Rwanda After Genocide

In the 1994 Rwanda genocide, around one million people were brutally murdered in just thirteen weeks. This book offers an in-depth study of post-traumatic growth in the testimonies of men and women who survived, highlighting the ways in which they were able to build a new, and often enhanced, way of life. In so doing, Caroline Williamson Sinalo advocates a new reading of trauma: one that recognises not just the negative, but also the positive responses to traumatic experiences. Through an analysis of testimonies recorded in Kinyarwanda by the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, the book focuses particularly on the relationship between post-traumatic growth and gender and examines it within the wider frames of colonialism and traditional cultural practices. Offering a striking alternative to dominant paradigms on trauma, the book reveals that, notwithstanding the countless tales of horror, pain and loss in Rwanda, there are also stories of strength, recovery and growth.

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Gender, Identity and Post-Traumatic Growth

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge. It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108426138
DOI: 10.1017/9781108591478

First published 2018

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-42613-8 Hardback

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues in University College Cork's French Department and School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures for their consistent intellectual and moral support throughout this project. In particular, I will mention my Head of the Department, Dr Patrick Crowley, as well as my colleagues and friends Dr Kate Hodgson and Professor Paul Hegarty. I would also like to express my appreciation for all colleagues involved in the Violence, Conflict and Gender cluster in UCC's Centre for Advanced Study in Literatures and Cultures (http://casilac.ie/violence-conflict-and-gender/) for our many stimulating and inspiring encounters: Nicoletta Mandolini, Professor Nuala Finnegan, Dr Silvia Ross, Dr Alan Gibbs, Dr David Fitzgerald, Dr Amanullah De Sondy and Professor Vittorio Buffachi.

For my time in Rwanda, I am heavily indebted to Dr James Smith for his collaboration in parts of the project, and for introducing me to the work of Aegis Rwanda. I am grateful to all Aegis Rwanda staff, but particularly Freddy Mutanguha, Yves Kamuronsi, Claver Irakoze, Paul Rukesha, Fabrice Musafiri, Yvonne Umugwaneza, Diogene Mwizerwa, Jean Paul Mugiraneza, Martin Niwenshuti, Shannon Scully, Aline Umugwaneza, Emery Rutagonya, Marie Gasagire and Adelaide Umugwaneza. All of them welcomed me to the team, helped me with my research, provided me with access to the testimonies, helped me to translate and proofread them, shared with me their expert knowledge and became my friends. For our endless conversations about Rwandan history, culture and politics I would like to thank Maggie and Phil Ziegler. I am also grateful to Jacques Mutabazi and Chantal Umutesi for teaching me Kinyarwanda, assisting me with data analysis and contributing various ideas through our discussions.

For funding different aspects of the project, I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Irish Research

Council and the Aegis Research, Policy and Higher Education Programme.

Other intellectual contributions to the project came from Professor Nicki Hichcott, Dr Catherine Gilbert, Dr Kathryn Batchelor, Professor Dirk Moses, Dr David Mwambari, Professor Stef Craps and Dr Phil Clark. I am thankful to all of them.

For their endless moral and emotional support, I am thankful for my family members, Sarah Kay, Will Williamson and Emily Kay Goodman, and friends, Fuchsia Fishbourne, Maja Halls Brosnan, Rita Martins Rodrigues and Gill Sorensen.

I am especially grateful to my husband, Chikondi, for supporting and inspiring me everyday.

Finally, I would like to thank all the survivors who had the bravery to share their stories.

Preface

Before the arrival of Europeans, conflict rarely took place between the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda. Wars generally pitted the Banyarwanda as a group against outsiders and, with the same language, religion and cultural practices, the terms Hutu and Tutsi did not refer to distinct ethnic groups, as such, but to political status and occupation.[1] The racialisation of these groups came with the arrival of German, and later Belgian, colonists who believed the Tutsi to be racially superior to the Hutu. Such divisions were further reinforced by the colonial policy of introducing identity cards in the 1930s which explicitly stated the individual's ethnic group. Alongside these reforms, the Belgians established Tutsi supremacy by reserving educational opportunities for Tutsi and replacing all Hutu in power with pro-European, Tutsi chiefs.

In the 1950s, a sense of injustice and inferiority among the Hutu, in combination with their numerical predominance, began to draw sympathy from Flemish missionaries and a Hutu counter-elite began to emerge. Anti-Tutsi rhetoric grew in intensity and the Belgian authorities began switching their allegiances to the Hutu majority, replacing Tutsi chiefs with Hutu ones. Following the 1959–61 revolution, the Parmehutu Party was elected to power with Grégoire Kayibanda as president.[2] Parmehutu propagated a pro-Hutu racist ideology, claiming that Hutu held the racial right to rule Rwanda. Despite a growing number of killings and human-rights violations, this government was perceived by Belgium – and later France – as

[1] The Hutu majority make up about 85 per cent of the population and are traditionally land-working famers. The Tutsi make up around 14 per cent of the population and are traditionally pastoralists. The third ethnic group of Rwanda, the Twa, represents just 1 per cent of the population and are traditionally hunter-gatherers and potters.

[2] Parmehutu, or Parti du Mouvement pour l'Emancipation Hutu, was the political party established by Grégoire Kayibanda to counter Tutsi supremacy.

democratic because the notion of ethnic majority was equated with democratic majority. Over the next few decades, the government reversed the ethnic hierarchy that had been established during the colonial period and corruption concentrated access to resources, opportunities and power into the hands of a tiny Hutu elite. Several outbursts of anti-Tutsi violence in the 1960s resulted in bloodshed and many Tutsi were driven into exile in surrounding countries.

During his presidency, Kayibanda relied heavily on people from his southern home town of Gitarama where, in return, he concentrated economic resources. In the face of increasing poverty, Hutu from the north of the country began to criticise the regime. Kayibanda lost control in a northern coup d'état on 5 July 1973 which placed Juvénal Habyarimana in power. At the time, the coup was immensely popular as it reduced ethnic violence and government corruption. In the early days, the regime also saw an improvement in Hutu–Tutsi ethnic relations and intermarriage became more common. However, in the late 1980s, Habyarimana faced a similar economic crisis to Kayibanda in 1973. Then, in 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) – consisting mostly of Tutsi refugees from Uganda – invaded northern Rwanda and sparked a civil war. Seeing this as a propaganda opportunity to abate the growing discontent, Habyarimana deflected criticism of his regime onto all Tutsi. In an attempt to retain power, the government fostered policies of ethnic hatred and fear of the RPF and all Tutsi. Habyarimana used racist propaganda and incited hatred through radio broadcasts, popular magazines, newspapers, songs and even school textbooks. Tutsi were portrayed as inherently evil; foreign conquerors who wanted to enslave the Hutu people. Under intense international pressure, a ceasefire was called and the Hutu government signed a power-sharing agreement with the RPF as part of the Arusha Accords. However, by the time Habyarimana's plane was shot down on 6 April 1994, plans for the genocide of the Tutsi were already in place.

Hutu extremists blamed the RPF for the plane crash and a killing campaign ensued. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary people participated in the genocide and victims were frequently raped, tortured and slaughtered by their neighbours. As soon as the killings began, the RPF rekindled the civil war and won within three months, establishing a new government. But, by the time the RPF won the civil war, as many as three-quarters of the Tutsi population had perished, as well as thousands of moderate Hutu.

Over the thirteen-week period of genocide, the death toll reached around one million people, most of whom were brutally murdered using machetes and other farm tools. In the immediate aftermath, a further two million Hutu – perpetrators and others – fled to neighbouring Zaire in fear of retribution and around 600,000 Tutsi refugees returned from neighbouring Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi. While the influx of Tutsi refugees created an increase in criminality at home, the outflow of Hutu refugees led to a security threat as members of the former regime began retraining their army and threatened to launch a full-scale invasion. Meanwhile, the people that made up the rest of the Rwandan population were psychologically traumatised. There were Tutsi and Hutu survivors who had lost their families, friends and property; thousands of children who had lost their parents; perpetrators of the genocide who had blindly followed orders and now lived in fear of being arrested or killed; and killers who had believed in the genocidal ideology. To make matters worse, the country's economy was non-existent. In short, the genocide left Rwanda and Rwandans devastated.

This book offers an in-depth analysis of post-traumatic growth in the testimonies of men and women who survived. Post-traumatic growth describes the ways in which survivors of trauma are able to build a new way of life that they experience as superior to the life they had before in significant ways – a phenomenon that has been recognised throughout history and across cultures. However, scholars in both the humanities and the psychological sciences have placed much emphasis on the negative cognitive, behavioural and emotional reactions to traumatic events which have been interpreted as pathological. In this book, I argue that Western concepts such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), belatedness, unknowability and unrepresentability may have limited useful application in a post-colonial, post-genocide context such as Rwanda and may even exacerbate, rather than remedy, the problems of trauma survivors. In addition, because of their exclusive focus on negative outcomes following trauma, both the medical model and trauma theory could be regarded as incomplete. This book advocates a new reading of trauma; one that recognises not just the negative, but also the positive, responses to traumatic experiences. Taking testimonies recorded in Kinyarwanda by the Genocide Archive of Rwanda as its corpus, the book focuses particularly on the relationship between post-traumatic growth and gender.

The trauma of experiencing genocide can have devastating social and psychological effects. Research has shown that depression and anxiety as well as emotional problems of guilt, shame, anger, substance abuse and conflicts within relationships are all common consequences of trauma. However, research also shows that, in the struggle to rebuild lives, there is often the possibility of positive changes for individuals and their communities. It may seem paradoxical to suggest that the genocide could have resulted in such positive transformations, but research in other contexts suggests it is a real possibility. Through a discursive analysis of survivors' testimonies, this book reveals that, although there are countless tales of horror, pain and loss in Rwanda, there are also many stories about strength, recovery and growth. It identifies how growth is manifested, how gender affects processes of post-traumatic growth and how growth might be facilitated in the socio-cultural context of Rwanda.

Through its focus on the voices of individual Rwandans who have given their testimonies to the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, this book differs from other books on the Rwanda genocide. Many Africanists working on post-genocide Rwanda rely on historical or political documentation produced by government or other elite institutions. Others base their research on interview material. The testimonies on which this book is based offer a new perspective on the genocide because the interviews are carried out by fellow survivors rather than by Western researchers and by providing an environment in which survivors feel comfortable speaking freely, these testimonies challenge many of our received understandings of Rwandans. For example, Rwanda is often portrayed as a place where a culture of silence prevails. Contrary to this popular perception, however, I show that Rwandan men and women are willing to speak out and actively shape public discourse on such issues as the government, ethnicity, pre-genocide history, the genocide and the role of the international community.