallels between disturbing pasts does not mean to disintegrate difference or to de-emphasize it. Quite to the contrary, colliding transnational memories in a way that produces empathy brings others and subjects into a space of mutual belonging-for-the-other. It is, furthermore, critical to stage opportunities for turning toward the other in circumstances where it is believed to be impossible. In Masika Katsuva’s case, an acknowledgment of mutilation and forced cannibalism in modern US history, or suturing that memory into American public consciousness in view of Masika’s experience, can shift American audiences closer to those previously thought out of reach.

**CONGLOMERATE MEMORY**

The second section proposes to transform the appearance of the Congolese in American discourses by using online discursive spaces to bring together common histories and like-experiences with conflict. Developing such empathetic transnational memories renders the appearance of the other poignant and begs a shared sense of responsibility and care. However, in order to foster transnational memory and to create a horizontal relationship between the Congo and the United States, it must not dissolve difference, but revere it. This section defines and illustrates this reverence through the concept of conglomerate memory, transnational/transcultural memory that fuses others without erasing difference.

Masika squints in the sunlight and leans a little against the handrail of the bridge. As she shares stories of her torture and recovery, she looks beyond the video camera’s gaze, and rocks back and forth, churning with the water around her. She speaks steadily, rolling through her narrative, clearly stirred but calm on the surface, her waves of words broken only by her breath. She described the havoc wrecked on her family by armed militia one early morning, their looting and mutilating her husband’s body.

He was still alive, speaking and pleading with them but they continued to chop him up. They started from the feet and as they dismembered him, he was still talking and pleading. They got to his intestines and he was speaking and then they got to his penis and they cut it off and put it aside and he was still speaking and pleading. He was left in half until they pulled his heart out; then he stopped speaking.\textsuperscript{46}

At this point, Masika emphasizes how cooperative she and her husband had been, and that even so, the intruders persisted.

There was one man—the leader—who said, “Mama, have you ever eaten chewing gum?" And I replied, “Yes" because I thought he was talking about chewing gum and was going to give me some. He then took my husband’s penis and chopped it into pieces and forced me to eat, chew, and swallow them.\textsuperscript{47}
It might be tempting to slip into pity in thinking that those who suffer and survive such vicious atrocities are meager victims of a primitive world. However, while the Congolese are currently terrorized by acts of rape and cannibalism by armed forces like Mai Mai Morgan and FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda)—groups who often go unnamed in news articles, as if to suggest this sort of violence is typical of Congo rather than specific to any military or political agenda—a similar evil was a twisted American pastime in the Postbellum South.

After the Civil War and Reconstruction, Euro-American Southerners were faced with a looming threat, a “new domestic enemy”: hordes of “masterless slaves.”48 The atrocious treatment of African-Americans had certainly not eased. White middle-class Americans stalked their Black neighbors with malicious purpose. At the hands of those besieged by bigotry, African-American Claude Neal was tortured and lynched on October 27, 1934, in Jackson County, Florida. Formal invitations and announcements published in local newspapers staged Neal’s murder as a ceremony that over 2,000 middle-class Euro Americans congregated to witness. One of the lynching participants offers an account of what happened:

After taking the nigger to the woods about four miles from Greenwood, they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it. Then they sliced his sides and stomach with knives and every now and then somebody would cut off a finger or toe. Red hot irons were used on the nigger to burn him from top to bottom.49

The “civilized” made their mobs a new kind of custom, and they often carried out lynchings with the same pastel jubilation one would expect on the afternoon of a Sunday picnic. On occasions such as Claude Neal’s lynching—after tearing off a man’s clothes, roasting his naked body, carving off his fingers, his toes, his penis, fileting his trunk—it was not unusual for crowds to acquire a ravenous appetite and go from the scene to eat and drink. One reporter recalls a Mississippi mob dispersing after finishing up another unnamed Black victim and from the pack, he could hear someone complain, “I’m hungry. Let’s get something to eat.”50

Masika Katsuva and Claude Neal are, individually, clearly commensurate, and although the two are of different origins, their pains are braided together. But these connections extend beyond certain bodies as well; as Masika’s story is embedded in the identities associated with the DRC, and as Neal’s lynching is fixed into a large history of racial violence in the United States, it is reasonable to suggest that each country’s memory of the traumatic abuse suffered by its people link the Congo and the United States together in definitely intimate ways. When Masika Katsuva and Claude Neal share a textual space, especially on the Internet, a “new [technology] of memory” that enables the coming together of radical alterns, readers can swell up with empathy that enables them to see and act in the world differently.51

My use of the word “empathy” here refers to what Levinas considers a process of acknowledgment that requires a sensing of and becoming vulnerable to an other. It is, for Levinas, the embodied conditions of ethical relationality, which depend on the impossibility of the completely autonomous self, and instead which recognize the self as born out of relationship to others. For Levinas, the individual is only distinguished according to his or her affective and intimate relationship to others; it is therefore a “concrete” impossibility to “[abandon] the other to hisaloneness.”52 As he writes, “The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse …There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me.”53 To clarify, an individual’s subjectivity is constructed according to a pre-reflective, pre-discursive encounter with the other; for this reason, one cannot become I without a somatic, sensory meeting of an other because it is in this meeting that I comes to be, comes to know language, and comes to conceive of the social world as such.54

Levinas’s assertions about empathy can be supported by a great deal of work in fields such as developmental psychology and cognitive sciences, which perceive empathy as a sensual phenomenon that formulates the bounds of our consciousness and which is experienced through engaging with others. Scholars in these fields argue that empathy is either a process of anticipating the mental states and behaviors of others55 or a process in which we reflect on our own mental states in order to simulate the emotional or physical state of another.56 Both of these theories of empathy involve perceptual and emotive processes that
occur within an empathetic subject; it connects an autonomous interiority with a shared social exteriority and produces some understanding of others, their mental states, and their drives. More recent research in development sciences have found furthermore that these processes entail innate capacities: infants, for example, are able to match the acts, motivations, and emotions of self and other; in the earliest stages of our being, these relationalities shape our interpretations of our environments.

Much in line with Levinas’s philosophy of an affective and pre-reflective foundation for the subject, these studies emphasize empathy as a structural component to embodied experience which underwrites consciousness of the social world; and, affirmed consistently among these discourses, such empathetic capacities are discharged in close proximity—within an intimate presence—of another. As Levinas puts it, ethical relation is not generated from the logics of discourse and social institution or conceptualization and calculation. It is coded into our being; it grabs hold of a subject, in the presence of the other, and this exposure to the other is sensed “on the surface of the skin, at the edge of the nerves.” Sensibility and vulnerability, which bring to bear by our bodies’ empathetic capacities, are reached through an “exposure to the other”; it is something that is felt and that leaves us fundamentally open to the world and therefore capable of becoming an ethical subject.

In sum, empathy is characterized as a “feeling for, while feeling different” from the other and can so be considered both compatible with Levinas’ ethics and more desirable than sympathy. In an act of sympathizing, one inscribes his or her feelings onto an other. It presumes that one can see through an other’s eyes and experience the world exactly as the other experiences it. Very much in the spirit of an ethic with which Levinas takes issue—an ethic that regards others in the world as objects of use for defining one’s identity—sympathy is a violation of an other’s alterity; it supplants difference with sameness. By contrast, empathy is a matter of honoring otherness while cognitively learning and affectively understanding an other’s circumstance. It starts from a place of difference and works to form connections from beneath surfaces. Given that empathy is a sensation that dwells between others, it makes sense that Levinas and Richard (1986) would depend on it for accounting how ethics moves in a material way:

“... ethics as the extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another becomes morality and hardness its skin as soon as we move into the political world... But the norm which must continue to inspire and direct the moral order is the ethical norm of the interhuman.”

In responding to the call of the other, therefore, before structuring any transnational relation to be good or compassionate, empathy—the corporeal realization of a primary ethics—needs to be roused. Empathizing is made possible by the expression of the other, the touching of the other, and an intellectual means through which to comprehend the grief of the other. A fellow-feeling like empathy calls for histories to brush arms and grip hands, for peoples parted by thousands of miles to “touch and be touched” by one another.

Different histories bound together by empathy, discourses wherein radical others appear, touch, and are touched, are conglomerate memories. Without blending its pieces into a unit, a monochromatic sameness, conglomerate memories press transnational or transcultural memories together within a bed of finer-grained material (a fundamental ethic) while preserving the alterity of others involved. Clasts of others are eroded by events that are proportionately traumatic or shameful or triumphant, and when the fragments of national or cultural memories come in contact and stick in that contact, the distinctive qualities of others in the making of this collective are preserved. Others are, in conglomerate memory, affiliated in difference and maintain the integrity of it. Were an author to bring forth the memory of the murder of Claude Neal in light of reporting on the torture of Masika Katsuva, American and Congolese people, empathetic of each other’s circumstance and moved to relate responsibly with their radical others, are attached through the process of suffering and surviving similarly disturbing pasts. These attachments, once set, are firmly so and others are secured into a collective wherein ethical calls ring and excite.

The conglomerate translates theories by Levinas and Arendt into concrete terms. Others are connected, though not fused, and such connections coagulate thanks to the frictive process of emerging and acting in the polis. The close proximity, the intimate experience of witnessing and remembering the other’s expression, permits a relationality
with others alternative to those based on condescension and colonialist frameworks. Accordingly, facing the *Amazimu* does not result in a chase or even mutual trepidation toward an other’s extreme otherness; one sees and hurries toward the other, reciprocating strides, and each stretching out with open palms until discrete bodies are joined in common regard.

**TURN TO THE OTHER**

Masika Katsuva’s story restates many reports of human rights abuse and might be considered a synecdoche for the current state of things for the Congolese. That so many journalists publish testimonies online and link them together with accounts of similar horrors without a fuller political or historical context is a legitimate concern but is separate from the problem taken up here. Even if authors of digital texts were to hyperlink Masika’s trauma to an exhaustive explanation of how eastern DRC came to house warring groups between 1996 and 2003, Western audiences would still be exposed to narrative structures that reinforce stereotypes regarding Masika’s world as irreconcilable with their own. These categorizations intensify rationales for hegemonic international discourses.

However, journalism in digital media could make very different sorts of associations and complicate those colonialist classifications that suggest the wounds of Masika and her family are evidence of a barbaric culture. Toward this end, authors of digital texts should explore ways to make a space for an other’s expression, not merely for the purposes of constructing a national identity through negation, but for fostering relationships of mutual responsibility and hospitality. With the American public, hyperlinks, for example, can connect a report of human rights abuse in the Congo to similar abuse in the modern Western world. Similarly, a review of the atrocities committed in the American South can be posted in the margins of reports of abuse in Goma, anchoring two cultures into a shared remembrance of the brutality citizens and neighbors have suffered. Designing online news sources in such a way is one form of intervention that challenges what Charlayne Hunter-Gualt describes as “old journalism maxim[s]” that may justifiably portray the DRC as a place of violence, but which also misleadingly indicate that its violence is exclusively Congolese. Along these lines, the expressions of Masika and Claude Neal sharing a textual space is ultimately an occasion for both developing transnational affiliations and exhuming a marginal memory excluded from American public consciousness.

Conglomerate memories accordingly attach memories of different nations or cultures for the purposes of solidifying a relationship grounded in mutual responsibility for the other. Keeping memories touching together without devouring them as objects of pity, sympathy, or similarly patronizing sentiments give rise to expressions of alterity that can move one to empathize with and for the other. In this sense, designing discourse and promoting a conglomerate cosmopolitan at the very least contributes to the turn to an encounter with the face of an other. A fundamentally ethical responsibility toward an other and the empathy felt in response to that call—the “pain that penetrates into the very heart of the for oneself”—may be beyond words. However, the other expressing, the expression being the materialization of the face in the world, needs a place for voicing his or her presence.

While my argument suggests that touching histories is a way through which we can reach for the radical others and submit to goodness, violence remains rooted in the process. It hovers over appearances of the other in the world. Confronting the radical alterity of the other may move the subject who perceives the other to hospitality, a possibility thought out through conglomerate memory and feelings of empathy toward those sensibly in need. Even still, saying—articulating one’s call as an expression of insistent otherness—is a risk. It exposes wounds, the gashes splitting one in distress, for the chance that one who witnesses mends. There is, too, a chance that brutality, an attempt to possess the other, is the response to the call; this is especially possible in the agonistic space such as the *polis* where calls conflict and compete for allegiances. Both conceivable reactions make up the double bind of language for Levinas: the appearance of the other that paves the foundations for ethical relationalities also threatens the life of the other. For Levinas, “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a realm incommensurate” with relations constructed by knowledge or politics, introducing [my] very “ability for power.” That is, the fate of the touching-other is placed in the hands of the one-touched.
The other possesses this power and is subject to it. For this reason, returning to the Bantu myth, she who escapes the *Amazimu* is not alone in her terror and awe; the *Amazimu* turns in fear of one who seeks him. Given we are mutually vulnerable and powerful, encountering others and orchestrating the occasion for the expression of the other is a responsibility that puts us in peril.

In the presence of a cry or a grunt or a moan that slips into consciousness as a plea for help, the impossible response—much to the astonishment of those who are convinced apathy is to blame for deficient intervention of rights abuses—is indifference.70

Though one cannot say for sure if an other’s call will result in violence or caress, the expression of the radical other, once attended to, is primordial, undeniable, and unforgettable. At the very least, it is reasonable to view conglomerate memory as a way to foster ethical relationships and to see digital media as crucial to globalizing such memorialization and affiliation. There is virtue in alone making room for the expression of the other, which online discourses certainly have the potential to provide. Appearing before the other and the other appearing is a moment writh with risk, but in such moments, we may rely on sound judgment and carefulness for deciding on what response to the call is most good or which call of the Other to answer foremost. In becoming for the other, we at any rate overcome complacency. The Other incarnate—the words, voice, and spirit that course through an expression—absolutely moves us away from ourselves. To what end, we choose.

Notes
1. My adaptation of the myth of the *Amazimu* (“cannibal”/“ogre”/“monster”) is based on Ulutuli Dhladhla’s recitation of it, recorded and translated by Henry Callaway, *Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus* (London, UK: Springvale Mission Station, 1868), 155–8.
2. Jean Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume, *Radical Alterity* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008).
3. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1984), 38–9.
4. Mitchell G. Reyes, “Memory and Alterity,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 43, no. 3 (2010): 224 and 243.
5. In his essay, “Being-for-the-Other-to-the-Other: Justice and Communication in Levinasian Ethics,” Pat Gehrke (2010) provides a useful explanation of the difference between *autrui* and *autre* (“Other” and “other”): “In the original French, Levinas uses two different terms, both of which are translated as other. The capitalized Other is used for *autrui*, which might best be described as ‘the personal other, the you’ whereas the uncapitalized other is used for *autre*, which simply means the common usage of other, such as another.” (p. 8) This distinction can be fleshed out further through Levinas’s (1997) concept of “substitution,” which refers to one’s being responding to the other before all knowledge and before one recognizes one is responding at all. In conducting oneself toward the other, one’s identity becomes concrete (p. 127). It therefore makes sense to argue that l’autre (the other) refers to the inevitable everyday encounter with another through another’s face and l’auteri (the Other) remains the transcendental ethical call that pertains to an ethic prior to ontology and epistemology and which is the grounding for an always-already relationship of responsibility. From “Being for the Other-to-the-Other: Justice in Levinasian Communication Ethics,” in *Review of Communication* 10 (2010): 5–19.
6. Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), 12.
7. Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 80.
8. Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, 39.
9. Johanes Fabian, “Remembering the Other: Knowledge and Recognition in the Exploration of Central Africa,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 1 (1999): 67.
10. Most philosophical turns to cosmopolitanism make mention of some form of worldwide, multicultural “unity” and typically take up Kant’s conception of unity as it relates to the project of Enlightenment. More specifically, Kant connects the cosmopolitan to one who travels and encounters and comes to understand first those townsman and countrymen, then to more “distant” places. Martha Nussbaum famously corrected the Eurocentric assumptions in Kant’s conception of cosmopolitanism; while she maintained Kant’s vague reference to knowledge and difference (and process of becoming familiar with others to whom we are not already known), she takes on a clearer set of objectives as it relates to educating citizens as part of a world community rather than as members of an exclusive community. (Nussbaum 2002; 2008) “Cosmopolitanism” is taken up altogether differently in the social sciences and usually differentiated from globalization: while the latter matters in terms of economic development, markets, and neoliberal policies, cosmopolitanism refers to shared social worlds and international loyalties, especially as they relate to global organizations. Ulrich Beck, “Cosmopolitical Realism: On the Distinction between Cosmopolitanism in Philosophy and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 4, no. 2 (2004): 135–40.
11. Judith Butler, “Universality in Culture,” in *For Love of Country?*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 47.

12. Levinas refers to chapter 33 of *Exodus* for making this point: “And the Lord said: ‘Behold, there is where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.’” Levinas explains, “The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality maintains all the infinity of his absence . . . He shows himself only by his trace.” From *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 345–9.

13. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 197.

14. Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague, Netherlands: Marinus Nijhoff, 1974), 90. The central question directed toward Levinas’ presumed wholly transcendent ethics is in what way the absolute other can be encountered in the world in a manner that does not compromise the virtue of the other’s complete alterity.

15. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic, 1997), 76.

16. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 49.

17. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 118.

18. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 50.

19. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198.

20. Ibid.

21. Stephen Browne, “Arendt, Eichmann, and the Politics of Remembrance,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 54.

22. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006), 26.

23. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 44 and 198.

24. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 56.

25. The *Greatest Silence* (2007) features interviews with soldiers of the Mai Mai who rationalize their attacks against women as a natural response to their presence in combat zones. Two different soldiers explain that by raping women during their raids, they ensure that women are contributing to their cause and more broadly, that they are helping the DRC.

26. “Unwatchable: Masika Tells Her Story,” Youtube video. Posted by “unwatchablefilm,” October 12, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYUsMD3BbZg (Oct 14, 2014).

27. Fiona Lloyd-Davies, “Why Eastern DR Congo is ‘rape capital of the world,’” CNN, November 25, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/24/world/africa/democratic-congo-rape/index.html (Oct 14, 2014).

28. Delphine Minoui, “Congos Anti-Rape Crusader,” *The Daily Beast*, June 28, 2011, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/06/28/chouchou-namegabe-and-the-rape-crisis-in-congo.html (Oct 14, 2014).

29. Anne Chaon, “Who Failed in Rwanda, Journalists or the Media?” In *Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2007), 163.

30. A matter touched on during a debate at the African Development Bank Annual Meeting (2013) by participants including Paul Kagame and ADB president, Donald Kaberuka.

31. Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 11.

32. Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 108–9.

33. Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 7.

34. Evitar Zerubavel, “Social Memories: Steps Towards a Sociology of the Past,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vintzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011): 223.

35. Keim, *Mistaking Africa*, 16.

36. Charlayne Hunter-Gault, *New News Out of Africa: Uncovering Africa’s Renaissance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006): 109.

37. Phaedrea C. Pezullo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Travel, Pollution, and Environmental Justice* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 141–2.

38. Pezullo, *Toxic Tourism*, 166.

39. Allison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in an Age of Mass Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 153–4.

40. Janet Leach and Mitch McKinney, “Of loss and Learning: How Anniversary Coverage Affects Understandings of May 4, 1970,” in *Democratic Narrative, History, & Memory*, ed. Carole A. Barabo and Laura L. Davis (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2012), 112–13.

41. George P. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 9–10.

42. Senator Robert Dole (R) said of the genocide in Rwanda (1994): “I don’t think we have any national interest here. I hope we don’t get involved . . . I don’t think we will. The Americans are out. As far as I’m concerned in Rwanda, that ought to be the end of it.” These comments reflected the concern in Washington over the gain to be had by restraining the Rwandan genocide. See Sciolino (1994).

43. Sarah Florini, “Recontextualizing the Racial Present: Intertextuality and the Politics of Remembering,”
Critical Studies in Media Communication 31, no. 4 (2014): 315–16.
44. Florini, “Recontextualizing the Racial Present,” 322.
45. Butler, “Universality in Culture,” 48–51.
46. “Unwatchable: Masika Tells Her Story.”
47. Ibid.
48. Orlando Patterson, “Rituals of Blood: Sacrificial Murders in the Postbellum South,” The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 23 (1999): 123.
49. Qtd. in Patterson, “Rituals of Blood,” 127.
50. Patterson, “Rituals of Blood,” 127.
51. Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 150.
52. Emmanuel Levinas, Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 146.
53. Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 87–8.
54. More specifically, I come to be in the world for the other and conceives of the social world according to the other’s appearance.
I want to take pause in this point to clarify why earlier in the prose I included the violent testimony related to Masika Katsuva and Claude Neal. The purpose of including their personal experience in disturbing detail is twofold: 1) as I argue in the body of this article, conflict and suffering is one route—indeed, a deeply moving route—through which to establish shared memories and construct kinships and 2) the unsettling detail is the very sensory means through which a reader becomes witness. That is to say that the inclusion of these violent retellings should not be reduced to spectacle but a means through which a reader becomes witness.
55. See: Simon Baron-Cohen, Mindblindness: An Essay on autism and Theory of Mind (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Andrew Whitten, Natural Theories of Mind (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).
56. Alvin Goldman, “Interpretation Psychologized,” Mind & Language 4, no. 3 (1989): 161–85.
Reflection of one’s individual mental state and simulation of another’s and a distinct association with memory; this understanding of empathy is commonplace in methods of emotive performance: “sense memory” (a practice advocated by dramatists like Stanislavski and Stanislavski) requires the performer to recall and re-experience a personal memory that, in that performer’s re-experience of it, externally resemble the emotional, mental, and physical state of the character whom the performer attempts to portray. This form of method acting—what Stanislavski calls “the private moment” and what Stanislavski referred to as “public solitude”—conveys a strange tension between private and public, personal and other-ed. It never requires the actor to know what the other experienced but to rationally map out routes for connectivity and kinship so that one may share in a similar irrational/emotional experience. Paul Gray, “Stanislavski and America: A Critical Chronology,” The Tulane Drama Review 9, no. 2 (1964): 49–51.
57. Andrew N. Meltzoff, “Imitation and Other Minds: The ‘Like Me’ Hypothesis,” in Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science, ed. Susan Hurley and Nick Chater (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 76.
58. Emmanuel Levinas, “Essence and Disinterestedness,” in Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 121.
59. Emmanuel Levinas, Discovering Existence with Husserl, trans. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998): 54–6.
The importance for empathy and Levinas’s ethics is most clear here: “sensibility” and “vulnerability” are terms that Levinas uses in reference to the subject’s relationship with his or her environment by which s/he is fundamentally affected by. The affectivity of the other in this regard—the degree to which the ethical subject experiences empathy for another—is determined by proximity and intimacy. This closeness, as I elaborate, is not necessarily referring to physical closeness; it is instead marked by the varying intensity to which an other informs our perceptions of and being in the social world. In short, empathy is a pre-reflective phenomenon which all humans experience and which all individual human existence is informed by; by whom we are informed depends on who is close enough to grip our consciousness and imagination.
60. Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 149.

Even if we presume a more congruent relationship between “empathy” and “sympathy” as do philosophers such as Adam Smith and as do some developmental scientists, there remains a sharp distinction
that renders “empathy” most pertinent to Levinas’s ethics: sympathy may refer to the observer’s response to another’s suffering whereas empathy more broadly refers to the decentering of the subject and acknowledgment of another. Simon Baron-Cohen and Sally Wheelwright, “The Empathy Quotient,” Journal of Autism, and Normal Sex Differences 34, no. 2 (2004): 164–5. Empathy therefore remains a pre-conscious experience that underwrites our thinking and behavior, which may secondarily refer to sympathy, which is more pertinent in regards to ethical reasoning.

61. Ibid.
62. Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 76.
63. Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in Face to Face with Levinas, ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1986), 29–30.
64. Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 149–50.
65. Hunter-Gault, New News Out of Africa, 109.
66. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 56.
67. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 50.
68. Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 198.
69. Ibid.
70. Emmanuel Levinas, Humanism of the Other, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 93.

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