

Effects of Intergenerational Trauma on Attitudes Toward Reconciliation Among Genocide Survivors in Rwanda

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Introduction

The 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda was a one-hundred-day period of mass slaughter that culminated from decades of ethnic tension. It was meticulously planned by the former government of Rwanda. On April 6, 1994, then President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was shot down as he was travelling back to Rwanda from Burundi. By daybreak on April 7, 1994, orders to exterminate all Tutsi and Tutsi-sympathizers had been sent to the Interahamwe, localized killing squads, over the radio. The Rwandan Patriotic Army, an army of mostly Tutsi, did not gain control of Kigali, the capital, until July 4, 1994, officially declaring the end of the genocide. It is estimated that over a million Rwandans lost their lives as a result of this violence.

Following the genocide, the government of Rwanda, led mostly by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF),¹ put in place different mechanisms and programs to facilitate reconciliation among its citizens. These mechanisms included the creation of the localized gacaca courts, the institution of a national Commemoration period, the creation and utilization of a strict narrative of the genocide, and the criminalization of ethnicity and genocide ideology. Those that survived the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi faced, and continue to face, incredible hardship and trauma. Further, there is now a new generation of young people whose emotions and willingness to reconcile have been informed by the experiences, memories, and teachings of their family members, friends, and the government.

While the effects of traumatic events and government-sponsored programs on reconciliation have been studied in Rwanda, limited research has been conducted on the effects of intergenerational transmission of trauma on those born during or after the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. Accordingly, this thesis asks: What are the attitudes of young genocide survivors toward

¹ The Rwandan Patriotic Front is the political party that grew out of the Rwandan Patriotic Army.

reconciliation in Rwanda? To answer this question, this thesis relies upon in-depth interviews conducted during the summer of 2019.

For reference, the term *young* in this study refers to those born immediately before, during, or after the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi with no personal experiences or memories of genocide violence. This cohort of young survivors has secondhand exposure to trauma via the information they have been given from parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and government officials. The age range of this cohort is 21 to 26 years of age.

This thesis first reviews existing research on the effects of trauma on reconciliation following mass violence, in general and specifically in Rwanda. Next, it discusses the methods used to find participants and conduct interviews with 21 genocide survivors of varying ages and levels of exposure to trauma caused by the genocide. While the study focuses on the attitudes of young survivors, as previously defined, older survivors were interviewed for comparison purposes. It then presents findings on several themes from the interviews, focusing on the simplification of the Commemoration period,² attitudes toward intermarriage,³ and concerns about mass violence in the future.⁴ It then briefly discusses and contextualizes the findings, which indicate that young survivors in Rwanda may have more positive attitudes toward reconciliation than their older counterparts with firsthand experiences of trauma. Finally, it suggests topics for further study on intergenerational trauma and reconciliation in Rwanda.

² Simplification of the Commemoration period refers to the changes made to the 100-day period of remembrance celebrated from April 7 to July 4 (Republic of Rwanda, 2020). In recent years, the Commemoration period has been altered in an effort to make the period less traumatic for those attending. Dramatizations of violence are no longer included, and testimonies are screened before they are given to ensure they are not trauma inducing.

³ Intermarriage refers to marriage between those considered survivors and those from a different background. This type of marriage was highly uncommon before the genocide, as people were expected to marry within their given ethnic group, which was easily identified through the use of ethnic identification cards.

⁴ Mass violence does not refer to only genocidal violence. It was used generally to gauge respondents fears regarding genocide, war, terror attacks, or any other occasion of large-scale violence.

Literature Review

Scholars have long studied the effects of personal trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on interpersonal relationships, community involvement, and national development, in countries that have experienced war, civil war, genocide, or another form of mass violence, including gender-based violence. Existing studies have largely found that willingness to reconcile is easier and attitudes toward reconciliation are more positive among people with less victimization and/or fewer episodes of post-traumatic stress. For instance, following World War II, researchers assessed the readiness to reconcile among women that experienced wartime rape in Germany in 1945 (Eichorn et. al., 2015). Their results showed that wartime rape survivors' readiness to reconcile was higher in women who reported less post-traumatic distress (Eichorn et. al., 2015). In South Sudan, Ng, Lopez, Pritchard and Deng studied the association between traumatic events and PTSD symptoms and attitudes toward reconciliation mechanisms amidst ongoing conflict (Ng et. al., 2017). The study found that people that experienced more traumatic events endorsed criminal punishment for perpetrators of violence at higher rates and were more likely to consider confession and apology necessary for reconciliation (Ng et. al., 2017).

While these and other studies thus more commonly find that lower levels of post-traumatic stress are associated with higher levels of willingness to reconcile, studies have shown other factors can be influential on a person's willingness to reconcile. Aguilar, Balcells, and Cebolla (2011) studied attitudes toward transitional justice policies put in place by the Spanish government. The study found that individual ideology, as well as family victimization during the dictatorship, were highly relevant factors in explaining attitudes toward transitional justice policies (Aguilar et. al., 2011). This suggests that secondhand exposure to trauma, as well as transmission of trauma between family members, can affect attitudes toward reconciliation even among those who had no

personal experience of trauma. In addition to exposure to trauma, time elapsed between the cause of trauma and present day may affect a person's attitude toward reconciliation. Backer (2010) found that support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa declined dramatically over time. The study found there was, "an increased sense of the unfairness of amnesty and dissatisfaction with the extent of truth recovery," (Baker, 2010) even as time passed and traumatic events were less recent.

Turning to the specific case of Rwanda, Pham, Weinstein, and Longman completed a study in 2004 to assess the levels of trauma and PTSD symptoms amongst Rwandans and to determine how these factors are associated with Rwandans' attitudes toward reconciliation (Pham et. al., 2004). The study used a stratified cluster random survey to determine participants within four communes (geographic areas akin to counties). Researchers completed a total of 2,091 interviews with participants ranging in age from 18 to 94 years old (Pham et. al., 2004). Important to note, 10% of participants were unwilling to disclose their ethnicity, and of those who specified their ethnicity, 70.3% were Hutu, 26.0% were Tutsi, and 3.4% were another ethnicity (Pham et. al., 2004).

The results from this study are in line with those previously mentioned. Pham, Weinstein, and Longman (2004) found that respondents that had symptoms of PTSD were less likely to have positive attitudes toward Rwanda's national judicial responses to genocide, belief in community, and interdependence with those from a different ethnic background (Pham et. al, 2004). Additionally, respondents that had been exposed to multiple trauma events were less likely to positively respond to Rwanda's national or local (gacaca) judicial responses and were also less likely to adhere to beliefs in nonviolence, beliefs in community, and interdependence with those

from a different ethnic background (Pham et. al., 2004). Overall, the study concluded that exposure to traumatic events are negatively associated with attitudes toward reconciliation.

Regarding government-sponsored reconciliation programs, Clark (2010) completed a study on the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) – an institution that prepares and coordinates national programs, establishes and promotes mechanisms for restoring unity, educates and sensitizes the population, and carries out research and makes publications on the promotion of peace and unity (NURC, 2020)– alongside Rwanda’s unity and reconciliation policy in general.⁵ The study found that the basis on which unity and reconciliation policy is founded is critically flawed, in that negation of ethnicity disallows open and honest engagement with the past (Clark, 2010). This implies that ethnicity is still of significant importance in Rwanda and that incomplete narratives about the past can disrupt reconciliation or negatively impact attitudes toward reconciliation. This is particularly true within Rwanda’s educational system, where Hodgkin (2006) noted that, 12 years after the genocide, history was absent from formal school curricula.⁶ Hodgkin notes that despite there being a gap in curricula, the extra-curricular mechanisms put in place by the government, including gacaca, commemorations, and memorials as previously mentioned, have created a politically correct official narrative, that can be monitored, edited, and disseminated on a mass scale (Hodgkin, 2006). This likely influences the way a cohort of young genocide survivors perceive not only the events of the genocide, but the reconciliation that has taken place.

⁵ Rwanda’s National Unity and Reconciliation Policy aims at fostering unity and social cohesion, and to ensure that equality among all Rwandans regardless of individual difference. The essential pillars of the policy are peace, security, unity, reconciliation, and development. (International Alert, 2018)

⁶ Considering education today, history of the genocide is taught in Rwandan schools. The history, however, tends to be general with the focus being on the events leading up to the genocide rather than the events that occurred during the genocide. Many students that I spoke with acknowledged that the history of the genocide they learned in school was general, but allowed them to ask another source, parents, siblings, etc., for more detailed information.

My study addresses a specific population that is absent from the studies conducted in Rwanda by Pham, Weinstein, and Longman and Clark (2010), specifically those considered second-generation genocide survivors. Almost 26 years after genocide, a cohort of young survivors that were born immediately before, during, or after the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi are considering the consequences of genocide, participating in government-sponsored reconciliation activities, and making decisions about how the country should move forward in terms of development despite having no personal memories of genocide or any firsthand experiences of violence. Many members of this cohort have relied on parents, caretakers, teachers, trials, testimonies, and memorials to understand exactly what occurred in 1994. Intergenerational trauma and its relationship to reconciliation, is an understudied area within the context of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi.

Intergenerational trauma, or postmemory, is the relationship that exists between a second generation and powerful, traumatic experiences that preceded their births but “were nevertheless transmitted as to seem to constitute memories of their own” (Harris, 2020). Intergenerational trauma has been studied within the context of colonization of First Nations peoples in Canada (Bombay et. al., 2009), enslavement of African Americans in the United States (Graff, 2017), and second-generation Jewish peoples after the Holocaust (Harris, 2020), among others. Through these studies, considerable evidence exists that the effects of trauma experiences are “often transmitted across generations, affecting the children and grandchildren of those that were initially victimized” (Bombay et. al., 2009). These studies have led me to hypothesize that Rwanda is no different.

My interviews with genocide survivors build on existing literature, which led me to expect that my interviews would suggest that young survivors would have, generally, more positive attitudes toward the current level of reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda than those in the older

generation who experienced the genocide more directly. My findings are consistent with existing literature regarding the relationship between exposure to trauma and attitudes toward justice and reconciliation. My study adds to the current scholarship on intergenerational trauma, and shows the way intergenerational trauma, or postmemory, can also affect attitudes toward justice and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Methods

I interviewed 21 survivors of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda during May, June, and July of 2019. For this study, I defined survivors as those who were persecuted during the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, those previously classified as Tutsi, and their children. I selected participants by snowball sampling via six different survivor organizations and networks, as I detail below.

Specifically, after the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, the Rwandan government outlawed ethnicity. In the Constitution of 2003, amended in 2010 and again in 2015, the Rwandan government formally committed itself in Chapter III, Article 10 to “[conforming] to the following fundamental principles,” which included the “eradication of ethnic, regional, and other divisions and promotion of national unity.” The classification of ethnicity as Hutu or Tutsi is no longer utilized. The government more commonly utilizes the term “survivor” to describe those who were Tutsi or are of Tutsi descent. This language is used exclusively for those with Tutsi background.⁷ The government does not classify those of Hutu background as survivors, even if there was no active participation in the genocide. Those who come from mixed backgrounds, having one Hutu and one Tutsi parent, may identify as survivors if the father was a Tutsi, as ethnicity was considered patrilineal in 1994.

⁷ While ethnicity has been outlawed, the term “survivor” is still a social marker of ethnicity. Someone identified as a survivor is assumed to be of Tutsi descent. In this way, ethnicity while outlawed can still be perpetuated.

There is no national registry of survivors, at least not one available to the public.⁸ Thus, I contacted leaders of different survivor organizations and networks to find those who were willing to participate in this study. Organizations that I contacted included: Aegis Trust, Never Again Rwanda, Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace, Survivors Fund, Genocide Survivors Students Association, and the Association of Genocide Widow Agahozo.

Aegis Trust is an international organization working to prevent genocide through education and research to improve the practice of prevention (Aegis Trust, 2015). Additionally, Aegis Trust established the Kigali Genocide Memorial in 2004, which exists as a final resting place for 250,000 victims of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi and is home to the Genocide Archive of Rwanda (Aegis Trust, 2015).

Never Again Rwanda is a non-government organization founded in 2002 as a safe space for youth and students to discuss trauma and anxiety related to the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi (Never Again Rwanda, 2020). The organization has grown in recent years to engage with people of all ages, not just youth. Never Again Rwanda organizes citizen forums, spaces for peace, and art competitions to facilitate peacebuilding and community engagement (Never Again Rwanda, 2020).

Similar to Never Again Rwanda, the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) is a peacebuilding institute producing evidence-based research and providing neutral spaces for community engagement and development (IRDP, 2020). IRDP also operates a school of debate

⁸ There may be records of survivors through the Fund for the Neediest Survivors (FARG), but this information is not widely available. The Fund for the Neediest Survivors (FARG) was established in 1998 as a parastatal organization. The principal focus of FARG today is to, “support the education costs of genocide survivors still yet to complete secondary school, and a select merit-based number through higher education” (SURF, 2020). The program operates on a national scale, but focuses on vulnerable genocide survivors, particularly orphans, elderly people, and adults with disabilities in accordance with Article 50 of Rwanda’s current constitution. Chapter V Article 50 states that the State has the duty to “undertake special actions aimed at the welfare of the needy survivors of the genocide against Tutsi.”

for students to promote creative and critical thinking (IRDP, 2020). Additionally, Survivors Fund (SURF) is a charity founded in 1995 that works to rebuild the lives of survivors of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi through holistic programs developed and delivered by other survivor-led organizations (SURF, 2020).

The Genocide Survivors Students Association (AERG) founded in 1996 functions as a support mechanism to student survivors in universities, higher-learning institutions, and secondary schools facing consequences of the genocide, including loss of family, lack of access to basic needs, physical disabilities, and psychological trauma (Genocide Survivors Student Association, 2020). AERG is represented at 41 universities and higher-learning institutions and 484 secondary schools, totaling 43,000 members in Rwanda (Genocide Survivors Student Association, 2020).

The Association of Genocide Widows Agahozo (AVEGA) is an organization founded in 1995 by a group of 50 widows to cope with life after genocide, promote the general welfare of survivors, build solidarity among members, fight for justice on behalf of survivors, and participate in the rebuilding of Rwanda (Gruber Foundation, 2020). AVEGA achieves its goals through the implementation of four departments: medical; advocacy, justice and information; administration and finance; and economic and social operations (Gruber Foundation, 2020).

I chose to search for participants through these organizations in an effort to ensure diversity within my study. I talked with people of varying ages born before, during and after the genocide, to study how intergenerational trauma affects attitudes toward justice and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda. In addition to providing participants of varying ages, these organizations support survivors from both rural and urban areas of the country.

Upon contacting survivors' organizations and associations, leaders provided me with one or two names of people that would be suitable participants for my study. I obtained their email

addresses and phone numbers from the leaders and called or emailed to ask them to participate in this study. I sent emails in English, though phone calls were used more frequently and were completed by my translator in Kinyarwanda. All emails I sent were followed by a phone call with my translator, who was able to answer additional questions about the study and schedule interviews. As previously mentioned, I used snowball sampling during all of the interviews I conducted. I would ask participants if they knew of anyone else that may be willing to participate after the interview had concluded. If the participant was willing to recommend another potential participant, name and contact information was given directly to my translator. None of those contacted declined to be interviewed initially, but two potential participants cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances on the proposed day of interviews.

The interviews were conducted in English and Kinyarwanda. A translator was present at every interview to assist me, an English-speaker, in conducting the interviews. The majority of those interviewed elected for the interview to be done in English. During these interviews, the translator was not utilized unless the participant asked for help understanding a question or explaining an answer. I chose to have the translator with me even in these cases as many of the students I interviewed were still in the process of learning English. Additionally, the names of the government programs I was inquiring about were in Kinyarwanda and participants occasionally had trouble understanding my pronunciation of words such as *gacaca* or *umuganda*.

My translator is a survivor himself. He is involved with or was previously involved with many of the organizations listed above. He was selected because of his familiarity with survivor organization and networks. Additionally, his being a survivor allowed for a greater level of trust and vulnerability on the side of participants regarding sensitive topics.

Interviews took place in quiet restaurants or coffeeshops, with the exception of several interviews that took place in offices or classrooms. The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours. Each interview followed an interview guide that was written in English and translated in Kinyarwanda for those who elected the questions to be in Kinyarwanda. I asked questions about participants' lives before and during 1994, and immediately following the events of 1994, how they remember the events of 1994, how they were taught about the events of 1994, and how they feel living in their community based on their experiences. I asked questions about participants' level of engagement with different instituted programs, including Commemoration, gacaca trials, and umuganda. Umuganda is a community workday held on the last Saturday of every month, where people come together to complete local projects and hear updates on development from local officials (Rwanda Governance Board, 2020). I finished the interviews with questions related to participants' views on levels of reconciliation among Rwandans.⁹

As my thesis seeks to address attitudes toward reconciliation on the side of survivors, I rely heavily on the participants' personal reflections on reconciliation within their community and among survivors and perpetrators. I do not present any data from a non-survivor comparison group. My findings are unique to survivors.

Membership in survivor organizations or networks is not compulsory, although many survivors elect to join these groups to facilitate personal healing of trauma that resulted from the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. Of the 21 participants, 16 were men and five were women. I strove to interview equal numbers of men and women, however, the first point of contact through my snowball sampling was always a man who often referred me to other men. It was only when I

⁹ During the interviews, I did not present a definition of reconciliation to respondents, as part of my study is to determine how young survivors define and view reconciliation. I did not want to bring any preconceived notions of reconciliation from a Western lens into the interviews. Instead, I allowed participants to define reconciliation in their own words and answer questions about reconciliation using their own definition.

insisted on interviewing a woman that I was referred to a woman. This could be due to the patriarchal nature of Rwandan society, but I also noticed that men were much more willing to speak extensively on their experiences.

Participants ages ranged from 21 to 42 years of age, with 13 being born before 1994 and 8 being born during or after 1994. Two of those described as being born before 1994 were born only a year before, meaning they have no memory of the genocide and align more with those born during or after 1994 in terms of findings. Of the 21 participants, 11 are considered to be within the cohort of young survivors, with no personal experiences or memories of genocide violence, and were all 26-years-old or younger at the time of the study. 15 of the participants identified themselves as single, three were married, one was divorced, one was cohabitating but was not formally married, and one preferred not to indicate their marital status. All participants attended school and completed primary, and 19 are working toward or have obtained a bachelor's or master's degree as their highest level of education. This means my sample is highly educated compared to the rest of the population.

My sample being more educated and predominantly male has implications on my findings. The participants I interviewed, because of their level of education, have more opportunity to participate in government-sponsored reconciliation programs, and may also have different perceptions of justice and reconciliation than the average population because of their schooling. Additionally, many of the participants directly benefited from the government and received education through the Fund for the Neediest Survivors (FARG), which could have effects on their attitudes toward reconciliation and government-sponsored programs.

Regarding transmission of trauma, it was assumed that all members of the young cohort had experienced some level of secondhand trauma. This secondhand trauma was transmitted from

parents, other family members, neighbors, and friends, as well as from testimonies at gacaca trials or at Commemoration events. There was no procedure to quantitatively measure the level of secondhand trauma experienced by respondents within the young cohort.

Scholars with knowledge and understanding of both Rwanda's history and the nature of its contemporary politics may be concerned about participants' honesty in discussing the effects of government-sponsored reconciliation programs. I found, however, that most participants in this study readily shared personal opinions on shortcomings, criticisms, and negative consequences of such programs and reconciliation overall in Rwanda. Nevertheless, participants generally had an overall positive view of reconciliation and all related programming that may have been influenced, at least in part, by hesitancy to criticize the government or perpetuate genocide ideology.

To address participants' questions and concerns regarding reprisals and privacy, I stressed to each of them (before the interview during the consent process and throughout the interview) that all information obtained, as well as the results of my study, would be confidential. I confirmed that no personally identifiable information would be included in any work or publications resulting from this study. Consequently, I use pseudonyms throughout this thesis to present direct quotes from participants. Three participants in this study denied consent for audio recording their interviews because of previous experiences where they were filmed without consent. Detailed, handwritten notes were kept during these interviews, and information from these interviews was included in analysis for this study.

All recordings and field notes were transcribed and then coded using NVivo. I reviewed the recordings to determine key themes and then created a coding scheme to be used with all interviews. The codes were broken down into sub-categories, which included general reactions, childhood, during the genocide, after the genocide, and unity and reconciliation.

Findings

In order to assess the attitudes of young survivors, I selected three potential indicators of reconciliation for evaluation of opinions due to their prevalence in the data. All 21 participants had knowledge of and spoke openly about these three indicators, more so than other topics such as the gacaca trials or the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. First, I discuss what many respondents referred to as the simplification of the Commemoration period. While all 21 of the respondents answered that they participated in Commemoration out of a sense of obligation to honor the dead, the cohort of young survivors were generally more accepting of its simplification for the purposes of continued development. Second, I discuss intermarriage between survivors and those of a different background. Again, respondents of all ages agreed that intermarriage happens, although at varying frequencies, but young survivors were less concerned with the opinions of others on whether intermarriage should occur. Finally, I discuss the potential recurrence of violence. With this, the cohort of young survivors were much more confident that there would not be another outbreak of mass violence in Rwanda, attributing this mostly to government programs that ensure an “official history” and continued economic development in the country.

Simplification of Commemoration

Kwibuka, meaning “to remember,” is a 100-day period of honoring and commemorating the victims of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. Also referred to as Commemoration, the period begins with an official holiday on April 7, Genocide Against the Tutsi Memorial Day (Republic of Rwanda, 2020), and concludes on July 4, Liberation Day (Republic of Rwanda, 2020). The national mourning period opens with a national ceremony, with events continuing for the duration of the period on a more localized level within sectors.

As they discussed how Commemoration has changed over time, respondents overwhelmingly suggested that Commemoration has been simplified. Respondents reported that in the early years of Commemoration, events included screenings of dramatized violence or even re-enactments of genocide events, as well as detailed personal testimonies from genocide survivors. Oliver, a 35-year-old male, explained, “There has been a simplification. It used to be very intense, but as you move on, the government is trying to make sure the Commemoration doesn’t affect people’s lives. We used to have people who could be affected for about a month, dealing with trauma.” Respondents indicated that levels of trauma and distrust among Rwandans increased during the Commemoration period. Marie, a 42-year-old female, reported that reconciliation can actually decrease during the Commemoration period, because, “... if we go back to where it happened, for example, or I hear about how you killed my family, everything, I may cancel my reconciliation with you.”

Several respondents reported personally experiencing or witnessing episodes of anxiety or post-traumatic stress at these events. John, a 35-year-old male, answered, “Even myself I’ve experienced [trauma]. When it first happened to me, I was in university... I was listening to somebody giving their testimony, then I fainted.” Additionally, Gloria a 26-year-old female, discussed her first experience at Commemoration:

“I was seven and it was my first time to see people who were crying. Crying very hard. My mother, at the time, cried so much she had flashbacks and fainted from the trauma. That was the last time to go to the Commemoration for my mother until she passed away in 2014. She hadn’t gone back.”

The simplification of Commemoration, based on the responses used in this study, refers to the removal of re-enactments or other visual depictions of violence, as well as the incorporation of testimonies from survivors, perpetrators, and rescuers, and speeches from government officials.¹⁰

In respondents born before the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, with memories of genocidal violence, the simplification of Commemoration was reported to be upsetting and concerning. Moses, a 30-year-old male, explained that,

“We used to spend the day and night. But later, we are going for two hours in the night. We put on candles, testimonies, the speeches of the local leaders. Then in the morning, no more than four hours. Just speeches, one testimony, and you go.”

Other respondents expressed fears that simplification of the Commemoration period undermines the seriousness and devalues the period altogether. Marie responded, “I think today [Commemoration] is getting somehow very simple... the way it is organized, you can see it is not very serious as you want it to be.” One respondent, Damascene, a 36-year-old male, explained that simplifying or shortening Commemoration has worse effects than just devaluation. In his words:

“Some have been criticizing this [simplification], saying the government is encouraging the denial because people don’t meet regularly. Even businessmen used to close their shops, but now they are doing business, and there are foreigners who like to visit.”

Despite their perceived oversimplification, respondents in this age cohort reported feelings of obligation to participate in Commemoration to remember and honor those who were killed.

¹⁰ In her forthcoming book, Dr. Nicky Fox, California State University, Sacramento, notes that those giving testimonies are very intensely screened and purposefully chosen for their simple, non-trauma-inducing narratives. Previously at Commemorations, other people would give testimonies, but they were a lot more traumatic.

Responding to why he participates in Commemoration, Jean, a 29-year-old male said, “Of course. Because that’s mine. It’s my obligation. It’s my spirit.” Additionally, Moses reported that “[he] can’t miss. Not only in my village, all around the country. I make sure that I go as much as I can.”

Most young respondents also reported a feeling of obligation to participate in Commemoration. Gloria explained, “I think it’s a responsibility that I have because even in normal life, when you lose a loved one, you take time to go and lay your flowers and remember them... it places a need, an obligation on me to remember them... I do it because it’s an obligation; it’s a conviction.” Additionally, Eric, a 24-year-old male responded that he participates, “every year April to July. Without any hindrances, without any difficulties. I have to because this is my identity.” Emmanuel, a 28-year-old male, explained, “Commemoration is not a choice for us. [It] is our duty. We have a duty to show respect for those people that perished in the genocide, but as a person, I decided to engage.” Respondents of all ages felt that it was critical for those of the younger generation to participate in Commemoration, to learn from and not repeat the events of the past, and that young survivors are very likely to participate in Commemoration for these reasons. John responded, “People that were involved in the student organization of survivors, you see how they participate in everything, every single Commemoration... young people are most likely to participate.” Omar, a 25-year-old male, also explained that Commemoration is, “to tell and to teach our young generation what has happened in our country, and a good platform to teach the world what happened in our country.”

In respondents born during or after the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, the simplification of Commemoration was reported to be an indicator of progress. Unlike the older respondents, the younger cohort did not express as much concern about the devaluation of the Commemoration period; instead, the younger cohort presented simplification as a necessary step for the country’s

development.¹¹ Paul, a 26-year-old male, explained, “They used to have documentary films about genocide at [Commemoration]... and people would openly insult perpetrators, name them and shame them... it is simplified and [inclusive] now. It is better, people can keep going, keep working.” Eric, a 24-year-old male, explained:

“The trauma at that time caused people not even to go to work. These days, I don’t agree with those people that it has been too much simplified. Maybe if they don’t understand what is stable, but because of this 21st century, the world is moving, we need to develop the nation.”

Several respondents reported that this simplification is only possible because Commemoration has greatly influenced reconciliation; even during the Commemoration period, people are able to go to work or school and interact with those from a different ethnic background. Omar explained, “Now, people have understood [Commemoration], but also have the right to open their shops.” There was insistence that Commemoration and economic development must occur simultaneously, with many reporting that focusing on development shows unity in that it creates a country that is better suited for all Rwandans. As such, respondents suggested that prior Commemoration periods were traumatic to the point that some people were unable to work or attend school during the period. Paul explained, “People would be sitting there, and they are talking, and somebody would just burst into crying or... just start screaming because of a flashback... then they couldn’t work for days or longer because of the flashback.” This cohort of respondents emphasized the importance of remembering while at the same time working,

¹¹ There was one exception in the younger cohort. Gloria explained, “But nowadays, it’s just getting simplified, which actually doesn’t make me happy. It’s more of a lot of decorations and political, but it doesn’t really go down to people’s, it doesn’t touch anybody. Nowadays, it has been simplified so much to the point where it doesn’t make me happy.”

suggesting that creating a period that is less traumatic and allows people to continue their daily lives is beneficial for the country.

Intermarriage

Prior to the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, intermarriage between a Hutu and a Tutsi was rare. Respondents, regardless of age, reported that intermarriage occurs at a much higher rate today than in the past. Most attributed this to the outlawing of ethnicity and the discontinued use of ethnic identity cards. Respondents reported that because no one has an ethnicity, one can find a spouse without ever knowing his or her ethnic background. However, as previously mentioned, the term “survivor” is widely used to describe those of Tutsi background, so it is likely that a person could infer the ethnic background of people self-identifying with this term.

While all respondents indicated an increase in the number of people engaging in intermarriages, several of the older participants admitted they could not marry someone from another background. Oliver explained, “It happens, but it causes more issues. I could not. It causes a lot of difficulties. Even in my family, it once happened, but it didn’t go well.” Additionally, John reported that he could not intermarry because his parents had issues with people from different backgrounds, “so it is very hard to trust them.”

Less than half of respondents, however, suggested that a family member or friend had discouraged them or would discourage them from marrying a person with a different ethnic background because the family member or friend could not forgive or coexist with those who supported genocidal violence. Moses explained:

“If I need to get married, I don’t think I can get married to someone from a perpetrator’s family. It’s not because I hate them, I love them. But I can’t marry

because I have a family that I survived with... how am I sure that my family is ready to receive you?"

Oliver echoed this sentiment and explained further, "[Intermarriage] won't become a norm, the culture, until centuries have gone. It is the whole process of building trust... so people can now feel comfortable and very unified." Additionally, Marie explained:

"I know people who are marrying people from different groups, really a lot. There is no problem with that, just for those people that still have wounds. Like I feel that I cannot let my child marry someone who is Hutu, for example. But people who do that, it is because of what they experienced. People don't forgive at the same level. There are people who forgive quickly. Others who forget, who can't forget."

Those who had been discouraged indicated that did not necessarily mean they would not consider marrying someone with a different ethnic background, but it would make it difficult to do so. Paul responded that while he would be able to marry someone from a different background, intermarriage does not happen as often as it should: "Why? Because we still have our parents. You have to show your boyfriend or girlfriend to your parents... after you are no longer in the company of your girlfriend, she goes, 'why are you marrying a killer?'" Pauline, a 25-year-old female, explained, "10 years ago, it would be very difficult to get married because of family... but now, you can marry whoever you want."

Overall, for younger participants, opinions on marriage from family and friends seemed to carry less weight than it did for older participants. This could be because 19 of the 21 people I interviewed were either working toward their bachelor's degree or had already obtained their bachelor's degree and were either searching or had found a career. In addition, all 11 of the survivors in the young cohort were single, and none of them indicated that they were actively

searching for a spouse. Younger participants were generally more focused on the idea of finding love, regardless of family history or ethnic background. Felix, a 25-year-old male, explained that when a genocide survivor marries a non-survivor, “it looks like Rwanda has total peace... you get peace in the home. We love each other.” Therese, a 22-year-old female, explained, “Love doesn’t care. When love is available, you just marry.” Several suggested that using a person’s ethnic background to determine their suitability for marriage would today be considered genocide ideology. William, a 21-year-old male, explained,

“Today, you cannot see that people are Hutu or Twa or Tutsi. We are all Rwandans.

I think people marry each other regardless of family background, regardless of status. Before 1994, people had identity cards and race; it was mentioned if you are Hutu or Tutsi. Today, you cannot know.”

Recurrence of Violence

At the conclusion of the interview, respondents were asked whether they were concerned about another outbreak of violence in Rwanda. It was clarified that an outbreak of violence did not necessarily mean there would be another genocide but rather mass violence more generally in Rwanda. This could include war, civil war, terror attacks, or any other type of large-scale violence. No participant indicated any fear about the occurrence of another genocide. Despite reporting varying levels of reconciliation in Rwanda, all 21 respondents stated that genocide would never occur again in Rwanda.

While not concerned about genocidal violence, older respondents did vocalize concern about opposition groups that exist in places outside of Rwanda, like in Burundi or the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), that may have backing from countries like France. Marie explained:

“There are those people who left the country, who are missing the country. So, to come back, they will try to convince the world that they didn’t do anything. And you know in politics, some country will join them to help them to come back. And they saw how RPF come back. Who knew that they would come back one day after 30 years? It can happen.”

John explained, “They are everywhere; they are in Uganda, DRC, even in Europe. The former army of Rwanda, FDR, those guys are wanted for their crimes.” Respondents acknowledged the existence of groups in opposition to the current government of Rwanda, citing there is a history of conflict at Rwanda’s borders and invasion from neighboring countries.

Unlike older respondents, none of the young respondents worried about violence coming from inside or outside of Rwanda. This cohort used a greater amount of government language, like “We are all Rwandans,” or “Never again,” echoing the phrases used by officials giving speeches, at museums, and in schools. When asked about fears of a reoccurrence of mass violence in Rwanda, 8 of the 11 participants in the younger cohort quoted specific government language. Omar explained, “Never again... we have good leaders... and our generation, we are strong.” David, a 25-year-old male, responded, “99% no, never again. But 1% yes. Because we are human.” William answered, “Never again... I think Rwandans today, and even tomorrow, they are able to do something good together.”

Additionally, similar to discussions on intermarriage, young respondents placed greater importance on development and its effects on Rwanda. Simply, Rwandans today are focused on developing the country, improving its economy and the lives of its people. Progress cannot happen when the citizens of Rwanda are not working together; the destruction of infrastructure and absence of a strong economy in the post-genocide period exemplified that. Emmanuel explained,

“Genocide can never happen without being sponsored by the State... we can really be sure that we shouldn’t expect such a scenario because the government... is embarking on improving the lives of people and developing Rwanda to another level.” Additionally, Juventine, a 23-year-old female, reported, “The [government] policies in place are very effective... Rwanda is for sure developing but the development will be even more.” This removes the possibility for large-scale violence, as all Rwandans focus on similarities among people and a common goal for the country.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the cohort of young genocide survivors may have more positive attitudes toward justice and reconciliation than their older counterparts. Young survivors born immediately before, during, or after the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi explained that Rwanda is and will continue to become a better, more developed country for its citizens because of the reconciliation they perceive to have taken place.

To young survivors, what they described as a simplification of Commemoration is a necessary step in progressing toward a more developed Rwanda. The reduction of trauma during this period in order to facilitate everyday business seems to be of high importance to this cohort. This appears to indicate not only high levels of perceived reconciliation among young survivors but suggests that remembrance has become ingrained in aspects of daily life. It is important to note that the young survivors interviewed in this study were selected by way of involvement with survivor organizations and associations, so they are likely to engage with government-sponsored reconciliation programs and activities more so than the general population. Their perceived willingness to incorporate Commemoration into their everyday lives and positive attitudes toward Commemoration could be because of their involvement in such organizations – further research is needed to draw broader conclusions about survivor attitudes outside of these organizations. The

cohort of young survivors actively choose to discuss the events of 1994 regularly among their respective associations, especially within the Genocide Survivors Student Association, which is available only to those who attend university.

Additionally, intermarriage may be becoming more culturally appropriate, particularly among young survivors, providing evidence of their positive attitudes toward reconciliation. The young cohort was generally more willing to not only engage in intermarriage but support their peers in pursuing relationships with people from different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds. In accordance with existing studies, this could indicate high levels of reconciliation among young survivors and more positive attitudes toward people considered to be “other.” This may just be because there is higher agreeability bias among this young cohort. Another factor that could influence this outcome is that most of the young survivors I interviewed were either in university or had just graduated university, meaning they lived with other people their age and not with their parents or another relative. Seeing as respondents of all ages indicated that family opinion is influential when it comes to intermarriage, the fact that students tend to not live with their family, but instead with other people their age, could explain why this young cohort has more positive attitudes toward intermarriage.

Lastly, the cohort of young genocide survivors had positive attitudes toward the level of reconciliation, in that they were confident that mass violence would not occur again in Rwanda. This does not necessarily indicate that there has been less transmission or experience of trauma but could underscore that importance and power of the “official history” put forward by the government. The use of government phrases, like “We are all Rwandans,” or “Never again,” indicates a deep sense of nationalism and trust toward the State. While all of the respondents had generally positive attitudes toward the government’s initiatives to achieve reconciliation, young

survivors were more inclined to praise the government's work and confidently claim that another outbreak of mass violence will not occur in Rwanda because of strong government leadership.

My research builds on existing evidence that intergenerational trauma can have effects on attitudes toward reconciliation. Additionally, it supports the existing literature that finds that lower levels of experienced posttraumatic stress produce greater willingness to reconcile (Eichorn et. al., 2015), (Ng et. al. 2017) and, generally, more positive attitudes toward reconciliation in Rwanda (Pham et. al., 2004). This study adds information about Rwanda specifically, which is helpful in understanding the efficacy of their reconciliation programming and use of a strict "official history" (Clark, 2010) of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi.

As previously mentioned, the participants in this study are highly educated compared to the general population. This limits the generalizability of the results, as education can have impacts on perceptions of reconciliation and knowledge of government programs. Further research is needed to establish the broader scope of attitudes toward reconciliation among young survivors, particularly those who do not have access to education or are living below the poverty line. Without access to education or a stable source of income, young survivors may be less willing to reconcile with non-survivors, to whom they may attribute some of their hardships. Additionally, young survivors unable to attain education may not have access or understanding of government programs or may focus more on meeting basic needs than engaging with dialogue on reconciliation. This means that the educated nature of the sample could produce more positive attitudes toward reconciliation than would be observed in the general population.

Women were underrepresented in this study, and all of the women in the sample were educated. This also limits the generalizability of the results, as experience of trauma and perception of justice and reconciliation is likely to be different among women and men. Additionally, after

the genocide, many cooperatives were created to help women whose husbands were killed or imprisoned after the genocide. A study done in 2019 on maize agricultural cooperatives in Rwanda showed that women cooperative members have higher levels of trust in the Rwandan government (Meader & O'Brien, 2019), which likely impacts their attitudes toward reconciliation in general. Further research is needed to assess the impact of this type of reconciliation programming among female survivors, as it is likely that the nature of these cooperatives could have effects on the women that participate in them, which were not captured in this study.

Young survivors support the simplification of Commemoration for the sake of development and marriage between people of differing backgrounds, and confidently believe that mass violence, and particularly genocide, will not occur again in Rwanda. Based on these findings, I conclude that young survivors have positive attitudes toward justice and reconciliation in Rwanda, more so than those who have experienced trauma firsthand.

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