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A Place for Individuals: Positive Growth in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the Rwandan Stories of Change research project, and uses data collected jointly with the Aegis Trust to argue for the value of in-depth studies on individual Rwandans' positive growth. It seeks to explore the place of individual growth in discussions of post-genocide Rwanda by examining the communitarian culture and policies of present day Rwanda. The article uses discourse analysis of a sample of testimonies to analyse indicators of individual growth alongside an assessment of collective resources (political, cultural and therapeutic) to ensure the broader cultural context of growth is attended to. The article investigates what connections might be found between community reconciliation processes and individual growth, and seeks to question how the two are related. Finally, the article argues that though individual stories are more difficult to locate and articulate, efforts must be made to facilitate their dissemination in order to provide a comprehensive, forward-looking discourse of post-genocide adaptation.

KEYWORDS posttraumatic growth; Rwanda; genocide; testimony; individual; community

Introduction

Should remembrance culture only be retrospective? Can trauma studies account for positive growth? Are Western models of analysis useful in postcolonial contexts? These are some of the question I seek to answer in this article, which explores the place of individual growth in post-genocide culture by contextualising a research project on posttraumatic growth in the communitarian culture and policies of present day Rwanda. Where a focus on individuals has in trauma studies been criticised for its Eurocentric bias (Craps 2015, 4), and viewed as less relevant to non-Western cultures, I argue that such a focus is both relevant and productive in the Rwandan context. Individual stories may be more difficult to find and hear in the reconciliation-driven context of Rwanda, but research

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using individual testimonies can help draw attention to personal adjustments, both social and psychological. Further, this article probes what connections might be found *between* community reconciliation processes and individual growth, and seeks to question how the two are related. I also consider the culture of Rwandan remembrance, and suggest that individual stories can provide a helpfully forward-looking perspective amidst important retrospective narratives. The usefulness of various terms surrounding growth, healing, and resilience are discussed.

In this article I seek to apply a framework from Euro-American positive psychology, to testimonies from a postcolonial sub-Saharan African setting, and analyse the relevant terms to ensure they are culturally-sensitive, relevant and applicable to the Rwandan context. In doing so, I aim to reconcile certain tensions, namely between individuals and groups, and looking backwards and moving forwards, as pertains to survivors of genocide living in Rwanda today. As Lisa Hoshmand suggests, there is a need for both contextualisation and balance, 'the need at this time is for clinicians and researchers to find culturally sensitive and ecologically valid instruments designed for the assessment of both trauma and resilience' (2007, 42). In addition, Erin Jessee affirms that the narratives being produced by Rwandans today 'require substantial contextualisation to reveal their deeper meaning for how Rwandans make sense of their post-genocide lives' (2017, 14). In light of such recommendations, this article incorporates analyses of individual testimonies alongside an assessment of collective resources to ensure the broader cultural context of growth is attended to.

I include below an introduction to the Rwandan Stories of Change research project, and use data collected jointly with the Aegis Trust to argue for the value of in-depth studies on growth in individual Rwandans. The present study draws on 20 translated oral testimonies, originally conducted and recorded in Kinyarwanda. These were collected by the Aegis Trust as semi-structured interviews which vary in length due to the flexibility in questions and answers; all of them were collected between 2014 and 2016. This selection includes 10 one-to-one interviews with survivors and perpetrators about the genocide, peace and peace education, and 10 group interviews with members of unity and reconciliation associations. The article makes a case for studies which are rightly contextualised and culturally sensitive, which also bring a rare focus on individuals to processes of reconciliation and growth in a community-focused Rwanda.

Rwandan Stories of Change

'Rwandan Stories of Change' is a 39-month research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and based at the University of St Andrews in Scotland.¹ The project aims to investigate the ways in which individual Rwandan people have adjusted and reconstructed their identity in the years since the genocide. We aim to gain a comprehensive, qualitative understanding of the impact of the genocide with a particular focus on the expression of posttraumatic growth. The project seeks to translate, analyse and publish testimonies of positive change, both social and psychological, from Rwanda over the last 23 years.

In 1994, between April and July, up to one million Rwandan people were brutally killed in what is officially known as the Genocide against the Tutsi. Following an attack on the plane carrying then-president Juvénal Habyarimana on 6 April, a large-scale hate campaign saw three months of mass violence which had catastrophic consequences for Rwandan people. Thousands of Rwandans were killed and others exiled, and the political and cultural fabric of the country was destroyed.

The Rwandan Stories of Change project addresses the impact of the genocide on individuals, and highlights the importance of stories in their lives. We partner with the Aegis Trust, an international NGO working to prevent genocide through a series of educational and research programmes. An important part of their programme is the opportunity to hear from survivors, learning from their experiences of the past.

To contribute to the impact of their various programmes, Aegis has established the Genocide Archive of Rwanda as a unified repository for all information relating to the 1994 genocide. It contains documentaries, photographs, TV and radio broadcasts, interactive maps, and an extensive archive of testimonies. These testimonies, which have been shared by survivors and perpetrators of the genocide, provide the main corpus for our research and an essential resource for the focus on individual growth which is necessary in Rwanda. Through our project, we seek to give individual Rwandans the opportunity to express their own stories to a wide readership by transcribing the video testimonies and translating them into English, thus increasing their accessibility to global readers. Attention to accurate and careful translation allows Rwandans to be heard in their own words, and follows Lala et al. (2014) who emphasise the importance of a sense of ownership when sharing stories with the international community.

Posttraumatic growth

In our project, we then draw out and compare different experiences of psychological and social adjustment, using a framework of posttraumatic growth to carry out our analysis. Posttraumatic growth refers to the positive changes individuals may experience in spite of the pain, loss and distress they have endured through traumatic circumstances. During the genocide in Rwanda, about $\frac{1}{7}$ of the population was killed, 2.5 million people were exiled, and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the children lost either one or both of their parents.² It is estimated that 80% of the population was exposed to some form of traumatic experience (Munyandamutsa et al. 2009, 24). Posttraumatic growth *does not* deny or diminish the negative effects of such experiences. Nor does it ignore the presence of posttraumatic stress disorder. Rather, posttraumatic growth acknowledges the presence of positive changes that individuals may experience *despite* those negative effects. The construct can be broadly defined as the degree to which an individual believes he or she has grown and developed as a person as a result of struggling with trauma or crisis (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). This is one element of personality growth within broader psychological adjustment, as Blackie et al. have explored (2017). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory assesses positive outcomes in reports from people who have experienced traumatic events, and this includes change in areas such as: sense of new possibilities, spiritual change, ability to relate to others, an enhanced sense of personal strength and an enhanced appreciation of life. Where negative changes have received extensive attention, John Wilson (2006) observes that research on posttraumatic stress disorder is skewed away from human growth, self-transformation, resilience and optimal functioning; these areas require further examination.

In general we are interested in how theories of posttraumatic growth can be applied to sub-Saharan African contexts, and, in particular, how 'personal strength' and 'relating to others' might be helpful as we account for positive change in post-genocide Rwanda. Where previous work has addressed the impact of supportive and unsupportive environments (Blackie et al. 2016), specific sociocultural influences have not been explored. Psychologists such as Peterson and Seligman have shown that needs for personal growth are overwhelmingly connected to external factors, where 'almost all of the positive traits ... reach outside the individual' (2004, 519), but literature on sociocultural considerations for posttraumatic growth has not been extended to sub-Saharan African

contexts (Weiss and Berger 2010). In the aforementioned volume, Matthew Friedman argues that 'the transformative power of traumatic events to alter personal and collective trajectories is universal' (2007, v), but we need to explore how such alterations are reported and understood in specific, non-Western contexts.

In their 'Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma novels', Stef Craps and Gert Buelens rightly outline the dangers of mislaying Western constructs onto the likely radically different experiences of African postcolonial subjects. They advocate an ethical engagement that uses critical methodologies which emerge from non-Euro-American contexts (2008, 2). However, in such engagement, there is a place for using properly adapted and contextualised Euro-American frameworks to introduce a wider or different focus. When such models are applied in a culturally-sensitive way, and used to read Rwandans' testimonies in their own words, there is much to learn. Indeed, the models themselves are improved when adapted with the nuance and specificity required in their cross-cultural application. What is more, in a Rwandan context which is saturated with cross-cultural engagement (due to the collaborative nature of organisations such as Aegis Trust, and the ongoing presence of international organisations and business investment over the past twenty years), it makes sense to combine approaches. It is less a case of undermining 'the centrality of Western knowledge with the assertion of localised modes of belief and understanding' (Craps and Buelens 2008, 5), but rather of potential adaption, mutually, of context and framework. By contextualising the model of posttraumatic growth in a Rwandan context we shed light on a potential blind spot – that of individual change – in the community-focused context of post-genocide culture, including the specific practices and policies which surround remembrance and reconciliation. Simultaneously, the points of analysis set out in the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory are adapted by their culturally-sensitive application to communitarian Rwanda.

Individuals

The Genocide Archive of Rwanda has established a database of over 100 interviews which provide testimonies from survivors, perpetrators, elders, rescuers, success stories and others. This demonstrates the importance that the Aegis Trust places on using individual stories to raise awareness, in Rwanda and internationally, of what people experienced during the genocide. The benefits of testimonies are also linked back to those who

share their stories, since contributing to the wider project of awareness-raising and peacebuilding enables survivors to become educators, thus increasing agency and a sense of empowerment. As was reported in a pilot project for 'Messages of Hope' (a project designed to record and transmit stories from everyday Rwandans), sharing positive stories more generally builds hope since the givers of testimonies, which are later shared, experience an increased sense of empowerment (Lala et al. 2014, 463). As one speaker explained in her testimony from a unity and reconciliation group: 'For me, they know my testimony. My journey was long and sharing it has freed me. It also gave me hope to live and to see that my life goes on.'

The uniqueness of our project comes in its aims to assess this kind of positive change in *individuals*, but as is already evident, this does not happen independently of cultural context. This is one reason for using the term 'growth', which has more wide-ranging and dynamic connotations than 'healing'. As Phil Clark argues, it is questionable whether it is even valid to discuss 'resolving' or 'curing' people's trauma after conflict, since survivors will live forever with the emotional and psychological impact of the genocide (2010, 274). In Rwanda, where posttraumatic adaptation is happening on a wide scale, it is important to use terms which are broad enough to refer to different kinds of adjustment (not just physical or psychological). Additionally, 'growth' suggests moving forwards rather than 'returning to normal' which, as Wilson highlights in the post-genocide contexts of Rwanda and Bosnia, obscures both the extent of irreparable damage on a mass scale and the incongruence between seeming 'normal' externally, but bearing horrific inner scars (Wilson 2006, 450).

Of course there is also the risk, with a focus on individuals, of neglecting the wider historical and cultural context, both of trauma and its aftermath. This article, via its survey of Rwanda's communitarian culture, aims to avoid that potentially reductive shift. While it is not within the scope of this article to assess the historical conditions which preceded the genocide in 1994, my discussion of remembrance culture will give an indication of that wider context. Another criticism levelled at individualising models is that they are often depoliticising (Craps and Buelens 2008). It can be argued that 'by narrowly focusing on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse, such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination' (Craps 2015, 28). In the case of testimonies gathered for this project, I would argue that the highly politicised nature of the genocide means

each of the individual stories is unequivocally politicised. The scope of *Rwandan Stories of Change* remains geared towards analysis of psychological and social change, albeit contextualised in the cultural climate of Rwanda today. That said, such warnings *are* helpful in underlining the importance of avoiding ‘a curiously depoliticised conception of “bearing witness” as an individual process of working through the traumatic aftermath of an event rather than a collective contest over public configurations of space, place, and memory’ (Graham 2008, 143). I return to these collective dynamics of stories and memory below.

In post-genocide Rwanda, the stigma of psychological instability, which sometimes accompanies survivors, can be combatted with evidence of their positive adjustments. Rather than being considered an impediment to the forward movement of Rwanda, they can be reconsidered as contributing to that development with their own personal growth. It can be difficult to locate these stories of individual growth for a number of reasons, not least the dominance of communitarian ideas of culture which are upheld both by adhering to tradition and via the particular set of social policies put in place by the Rwandan government. I turn now to explore this cultural context and its implications for the model of posttraumatic growth, before returning to the place for individual narratives that exists and can be developed therein.

Cultural context

In his recent edited collection, Serban Ionescu writes that, ‘though resilience is a universal process, the ways it is built and displayed are coloured by the cultural environment of those who experience adversity. The study of resilience processes cannot be taken further without attending to this environment’ (2016, 5, my translation). In other words, we need to ask what cultural values underlie approaches to recovery from trauma, and how Rwandans understand ‘growth’. As Wilson puts it, ‘how does the culture view “trauma” and employ methods to facilitate healthy forms of posttraumatic adaptation?’ (2007, 17).

In Rwanda, the influence of a strongly collective or communitarian culture must not be underestimated. Rwandans are community-oriented people, and this is visible in social customs and family life, where interpersonal relations are the pillar of community life (Adekunle 2007, 115–16); but all the more so within the reconstruction of social narratives which has occurred since the genocide. Following violence of such a mass scale, trauma is experienced *en masse*, and subsequently experiences of

growth and resilience are also understood in that collective context. 'It is clear that Western conceptual and clinical approaches that focus primarily on individual psychopathology must be expanded to incorporate collective cultural, psychosocial, and historical considerations,' hence we must pay attention to the collective discursive contexts of memory, reconciliation and healing (Friedman, in Wilson et al. 2007, vi).

The terms we use are therefore particularly important. I have already suggested that 'growth' is preferable for the way it suggests both an ongoing process and its interaction with other processes and other people. Since traumatic events and psychosocial adaptation in their aftermath are not only individual, but also collective, spatial and material, 'growth' seems the most appropriate term to incorporate each of these possibilities. Attending to the collective dynamics of a post-genocide culture, it seems more relevant to describe growth in individuals and groups than 'healing', for example, which is difficult to articulate and to measure when violence happened on such a massive scale and since traumatic stressors are multi-dimensional in nature (Wilson 2006, 4). Equally, we have to be wary of the dangers of the term 'healing', as well as 'posttraumatic', suggesting some kind of end to the consequences of traumatic experience. The nature of people's pain and their feelings of loss are not only immense but highly complex (Clark 2010, 274). 'Growth' does not exclude the possibility of ongoing distress and pain, and also suggests an ongoing process which, like 'resilience', is forward-looking, and thus concerned with education, awareness-raising and prevention in a way that 'healing' isn't necessarily. In terms of groups and communities, assessing whether people can 'heal collectively' is extremely complex, since reconciliation can occur on multiple levels: 'Les gens vivent ensemble sans vivre ensemble' ('people live together without living together'), as Naasson Munyandamutsa describes (Sabah 2004). As has been seen with communities where genocide perpetrators and survivors now live together, they *can* overcome avoidance, increase their interactions, and also move beyond functional interaction (NAR 2015, 32). This might more helpfully be called 'societal cohesion',³ and below I explore how this might provide a context or source for individual growth.

How people describe these processes, as well as how they make sense of them, will depend on the individuals' location in cultures shaped by specific belief systems.

Humans in general have an inherent need to make sense out of and explain their experiences. This is especially true when they are experiencing suffering and

illness. In the process of this quest for meaning, culturally shaped beliefs play a vital role in determining whether a particular explanation and associated treatment plan will make sense to the patient ... These beliefs and practices exert profound influences in patients' attitudes and behaviour [sic] (Smith, cited in Wilson 2007, 4).

Understandings of healing and growth will be inflected by clinical practices, as well as cultural and religious traditions. In Rwanda, a large percentage of the population are Christian, and notions of healing, as well as forgiveness and reconciliation, are undoubtedly understood in terms of Christian beliefs. Clark has discussed the importance of Christian theology, namely its principles of mercy, grace, redemption and atonement, for interpretations of the gacaca trials (2010, 257–306). As Wilson states, 'the spiritual transformation that occurs in the posttraumatic self is intimately related to core questions of identity, the conceptualisation of the self, and the capacity to create meaning in the wake of life's most disturbing episodes as a human being,' (2006, 25). It would be interesting to assess how narratives of community and self are understood within the specific context of church congregations, in particular how any sense of individual spiritual growth is understood alongside, apart from, or within the practices and relationships of a religious community. Whilst admitting that these are inevitably linked, for now this discussion will focus on Rwandan cultural expectations which are shaped by a number of government initiatives.

Ndi Umunyarwanda

'Ndi Umunyarwanda', which means, 'I am Rwandan', is an overarching programme designed to build a national identity based on trust and dignity. The programme was introduced in 2013 and aims to foster a strong sense of national community, belonging and ownership. This government initiative is spread through talks and education programmes, and is described as aiming to strengthen solidarity between Rwandan people. But critics of the policy highlight the lack of ambiguity in the government's narrative of the genocide, which risks reinforcing divisions in society rather than strengthening unity.⁴ Where the government has been criticised for generalisations surrounding ethnicity and identity after the genocide (Burnet 2012), individual accounts can provide much needed nuance. In light of its widespread presence, 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' must be considered as a significant feature of the discursive background to any individual sense of self. Though 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' is singular grammatically, it

places the individual's selfhood ('Ndi' means 'I am') first and foremost in a collective national identity. The prominence of this national narrative goes some way to explain the relative infrequency of other individual statements of identity in our corpus of testimonies (beyond 'I am' + occupation).

Largely the 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' programme is concerned with what it means to be Rwandan, which raises the question of what sets of expectations the culture possesses, both in terms of identity narratives and in resilience and coping after the genocide. Although the programme has had a mixed reception (Mbaraga 2013), it brings potential benefit for individual Rwandans. In an international study examining intervention principles for treatment after mass violence or trauma, Hobfoll et al. argue that hope plays a central role in recovery after trauma, suggesting that hopefulness for the future is critical to favourable recovery outcomes. This was found to be the case with an action-oriented sense of hope and with hope based on beliefs in a higher power (2007, 299). Hope was found to be a master theme in previous analysis of testimonies from survivors of the genocide in Rwanda (Blackie et al. 2017). It could be argued that the presence of the 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' campaign increases hopefulness for the future in general, and enables Rwandans to think more positively about their individual lives within the nation's future. There is personal hope (for self) and interpersonal hope (for others), sub-group hope (for minority group), and superordinate hope (for the Rwandan nation), and all of these are interlinked. What is more, as Lala et al. (2014) illustrate, different cultural systems understand certain concepts in interrelated ways. For example, the Kinyarwanda word 'icyizere' translates as 'hope and trust' (Lala et al. 2014, 452). Therefore this kind of hope is necessarily more than individual, since it is always linked to others, or to something else in which trust can be placed. In post-genocide Rwanda, it is not the case that individuals are an irrelevant category, but rather that they are always understood as related to a collective (here, Rwandanness but elsewhere, family or other survivors). This is a specifically Rwandan articulation of a more general tendency for how community processes interface with individual hope. In Seligman and colleagues' learned optimism and positive psychology model, the media, schools and universities, and community leaders can enhance hope by encouraging a focus on positive goals, building strengths (as individuals and communities), and helping people tell their story (Seligman et al. 2005). Evidence of individual growth should be examined alongside an evaluation of group interventions in order to assess their relatedness.

Individual testimonies about activities within the unity and reconciliation groups are one example.

Examining the testimonies of survivors and perpetrators there is a notably higher occurrence of discussions of collective action and feeling (we did this, we feel this, they are here) than individual. This is the case generally, but also in the specific cases of perpetrator testimonies, where one might expect a more defined sense of autonomy (following the admission of genocide crimes); it appears that collective identity is the starting point for a retrospective narrative. In one interview, a perpetrator describes his actions during the genocide, then his time in prison, and his life since being released. At every stage of the testimony, he first narrates in the first-person plural 'we were good neighbours'; 'we were staying there'; 'we were tried'. When asked explicit questions about his 'personal' contribution (in Kinyarwanda, 'wowe', meaning 'as you yourself', or 'personally'), he is more forthcoming with first-person singular narration, and uses 'njyewe' ('I personally') a number of times ('I personally killed three people'; 'I asked them to forgive me'). This tendency indicates the community-based cultural context of Rwanda, as well as the predominance of group activity during the genocide, where autonomous decision-making was made more difficult by peer pressure (and accompanying threats to life and safety). Articulating a sense of individual identity or independent action does not come naturally for the testimony-giver but, when pressed, he does so a number of times. This indicates that more work can be done in interview and therapeutic settings to help speakers articulate individual identity and action.

Within the government's policy of national unity and reconciliation, a large number of local associations have been established. Many local grassroots organisations have started their own groups where meetings take place, training is given and opportunities for practical projects (such as building houses and planting crops) are discussed. The initiative has led to, among other things, a theatre competition with prizes for educational plays about the value of unity and reconciliation. The group meetings allow individuals to share stories, and provide contexts for seeing hopeful progress in others. There is the danger, in the government's strong emphasis on unity, that individual differences become diluted and that togetherness is understood as 'being the same', as in this extract from a testimony: Nyuma yo kumva no gusobanukirwa ko **buri muntu wese ari nkundi** ('After learning the lesson that **every person is the same**'). But the same principle of unity can also benefit individuals in terms of posttraumatic growth, since hearing about others' positive

change could lead to a greater sense of personal strength, through empathy and imagining similar change for oneself. Indeed, when the concept of 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' is enacted within these groups, then a sense of connectedness with fellow Rwandans may contribute to growth in individuals. As described in another testimony, in reference merely to the relationships within the group, 'those with little strength' are described as having their strength increased.

Other initiatives

Beneath the umbrella of 'Ndi Umunyarwanda', the Rwandan government has implemented a series of policies and initiatives which foster unity and reconciliation. Each of them, in the investment they demand, and in their practical outworkings, is collective, and thus leaves a need for greater focus on individuals. They include judicial, social and economic policies such as Ubudehe, a kind of problem-solving forum for effective community development, and the Umuganura Festival, where Rwandans from all social backgrounds gather to celebrate the year's achievements in terms of agriculture, health, education and more.⁵

The gacaca trials provide another example of the communitarian backbone of these initiatives. The gacaca community courts used a traditional court system in local contexts to give opportunities for survivors to learn the truth about the death of their relatives and/or perpetrators to confess their crimes and seek forgiveness. Though gacaca (like 'Ndi Umunyarwanda') is not without criticism (*ibid*), when thinking about the relationship between collective processes of reconciliation and individual processes of posttraumatic growth, the gacaca trials are an interesting example. Not only did the processes aim to involve the entire population in post-genocide justice and reconciliation, but also to increase healing through the trials. In its aims to rebuild lives after genocide, the Rwandan population argued that gacaca should take a holistic approach in which individual and communal issues would be seen as symbiotically related (Clark 2010, 257). Clark distinguishes two types of healing in the context of the gacaca trials: 'healing as liberation', where an individual discovers a sense of inner freedom from psychological and emotional turmoil, and 'healing as belonging', where an individual seeks greater psychological and emotional wholeness through reconnecting with their community (2010, 258). These in turn can be seen to overlap with the effects of posttraumatic growth introduced above, namely 'personal strength' and 'relating to others'. Neither of these can be extricated

from the public, group processes which made up the gacaca trials: communal acknowledgement, acceptance and active engagement with the community all contributed to these experiences of growth and/or healing (Clark 2010, 259). These can reduce a sense of isolation in individuals' suffering and can increase awareness of others empathising with them, though this is not straightforward given the parallel risks of further trauma for participants. Some survivors report that the storytelling allowed by gacaca contributed to their sense of reintegration into the community, and helped them to overcome feelings of social dislocation (Clark 2010, 262). However, this is by no means universal, and other survivors report feeling anger, despair, and isolation through the trials (Africa Rights and Redress 2008, 5–6). Additionally, Rimé et al. report that prisoners who participated in the gacaca courts manifested a decrease in indices of PTSD afterwards, unlike those who had not participated (2011, 703). Thus we suggest that individual change may occur in parallel to formalised reconciliation or, at least, that it can be enhanced by participating in it. But also, it may be the case that group reconciliation is dependent on individuals changing as a prerequisite.

Other initiatives introduced after the genocide are similarly based on traditional Rwandan, pre-colonial community practices yet extend their benefit to individuals. One example is Umushyikirano, which is an annual event bringing together local councils and community members in a 'national dialogue council'. This has been democratised and modernised in recent years to include social media and phone-in participation as groups discuss national political questions. In the social sector, Girinka munyarwanda is based on a traditional friendship pact whereby a family in dire need is given a cow by neighbours in the community. Families facing financial difficulty are each given one cow, and more than 198,000 beneficiaries have received cows since the programme was launched in 2006 (Girinka 2017).

Where individual participation is valued, not one of these solutions promotes the individual's wellbeing, or foregrounds the articulation of an individual identity above that of the group. These governmental, legal, social and economic frameworks have been systematically implemented to foster not only reconciliation, but ongoing accountability and an increased sense of 'Rwandanness'. Evidence from the testimonies aligns with this focus, placing 'positive growth' in community terms. For example, one phrase which appears relatively frequently in the testimonies is 'gutera imbere', which means 'advancing' or 'developing'. 'Ntabwo twavuganaga, icyo ni ikintu cyahubwo kerekana ko Asosiyasiyo yacu imaze

gutera imbere.' Here the speaker is talking about the reconciliation experienced in a unity and reconciliation group; she says that previously people in the group (including those who'd burnt down her house and stolen her possessions) did not talk to each other but now they do, and that the association is progressing or moving forwards. In another testimony, a speaker uses the same phrase to describe getting training to help their association move forwards; she says, 'Rwanda is leading its people towards development.' Within the development of these associations, it is likely that individuals will experience personal growth, but this is only sometimes vocalised. Whereas Breed outlines a number of hidden narratives which exist in contrast to government-driven frameworks for remembering the genocide and enacting justice (2014, 41), we also draw attention to the hidden narratives of individuals' growth, which could run parallel to and even enhance state-driven processes of reconciliation.⁶

Another phrase which recurs is 'hari aho navuye naho nageze', which literally translates as 'moving from here to there'. In this passage, the prefix 'tu' (underlined) indicates a first person plural verb: 'Ikintu mbona itsinda rimaze kutugezaho, nuko **hari aho tumaze kuva n'aho tugeze** ubu ... Ariko mu by'ukuri tubona **hari aho twavuye n'aho tugeze.**' This translates as, 'we have moved on from where we were ... we have truly moved on (thanks to the association)', grouping the individual alongside others in the context of an association whose members are moving forwards together. In another testimony, the speaker uses the same phrase to describe an increase in enthusiasm for attending group meetings: 'there are things she told us that made you feel like your heart has taken a step forward'.

It is worth underlining the use of subjects in these examples: not one of these expressions is made in the first person singular. These particular interviews are about groups set up in the government's unity and reconciliation programmes, so the gesturing to groups and the help of others is not surprising. But from what we have seen more widely too, individuals do not tend to describe their experiences in terms that are separate from collective action and identity. This puts a question mark over whether we can measure posttraumatic growth in the two distinct domains of 'personal strength' and 'relating to others', and whether in the Rwandan context, more needs to be done to facilitate articulating individual growth.

This can happen via therapeutic processes. In terms of mental health care, there are local and national initiatives which provide clinical and psychosocial services in counselling and therapy. These forms of social and

emotional support for those experiencing posttraumatic adaptation are most commonly group interventions (NAR 2015, 26). Janoff-Bulman argues that the 'restorative efforts of survivors to rebuild a valid and comfortable assumptive world are always embedded within the larger context of social relationships' (1992, 143), and the group approach places an emphasis on sharing testimonies in a non-judgemental, accepting and confidential environment (NAR 2015, 27). The community approach gathers together a more diverse group of people, and concentrates on dialogue around potential problems being faced in the community (NAR 2015, 31). Beyond the importance of building hope, which I mentioned above, these interventions can also lead to a reduction of stigma and an increase in wellbeing. The affirmation of being listened to and accepted can be restorative for the individual sharing; and for those listening, a greater sense of agency and solidarity can emerge from contributing to that individual's wellbeing. Two speakers shared this apt Rwandan proverb in their testimonies: 'Inkingi imwe ntigira inzu', which translates as, 'One wall cannot support a house'.

The initiatives outlined here give an indication of the communitarian emphasis in Rwandan culture, drawing on traditional practices and prioritising narratives of national solidarity. It is clear that all the stories examined in the Rwandan Stories of Change project, which are told by individuals, are also emerging from a cultural context which is deliberately unifying and actively communitarian. My observation is that such concerted efforts towards peacebuilding and unity and reconciliation, particularly over the past 23 years, sustain a culture more interested in *collective accountability* than *individual accounts*. This means that more space needs to be created for individual stories to be shared: not to be read either as autonomous from others or depoliticised, but understood in the communitarian context of Rwanda today.

A place for individuals

One way that space can be created for individual articulations of growth is through sharing stories. Since it cannot be assumed that Western therapeutic techniques (especially an over-reliance on verbal self-reports) can be directly applied to non-Western cultures (Wilson 2007, 22), creative thought must be applied to culturally-sensitive forms of processing. As discussed above, there is a place for using Euro-American methodologies, as long as they are adapted and contextualised appropriately. One way of adapting them for wider application is to use a range of narrative forms

for articulating and assessing posttraumatic adaptation. This is where storytelling, in a broad sense, can play a role.

In the interviews and testimonies from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda there are indicators of positive growth. One challenge is finding these self-reflexive traces amidst a lot of other information (whether about events in 1994 or lots of detail about geography). Another challenge comes in the translation process, where repeated phrases in Kinyarwanda, and complex, lengthy sentences, might make descriptions of positive change harder to find. It might then be interesting to assess different forms of storytelling for evidence, and indeed to see the capacity for forming narrative in itself as one of the 'new possibilities' which can indicate posttraumatic growth. Having a sense of one's own life in the form of a story not only helps to ground one's goals for the future, but forms an integral part of one's identity (McAdams 2001, 108–110).

Indeed, if a unified national identity ('Ndi Umunyarwanda') is the most prominent vehicle for reconciliation, then where might we look for articulations of individual growth? In order to draw out and tell individual stories, we need to look to a range of genres, for instance individual testimonies, as well as autobiographies or works of fiction. Projects encouraging creative writing in Rwanda, such as the Jalada literary and arts festival, are to be encouraged. Within and around the reconciliation policies implemented by the Rwandan government, there is scope for individual stories to be used and shared effectively.

In addition there is a need to address the collective complexity of remembering and living with trauma. Just as experiences of trauma are person-specific, so are processes of posttraumatic adaptation and recovery. One danger of such dominant national narratives is that this specificity and complexity remains under-acknowledged and under-articulated. The importance of online and accessible stories cannot be overstated, and the work of the Aegis Trust in digitising their archive works to ensure archive users will be able to access individual accounts more easily. Our project aims to contribute to this by translating and publishing further testimonies.

Another point to note is the cohesive potential of cultural production. In contexts where the security of the entire society has been threatened, as in the genocide in Rwanda, it is not only through top-down policies that integrated reconciliation will be achieved. Individual growth *and* societal cohesion can be enhanced through participation in group arts projects, theatre collectives and storytelling groups (Uwingeneye 2016). These can also provide other settings for the strengthening of perceptions of

self. The growing arts scene, particularly in Kigali, provides a fascinating context to explore how artistic creativity interacts with positive growth. There will likely be instances of growth having been experienced and then subsequently expressed in art form, as well as growth being triggered by storytelling and creative production itself.

Remembrance culture

The importance of space for individual stories is especially necessary given the remembrance culture in Rwanda. Rwanda is a very specific case where national memory is narrated and preserved in an annual programme of events within a period of remembrance known as Kwibuka (the Kinyarwanda word for 'remember'). The season of commemoration begins on 7 April each year and lasts until 4 July. During this time, community groups gather to listen to talks and to share stories. There are also large-scale commemorative events where hundreds gather. These can have positive consequences, for example a sense of shared identity amongst participants may encourage them to view others as a source of social support which, in turn, contributes to a sense of health and well-being (Hopkins and Reicher 2016). Yet, because commemorative practices have such an important role and are government-led, there is a danger that individual stories become overshadowed or sidelined. The different rituals surrounding memory of the genocide (commemoration ceremonies, exhumations of bodies or displays of human remains at memorials) can have different effects on survivors and the families of victims. An increase in panic attacks, anxiety attacks and distress in secondary schools has been reported during the commemoration period (Sabah 2004). Yet, when individuals have experienced distress during public events (crying and screaming, sometimes with visible physical anguish), they have been carried out of sight and removed from public view. This is an example of how remembrance events can create obstacles to wellbeing, and is illustrative of the suspicion and/or fear which can accompany accounts of the past which stray from the official narrative. This may be unsurprising in a context where genocide denial still occurs, but it must not lead to the suppression of individual voices. It is important that any work on individual stories 'must remain sensitive to the inequitable distribution of power and resources and the role that memorative discourses may play in ongoing struggles for justice, equality, and varying forms of (political, cultural, or juridical) representation' (Bond et al. 2016, 21).

None of these memory practices is based on individuals: these events are public, officially programmed and collective; and, in the way they gather people together, they also contribute to the ongoing building of Rwandan unity. Where this is undoubtedly positive, there is a danger of engagement with official remembrance practices happening at the expense of more complex individual articulations of posttraumatic adaptation. This includes both retrospective remembering, and the opportunity to recount more forward-looking testimonies where individuals describe positive change. What is more, identifying oneself in terms of signs of positive growth provides an alternative to the politically fraught and problematic dichotomy of victim/survivor and perpetrator/génocidaire which is promoted by the official RPF narrative (Jessee 2017, 120). A comprehensive, multidirectional culture of remembrance would incorporate more individual stories, 'embracing the possibility that the intersection of disparate commemorative discourses might offer an opportunity to forge empathic communities of remembrance across national, cultural, or ethnic boundaries' (Bond et al. 2016, 6).

This is not only important for the purposes of equality and inclusivity; the potential for posttraumatic growth is enhanced when more individual stories are accessible. There is a need for ordinary individuals to access and be encouraged by stories from others, alongside official narratives during the Kwibuka events, and as well as those stories of prominent individuals which are shared in media. These messages can reinforce beliefs in the efficacy of reconciliation but also in the potential for growth and resilience in individuals. Lastly, there are also implications for the way Rwandans will be remembered in future. A focus on positive change reinforces an identity defined by agency and strength.

Conclusion

In setting out a series of hypotheses about the relationships between trauma, culture and posttraumatic mental health interventions, Wilson (2007) states that there is no individual experience of psychological trauma without a cultural history, grounding or background. Similarly, there is no individual sense of personal identity without a cultural reference point. Thus the stories individuals tell *must* be understood in the communitarian context of post-genocide Rwanda. The policy of national unity and reconciliation, manifest in numerous government initiatives, does benefit individuals, as the evidence from testimonies about group meetings shows. Posttraumatic therapies and traditional practices, in

culturally specific forms, can facilitate resilience, personal growth, and self-transcendence in the wake of trauma (Wilson 2007, 23). Additionally, participation by individuals in the gacaca courts at times fostered feelings of communality and belonging, thereby reducing hostile intergroup attitudes and increasing social cohesion. Thus collective processes of reconciliation and individual posttraumatic growth are mutually beneficial and inextricably linked. The challenge is therefore how to ensure space is created for individual stories and positive hidden discourses when programmes such as 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' occupy such a prominent position.

In Rwanda today there is a place for individual stories which risks being overlooked due to the prominence of communitarian culture and reconciliation policies. A wide range of genres and art forms is needed to account for the range of experiences during and since the genocide, and for aiding and expressing processes of posttraumatic adaptation. Our project, and the archival work of the Aegis Trust, goes some way to create space for this need. Evidence from the testimonies, where articulation of individual identity or actions is relatively sparse, indicates more could be done to create space for the strengthening of individual voices in Rwanda today. Simultaneously, while the model of posttraumatic growth is both helpful and relevant, it requires adaption to be culturally-sensitive in the Rwandan context. Viewing perceptions of 'personal strength' and 'forming relationships with others' as separate effects does not seem to make sense in light of the evidence found in testimonies so far. The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, and future therapeutic models which incorporate the posttraumatic growth framework, must accommodate the overlaps between individual and collective change. In probing the complex overlaps between single *accounts* and group *accountability*, further work must be done on what 'I' and 'we' mean in contemporary Rwanda.

Future research should seek to explore further the relationship between reconciliation and individual growth. In order to correlate responses from individual testimonies with data on community resources for reconciliation and coping, more work needs to be done on assessing resilience at group and community levels (Hoshmand 2007, 41). Responses to trauma, both positive and negative, must be examined alongside an assessment of the usefulness of community resources both for individual growth and for social cohesion. The Institute for Research and Dialogue for Peace are working towards this, together with the Aegis Trust. In addition, the role of creative arts in therapeutic and non-therapeutic settings should be assessed, both for its contribution to posttraumatic growth, and in the

forms of expressing such growth which might emerge in those contexts. This should come within an analysis of the shifting perceptions of self in survivors and perpetrators, particularly in terms of agency. In addition, continued research into positive coping must seek to redress the imbalance in current literature which emphasises the adverse effects of trauma. 'In order to understand the nature and dynamics of the posttraumatic self in its entirety, it is necessary to know how individuals transform trauma, reinvent themselves, reconfigure their identity and self-processes, and forge new patterns of living with a sense of integrity, well-being, and wholeness' (Wilson 2006, 421).

To conclude, while it is impossible to extricate any individual story completely from that of others, I reassert the need for individual stories to be preserved and heard in order to have a comprehensive and compassionate incorporation of memory *and* growth into post-genocide Rwandan culture. Our project seeks to achieve this through carefully listening to and analysing individual stories of change, and accounting for the need to look backwards as well as move forwards. The psychological framework of posttraumatic growth that we use presents opportunities to emphasise the less commonly discussed sides of posttraumatic adaptation, and we seek to present these in collections which are both contextualised and indicative of diverse experiences. In a Rwandan context so committed to group cohesion and programmes of reconciliation, such attention to individual growth can present a new, and helpful, contribution to cultural discourses in Rwanda today.

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Notes

1. www.rwandan.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk

2. According to the report on the count of the victims of the genocide by the Ministry of Local Administration in Rwanda, 1,174,017 people were killed during the genocide. Rwanda had 7 to 8 million inhabitants in 1994, hence around 1/7 to 1/8 of the population was killed (Ministère de l'Administration Locale (MINALOC), 2001).

According to Donald Kaberuka, former Minister of Finance and Economic Planning in Rwanda, 2.5 million people were exiled (Geslin, 2000).

A census of the population in Rwanda published in 2005 showed that of 8,128,553 inhabitants in Rwanda, the number of children under 18 years of age was 4,223,526. Of these, 1,267,057 were orphans (having lost father, mother, or both parents) (République du Rwanda, Ministère des Finances et de la Planification Economique, Commission Nationale de Recensement, 2005).

3. Boin and McConnell (2007) introduce this term as a theoretical construct for understanding 'bouncing back' in crisis management.
4. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014."
5. For a comprehensive review of these and other post-genocide governmental interventions, see S. Straus and L. Waldorf (2011).
6. See also chapters by Adamczyk and Thomson in Campioni and Noack for reasons why a range of groups and individuals may not vocalise stories which veer from the Rwandan government's official narrative.

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