

## **MADS ROSENDAHL THOMSEN**

*Making Africa Present in Western Literary Culture. Projects of remembrance in Achebe, Gourevitch, Eggers, and Okri*

A number of seminal books on traumatic events in Africa have in common that their author is not a first-hand witness to the depicted events, and that the writing is clearly trying to present both African and Western perspectives, also in the style of writing itself. In this presentation four works and their ways of being transcultural are considered: Chinua Achebe's classic and best selling *Things Fall Apart*, Philip Gourevitch's report on the genocide in Rwanda *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*, Dave Eggers's account of Valentino Achak Deng's history in *What is the What?*, and Ben Okri's allegorical history of the continent in *The Star Book*.

The strategies for carrying this out are very different though. Achebe works with multiple viewpoints and an almost overstated reference to both African and Western culture. Gourevitch aims to show how the genocide has deeper roots in Western thought and history, whereas Eggers cuts between African and American scenery to build up a contrast between these worlds. Finally, Okri's writing strives to be almost universal in its lack of references for long stretches that are interrupted with very concrete images from the colonial past.

All in all, these works provide a sample of different kinds of transcultural writing that also displays how the traumatic event with its universal references to death and masses has a function, but also that there is a layer of cultural complexity that they try to capture and make present to the reader.

Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Associate Professor, PhD, Comparative Literature, Aarhus University