

Articulating Growth in Rwandan Terms: Adapting the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory

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Abstract

During a horrific period of violence in 1994, over one million Rwandans were killed. The Genocide against the Tutsi left a legacy of trauma and pain and destroyed the social fabric of Rwanda, which would take huge efforts to reconstruct. Alongside suffering on a huge scale, researchers have found evidence in testimonies of positive growth in individual Rwandans' stories since 1994. Yet these stories of growth have received little attention. How is individual growth best articulated in Rwanda today, and how is it best understood by scholars and practitioners around the world?

This article explores how psychological frameworks might be mediated for understanding contemporary Rwandan stories, taking into account pervasive narratives and cultural influences. Giving testimony can form part of the process of meaning-making that happens after the shattering effects of trauma, and can create space for individuals to describe positive psychological and social adjustments they have made. This article builds on research into survivor and perpetrator testimonies to explore the contextual correlates of post-traumatic growth in Rwanda.

The framework of post-traumatic growth (PTG) provides a helpful lens for examining changes in personal strength, relating to others, and appreciation of life. Yet the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (used to measure PTG) has not been adapted for a Rwandan context and needs to account for culture- and language-specific influences on understanding and expressing growth. What affects the semantics and politics of expressing individual psychological change? And how are such models to be adapted to help individuals describe growth in Rwandan terms?

Introduction

This article introduces the 'Rwandan Stories of Change' research project and discusses the adaptation of a therapeutic tool for use by Rwandan therapists. Based on a thematic analysis of testimonies from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, I emphasise the importance for such tools to be modified and used in culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate ways. I explore three contextual correlates in particular and suggest next steps based on these areas.

'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 investigates the ways in which individual Rwandan people have adjusted and reconstructed their lives in the years since the genocide. We aim to gain a qualitative understanding of the impact of the genocide with a particular focus on the expression of post-traumatic growth. We collaborate with the Aegis Trust, an international NGO working to prevent genocide through a series of educational and research programmes. Aegis has established the Genocide Archive of Rwanda as a unified repository for all information relating to the 1994 genocide.² It contains documentaries, photographs, TV and radio broadcasts, interactive maps, and other materials including an extensive archive of oral interviews. From these interviews, which include testimonies given by survivors and perpetrators of the genocide, we translate, analyse and publish stories of positive change, both social and psychological, from Rwanda over the last 23 years.

The importance of stories to people's lives is widely recognised, and stories play a vital role after trauma has been experienced both individually and collectively.³ In 1994, between April and July, up to one million Rwandan people were brutally killed in what is officially known as the

¹ <http://rwandan.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>.

² <http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw>.

³ L. Harms, *Understanding Trauma and Resilience* (London: Palgrave, 2015).

Genocide against the Tutsi. Following an attack on the plane carrying then president Juvénal Habyarimana on 6th April, a large-scale hate campaign saw three months of mass violence which had catastrophic consequences for Rwandan people. Thousands of Rwandans were killed, others exiled, and the political and cultural fabric of the country was destroyed. Rwandan people's testimonies demonstrate the importance of narrative for articulating growth in general, its particular value for reconstructing shattered assumptions, and the potential for bringing words to experiences of trauma formerly impossible to describe.⁴ Additionally, the interpretation of events, consequences of events, and remembering of events all depend on how narratives (about what happened) are constructed, and this has a direct impact on healing and growth: 'One's explanatory style affects how one attributes the causes of an event and this attribution is an important factor affecting the cognitive processing involved in rebuilding one's assumptive world'.⁵ Sharing and documenting traumatic experience is seen as a restorative intervention; and the form of a testimony can help restore a sense of coherence and meaning to an individual who has suffered trauma.⁶

In semi-structured interviews conducted by staff members of the Aegis Trust, survivors, perpetrators, and rescuers have the opportunity to reflect on their lives before, during, and since the genocide, and to bear witness to what they experienced. The semi-structured approach enables staff to collect stories about certain areas of interest (for example, unity and reconciliation), and equally allows staff freedom to ask their own questions on a range of subjects. The interviews were not focused on themes of growth, and interviewees were free to speak at length on particular aspects of their story. Thus, the interviews range in length, from 10 minutes to around 90 minutes. Staff members from the Archive, themselves genocide survivors, conducted these 25 interviews between 2014 and 2016. Ten of them were conducted with members of unity and reconciliation associations: these are grass-roots groups established in local communities to foster cooperation in projects which benefit the community. In these interviews, people were asked to describe how their association had started, why they had joined the association and what

⁴ L. Harms, *Understanding Trauma and Resilience* and R. Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

⁵ Park, C. L., and V. S. Helgeson, 'Introduction to the special section: growth following highly stressful life events - current status and future directions', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74, 5, (2006), pp. 791-796.

⁶ D. Denborough, 'A framework for receiving and documenting testimonies of trauma', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3, 4 (2005), pp. 34-42, D. Denborough, *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experience* (Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications, 2006).

they found beneficial about being a member of such an association. All interviews were conducted and recorded in the individuals' native language, Kinyarwanda. With the permission of the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, we commissioned the translation of these interviews into English. We used a rigorous translation process: verbatim translation into written Kinyarwanda, then translation into English by local translators, and back translation back into Kinyarwanda. At every stage, accuracy and discrepancies were checked by two translators and we made every effort to remain faithful to the original texts. All the interviewees had signed formal consent forms prior to the interview, in which they agreed for their interview to be stored online by the Genocide Archive of Rwanda and accessed by third parties such as educators and researchers. This has inevitable implications for the content of the testimonies, which are discussed below. For this study, 25 testimonies were analysed. This was the complete number of testimonies the project had translated into English at the time.

The open questions and semi-structured format allow individuals to express their stories in their own words, allowing them to tell their stories in a way that will be restorative for them.⁷ In turn, these narratives can provide structures of meaning that allow a person to understand both her/his role and the wider social or cultural plot of which s/he is a part.⁸ Cruz and Essen also demonstrate that the story format aids knowledge and growth in awareness, which in turn equips people to rebuild their lives.⁹ 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. Attention to accurate and careful translation allows Rwandans to be heard in their own words, and follows Lala, McGarty and Thomas who emphasise the importance of a sense of ownership when sharing stories with the international community.¹⁰

In individual testimonies, researchers on our project have found evidence of post-traumatic growth, which is a framework for reading the kinds of positive adjustment and benefit finding

⁷ P. Blackburn, 'Speaking the unspeakable: bearing witness to the stories of political violence, war and terror', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3/4 (2005), p. 98.

⁸ R. Neimeyer and A. Stewart, 'Trauma, healing and the narrative employment of loss', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 77, 6 (1996), p 361.

⁹ F. G. Cruz and L Essen, *Adult survivors of childhood emotional, physical, and sexual abuse: Dynamics and treatment* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1994).

¹⁰ G. Lala, C. McGarty, E.F. Thomas, 'Messages of Hope: Using positive stories of survival to assist recovery in Rwanda', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 2, 1 (2014), pp. 450-468.

individuals can experience after suffering.¹¹ It is a particular kind of growth yielded from suffering, which emerges in the development of new goals, or a clearer focus on one's purpose or spirituality, for example. Post-traumatic growth can be described as a dynamic process of rebuilding life-ability that occurs after psychosocial or spiritual coping (such as cognitive reframing) and leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing.¹² Post-traumatic growth does not deny the presence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or other negative effects of trauma. Rather it acknowledges the presence of positive changes that individuals may experience *despite* the pain, loss, and distress they have endured. 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.¹³ This is one element of personality growth within broader psychological adjustment, and implies an ability to go beyond an original level of psychosocial functioning.¹⁴ The Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which comes in the form of a therapeutic questionnaire,¹⁵ assesses positive outcomes in reports from people who have experienced traumatic events, and these outcomes tend to be grouped in the following domains: new possibilities, spiritual change, the ability to relate to others, an increase in personal strength, and an enhanced appreciation of life. For this study, the PTGI has been used as an interpretative guide for thematic saliency analysis of a corpus of testimonies. The interview methodology for the testimonies in question did not draw on the PTGI, or on post-traumatic growth. In contexts of counselling and therapy, the PTGI is designed

¹¹ L. E. R. Blackie, A. M. Roepke, N. Hitchcott and S. Joseph, 'Can people experience post-traumatic growth after committing violent acts?', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22, 4 (2016), pp. 409-412, <<https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/9506>>.

¹² Walker-Williams 'The Prevalence of Coping Behaviour, Posttraumatic Growth and Psychological Well-Being in Women who Experienced Childhood Sexual Abuse', *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 22, 4 (2012) pp. 617-622.

¹³ R. Tedeschi and L. Calhoun, 'The Post-traumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma', *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 9 (1996).

¹⁴ L.E.R. Blackie, E. Jayawickreme, N. Hitchcott and S. Joseph, 'Distinguishing Post-Traumatic Growth from Psychological Adjustment among Rwandan Genocide Survivors', in *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, eds. David Carr, James Arthur and Kristján Kristjánsson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 279 - 317 and V. O'Leary, 'Strength in the face of adversity: Individual and Social thriving', *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 4 (1998), pp. 425-446.

¹⁵ See appendix A. The PTGI is a 21 item measure. Each item (e.g., "My priorities about what is important in life", "An appreciation for the value of my own life", "I developed new interests") is rated on a six-point scale ranging from 0 (*I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis*) to 5 (*I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis*) so that scores on the total scale have a potential range of 0 to 105, with higher scores indicating greater levels of growth. The PTGI can be used to yield a total score and five subscale scores of Relating to Others (7 items), New Possibilities (5 items), Personal Strength (4 items), Spiritual Change (2 items), and Appreciation of Life (3 items).

to serve alongside other therapeutic tools as a way to explore shifts and areas of growth which might not emerge as readily as other themes in therapeutic discussions.

In our project, we draw out and compare different experiences of psychological and social adjustment, using a framework of post-traumatic growth to carry out our analysis. This allows us not only to compare adjustment in survivors and perpetrators, but also to provide a rare focus on forward-looking change and growth, where health and humanities research on post-genocide Rwanda might usually be dominated by studies on the negative effects of trauma. It looks beyond the 'traditional spotlight of posttraumatic stress and psychological distress' and provides important insight into how people recover, within a wide range of adaptive mechanisms.¹⁶ Healthy coping, and the expression of positive emotions following trauma, has not received adequate scholarly attention.¹⁷ Where research on post-traumatic adaptation tends to be skewed away from thriving and resilience, Wilson concludes it is more important to study healthy survivors of trauma because 'by understanding the strong, resilient, self-transcendent survivor of extreme life-adversity, we can learn how it is that they found the pathway to healing, recovery, resilience, and the actualization of their innate human potentials'.¹⁸ I do not claim here that interviewees self-identify as 'strong, resilient, [or] self-transcendent', but themes of post-traumatic growth are evident in many testimonies. Research in this vein enriches the Rwandan context by shedding light on the under-examined area of positive growth in individuals, but the model must be adapted in light of Rwandan contextual influences.

We need to ask, as scholars have done for alternative cultural settings, how best to adapt the existing Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory for a Rwandan context.¹⁹ Given salient themes which emerge in the archive testimonies, how does the framework need to be mediated to be most relevant and most helpful? How do individuals express changes they experience, and how can we best articulate these changes in Rwandan terms?

¹⁶ S. Joseph, H. Stockton, N. Hunt, J. Maltby, A. M. Wood, and S. Regel, 'The Psychological Well-Being Post-Traumatic Changes Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ): Reliability and Validity', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 4 (2012), pp. 420-428.

¹⁷ G. A. Bonanno, G. 'Loss, trauma, and human resilience: have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?', *The American Psychologist*, 59, 1 (2004), p. 24.

¹⁸ John Wilson, *The posttraumatic self: Restoring meaning and wholeness to personality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

¹⁹ T. Weiss and R. Berger, *Posttraumatic Growth and Culturally Competent Practice: Lessons Learned from Around the Globe* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2010).

Influence of context

The framework of post-traumatic growth provides a helpful lens for examining changes in personal strength, relating to others, new opportunities, spiritual growth, and appreciation of life. This five-part structure has been established through factor analysis whereby these domains were shown to correlate strongly alongside one another.²⁰ Yet this structure was originally established on the basis of data collected from undergraduate students in North America, and the post-traumatic growth inventory has not been adapted for sub-Saharan African contexts, apart from one project in South Africa.²¹

One thing that the archive testimonies and narrative approaches to trauma bring to light is that context plays a critical role in influencing the narratives of individuals, families and communities, 'that is, our narratives are dialogical and co-created'.²² We see in the testimonies indications of the ways in which cultural, linguistic, and socio-political norms and expectations influence narrative. While it is true that humans have inherent potential for developing positive character traits and virtues and overcoming adversity to develop beyond their previous level of functioning, that inherent capacity will emerge in a range of culturally determined ways depending on specific contexts.²³ 'Culture plays a major role in many aspects of the struggle with traumatic events, including what is perceived as stressful, which stressful life events are likely to befall individuals and how they cope with them, as well as how one is transformed by the struggle'.²⁴ The structure of well-being constructs has been shown to vary across cultures, so tools need to be modified to account for culture- and language - specific influences on understanding and expressing growth.²⁵ Evidently, it is normal in processes of recovery to experience optimal functioning in some areas but not others. On an individual level, there will always be variation in results using the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory. Of interest here is which areas emerge across a number of participants from the same culture, how these are distinct from those that emerge in other cultural contexts, and why.

²⁰ Y. Longo, I. Cayne, and S. Joseph, 'The scales of general well-being', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 109 (2017), pp. 148-159.

²¹ Walker-Williams, p. 618.

²² Harms, p. 109.

²³ Linley, Andrews and Joseph, 'Confirmatory factor analysis of the posttraumatic growth inventory', *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 12 (2004), pp. 321-332.

²⁴ Weiss and Berger, p. 189.

²⁵ Longo, Cayne and Joseph, p. 157.

Since scholarship on post-traumatic growth is still in its infancy, an important next step is to contextualise and adapt its related tools for use in specific cultural contexts.²⁶ Weiss and Berger gather a number of studies aiming to do this (2010), and explicitly aim to overcome a major obstacle faced by researchers: the tendency to decontextualise stress and coping and ignore cultural milieu, in spite of it being recognised as a critical factor.²⁷ They recommend that future research examine post-traumatic growth in additional religious and cultural contexts, in order to develop a pool of best practices for enhancing growth tailored to specific cultural backgrounds, while continuing to critically appraise its applicability to a specific client situation.²⁸ Attention must be paid to proximate influences such as the way people respond to major stressors, with 'idioms of trauma, distress, coping and growth', and the norms and rules surrounding this, along with distal influences such as broad, pervasive narratives around individualism and collectivism, for example. All of these influence the kinds of growth which are experienced and reported.²⁹

In the case of other models, such as Wilson's 12 Principles of Self-Transformation in the Posttraumatic Self (2007), moderating the model *a posteriori* to fit a particular cultural context is not necessary, since it has already been constituted from research in a variety of contexts (World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia, Persian Gulf).³⁰ However, this is not the case with the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory. The existing questionnaire groups questions within the five aforementioned domains, though the questions are usually mixed up so that participants are not aware of these categories. Based on thematic saliency analysis of the archive testimonies, a number of the PTGI questions do not seem relevant in the Rwandan context: Q9 (*I am more willing to express my emotions*), Q12 (*I am better able to accept the way things worked out*), Q5 (*I have a better understanding of spiritual matters*), and Q1 (*I changed my priorities about what is important in life*). Although learning, in general, is a prevalent theme, there are no comments about emotional expression or spiritual understanding, and very little on acceptance and priorities.

Additionally, from the sample of 25 testimonies analysed, a number of relevant themes emerge which do not feature in the existing inventory. The theme of forgiveness is widespread, as

²⁶ Weiss and Berger, p. 189.

²⁷ M. Waller, 'Resilience in ecosystemic context: Evolution of the concept', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71 (2001), pp. 290-297.

²⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 192.

²⁹ IBID, pp. 3 - 4.

³⁰ John Wilson, 'The Lens of Culture: Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives in the Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD', in *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*, eds. John Wilson and Catherine So-Kum Tang (New York: Springer, 2007), pp. 3 - 30.

is experiencing a change in opinion (*I thought x and now I think y*) or significant learning or training, which is tied to a new sense of purpose and direction, and in many cases a shift out of a past coloured by 'false history'. In terms of relating to others, specific forms of relating to neighbours are mentioned which carry particular cultural significance, such as intermarrying and giving cows. These could arguably be counted within some of the existing categories, but their prevalence suggests they could feature more explicitly in their own right.

Finally, it emerges that the 5 part structure of the inventory is inadequately nuanced for Rwanda post-genocide context, in the way it places 'relating to others' as separate from other factors. Most frequently in individuals' testimonies, other changes which are mentioned come in the context of relationships with others. Development is described as a group process, strength follows reconciliation, and people talk more about having 'a greater sense of closeness with others' than any other feature on the inventory. It is vital that as scholars from a range of backgrounds, we gauge these experiences of growth without imposing frameworks which are inappropriately biased towards individualism, and that we account for the traditionally and socio-politically driven communal nature of Rwandan culture.

Adapted versions of this inventory have created a modified structure based on factor analysis.³¹ Basing the following suggestions rather on thematic saliency analysis, I seek to bring a multidimensional approach to assessing which areas of this inventory are most relevant and common in individual Rwandan stories. This is to explore connections between inner and outer worlds as regards the expression of wellness and growth, in other words, what contextual influences shape the articulation of growth by individuals in Rwanda, and which terms are subsequently most appropriate for describing and assessing that growth. I turn now to explore three related areas: community, language, and narratives of influence.

Based on this thematic analysis and common themes found in the testimonies, three areas are particularly striking which influence the semantics of growth for individuals in Rwanda. The first is the role and importance given to community and togetherness; the second is Kinyarwanda as the language of expression; and the third is a number of specific narratives of influence.

³¹ Weiss and Berger, p. 36.

Community

In Rwanda, the capacity for positive adaptation in the face of adversity seems to be demonstrated extensively (and deliberately practised) in groups. In the testimonies, description of group initiatives and activities emerges more frequently than independent pursuits. And because individuals' testimonies often concern their families' past, their description of growth will tend to be given in relation to family or wider community. This is particularly evident in testimonies given by participants in unity and reconciliation groups, which are organised group meetings set up to encourage reconciliation after the destruction and divisiveness of the genocide. In Rwanda government and grassroots initiatives to strengthen unity and reconciliation have seen huge success. Shared narratives which build connection and support are a vital part of this since they enable communities to make sense of their circumstances and decide on next steps.³² In studies of post-traumatic growth in Israel, Spain and Japan, a stronger sense of connectedness to the community was shown to be important for post-traumatic growth.³³

Deepened connectedness with others and a renewed understanding of the value of a relationship with others is a well-documented element of post-traumatic growth.³⁴ Human connectedness, acknowledgement and recognition, and relational warmth play key roles in promoting recovery and resilience, as well as secure attachments and the availability of role models.³⁵ Cross-cultural analysis has found communitarianism to be a greater or lesser influence on post-traumatic growth, and there this can manifest in social support and particular times (and contribute to healthy coping behaviour, building trust, acceptance, and help), it can also be an intrinsic feature of cultural expectations, affecting how individuals behave.³⁶

Independent individuals define themselves by how they differ from others, their uniqueness, and their personal accomplishments; they prefer individual action and

³² E. Chamlee-Wright and V. H. Storr, 'Social capital as collective narratives and post-disaster community recovery', *Sociological Review*, 59, 2 (2011), p. 270.

³³ Weiss and Berger, p. 190.

³⁴ C. S. Carver, 'Resilience and thriving: Issues, models, and linkages', *Journal of Social Issues*, 54 (1998), pp. 245–266 and K. Fromm, M. A. Andrykowski, and J. Hunt, 'Positive and negative psychological sequelae of bone marrow transplantation: Implications for quality of life assessment', *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, 19 (1996), pp. 221–240.

³⁵ Harms, p. 19.

³⁶ Walker-Williams, p. 262.

strive to meet personal goals. Interdependent individuals focus on their relationships with others; they prefer collective action and try not to stand out from the crowd, seeking harmony with others and being sensitive to their potential impact on them.³⁷

This being so, the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory should be adapted to reflect the importance of community and togetherness in Rwanda. Bagilishya affirms that 'the mental health and well-being of Rwandans cannot be isolated from that of their families and those who surround them'.³⁸ This could mean a restructuring of the inventory, so that 'relating to others' is not seen as separate from the other four domains. Following research among Palestinian people, Weiss and Berger concluded that 'in more collectivistic societies, the borders between social experiences, spiritual considerations, and self-realization are more blurred', which can be reflected in the inventory structure.³⁹ To reflect sufficiently the communitarian culture and reconciliation-driven social context of Rwanda, the structure could be re-worked to have 'relating to others' as one overarching domain connected to all the others.

Alternatively, the whole questionnaire could be conducted in relation to individuals' experience of their family, work, and other relationships, as in a systemic approach to therapy, which has the benefit of 'promoting connectedness'.⁴⁰ Or, the questionnaire could be used in group settings. Sociotherapy has been used widely in Rwanda since the genocide and has seen great success both in terms of individual healing and societal cohesion.⁴¹ In general, 'the therapeutic qualities of people coming together to share experiences, to remember collectively and to form a continuing story of what has occurred have been well noted', though the importance of choice, agency, and confidentiality must be noted.⁴² Themes of growth have been found in our corpus of testimonies even though questions did not directly address those themes. Group interventions can 'help generate alternative narratives that empower people to examine their dominant story and

³⁷ Weiss and Berger, p.9.

³⁸ D. Bagilishya, 'Mourning and Recovery from Trauma: In Rwanda, Tears Flow Within', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37, (3 (2000)), p 352.

³⁹ Weiss and Berger, p. 36.

⁴⁰ S. Hobfall, N. Ennis, N., and J. Kay, 'Loss, resources and resiliency in close interpersonal relationships', in *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives*, eds. J. Harvey and E Miller (Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge, 2000), pp. 267-285.

⁴¹ *NAR (Never Again Rwanda) and Interpeace, Societal Healing in Rwanda: Mapping of Actors and Approaches* (2015), p. 26.

⁴² Harms, p. 120.

develop a version conducive to posttraumatic growth'.⁴³ Indeed, researchers have found that growth narratives facilitate personality development and resilience.⁴⁴ It is vital that therapeutic interventions remain balanced, drawing attention to neglected areas of focus in the client's life but not engendering an unhelpful bias towards positive growth either. In this vein, a tool like the Psychological Well-Being: Post-Traumatic Change Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ) could be useful, since it incorporates positive and negative changes.⁴⁵ Bauer et al have found evidence of growth themes in narratives outside of therapeutic interventions, where participants narrate personal and interpersonal growth experiences as key elements of their autobiographical memories.⁴⁶ Building on this, the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory could be used as a guide in group discussions, and potentially in unity and reconciliation groups too, rather than a questionnaire for individuals in therapy only. This would also enable reports of post-traumatic growth to be sought from third-party observers, who may be more readily vocal than individuals, in a culture where putting oneself at the centre of attention is not the norm.⁴⁷ These possible therapeutic interventions are being explored within our project in dialogue with a number of psychologists and therapists working in Rwanda.

Language

By transcribing video testimonies conducted in Kinyarwanda and then translating them into English, we have noted a significant difference between the two languages, which affect the articulation of individual growth. Related to the aforementioned emphasis on community, pronoun indicators of 'I' and 'me' emerge less often than 'we' and 'us'. Second, individual growth and change is articulated in less direct and perhaps more hesitant ways than one would expect in a Euro-American context. In a Japanese context, individuals were found to experience growth in similar patterns to Europeans and Americans, but did not 'spontaneously report the changes' in the

⁴³R. Papadopoulos, 'Storied community as secure base', *The British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 15 (1999), pp. 322-332.

⁴⁴J. Bauer and S. Park, 'Growth is not just for the young: growth narratives, eudaimonic resilience, and the aging self', in *New Frontiers in Resilient Aging: Life-Strengths and Well-Being in Late Life*, eds. S. Prem and L. Corey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 60-89.

⁴⁵S. Joseph, 'The Psychological Well-Being Post-Traumatic Changes Questionnaire'.

⁴⁶J. Bauer, D. McAdams, and A. Sakaeda, 'Interpreting the Good Life: Growth Memories in the Lives of Mature, Happy People', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 1 (2005), pp. 203-217.

⁴⁷Weiss and Berger, p. 140. Using third-party observers also addresses the limitations of self-reporting as subjective perception of growth.

same way.⁴⁸ This would presumably differ in a more directed questionnaire, but the ways growth is expressed indirectly are worth noting. Growth and change are described via reports of pursuing new opportunities, or experiences of learning. Often answers are given at length and feature repetition of the same phrases or information. In addition, the use of proverbs emerges as a relatively common way of describing an approach to a situation (eg. through working together) or a conclusion about a commonly held belief (for instance about unity). Bagilishya describes proverbs as 'one strategy frequently used in Rwandan tradition to symbolize intense distress, and introduce a distance between experience and action, both at the social level and at the level of cognition'.⁴⁹ In Kinyarwanda, as well as meaning proverb or maxim, the word *umugani* also signifies tale, story, or parable, highlighting the value of this mode of communication for restoring a sense of cohesion through narrative as well as expressing what a person has witnessed or has experienced emotionally.⁵⁰ Further, these traditional modes of expression build empathy by creating a sense of common ground, in turn facilitating further sharing, and they strengthen intergenerational links when wisdom is passed on from elders.⁵¹ Lastly, there are terms in Kinyarwanda which hold specific nuance that cannot be expressed in a scalar response to a closed question. For instance, the word *mudaheranwa*, which describes people who show themselves to be resilient and refuse to be left behind. Or for example, 'Nadadiye!' which is a response given to a greeting, based on the verb *kudadira* (to bundle firewood). This is used as an expression of strength and wellness between young people within the AERG community (Association of Student Survivors of the Genocide).

Adapting the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory for use in Kinyarwanda has already begun with a translation of the existing list of features from English into Kinyarwanda. However, given what I have outlined here, a more open format may be preferable. Such a format could account for cultural differences not only in the form of post-traumatic growth but in the readiness to articulate it.⁵² This could take the form of a semi-structured interview which uses the five domains as guidance for questions, or uses a life story model approach.⁵³ In its current form, the inventory is used by participants who mark a number on a scale for each question. An adapted questionnaire could feature more open questions to give space for participants to share proverbs or stories,

⁴⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 132.

⁴⁹ Bagilishya, p. 341.

⁵⁰ IBID, p. 342.

⁵¹ IBID, p. 350.

⁵² Weiss and Berger, p. 140.

⁵³ D. McAdams, 'Personal narratives and the life story: Theory and research', in *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, eds. Oliver, Robins and Pervin (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), pp. 241-261.

cultural tools which more naturally facilitate their expression of growth and change. This is particularly important given that articulating growth and expressing emotion is so language-specific, as the above examples demonstrate. This also shifts attention away from quantitative assessment in the inventory, towards more qualitative assessment of well-being and change, whilst allowing people to draw on important cultural resources.

Narratives of influence

In any context, complex narratives and influences are always at play which impacts external and internal worlds. The discourses which are circulated in the public sphere directly shape how growth is understood and valued in Rwanda. To return to the theme of change, since 1994, Rwanda as a country has changed in a myriad of ways. All kinds of processes of growth are occurring in Rwanda, as they have been over the past 23 years, and these are celebrated in the RPF government's discourse of national success. The Global Development Institute recently commented that 'Rwanda's desire to hit targets is almost pathological',⁵⁴ and the country has certainly drawn attention for its rapid growth in business, entrepreneurship, and trade.⁵⁵ Economically, the market is growing at a rate of 7% per annum, start-ups and technology companies have seen huge expansion, and creative arts are on the rise through a number of initiatives including the Ubumuntu festival and Spoken Word Rwanda.⁵⁶ The Rwandan government celebrates and encourages this wider national growth, and according to many people plays an overwhelmingly positive role in Rwandan security, development and political life.⁵⁷ Weiss and Berger note that post-traumatic growth can be an integral part of national narratives.⁵⁸ This will inevitably affect what people feel able to express, influencing individuals' sense of freedom to deviate from official discourses and shaping what national values are to be aspired to. In the testimonies, appreciation of life is at points voiced as gratitude to the Rwandan government for their ongoing work towards unity and reconciliation. The prevalence of these comments could be illustrative of the suspicion

⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/GlobalDevInst/status/861581112434446336>.

⁵⁵ S. Allison, 'Like it or not, Rwanda is Africa's future', *Mail and Guardian*, 7th July 2017 [Accessed 9 February 2018] <<https://mg.co.za/article/2017-07-07-00-like-it-or-not-rwanda-is-africas-future>>.

⁵⁶ *The World Bank In Rwanda*, 7 March 2017 [Accessed 9 February 2018] <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview>>.

⁵⁷ D. Beswick, 'Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment: The Challenge of Political Space in Rwanda', *Development and Change*, 41, 2 (2010), pp. 225-251.

⁵⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 4.

and/or fear which can accompany accounts of the past which stray from the official narrative. More broadly, government policies have implications for individuals' post-genocide identities and social interactions, and directly and indirectly affect how individuals are positioned both socially and politically.⁵⁹ Drawing on positioning theory, Blackie and Hitchcott, explore these implications in lights of the Rwandan government's *Ndi Umunyarwanda* programme.⁶⁰ In terms of narratives, there is the danger, in the government's pervasive emphasis on unity and success, that individual differences become diluted. Critics have highlighted the lack of ambiguity in the government's genocide and post-genocide narratives, arguing that generalisations in these discourses do more to exclude and divide than to bring Rwandan people together.⁶¹

Pervasive narratives of national growth must be taken into account when contextualising individuals' testimonies, as well as the influential narratives which surround remembrance in Rwanda. Many cultural practices and rituals are formally and informally enacted following traumas and disasters, and in Rwanda the formal enactment of remembrance on a yearly basis is part of this.⁶² An annual programme of events takes place within a period of remembrance known as Kwibuka (the Kinyarwanda word for 'remember'). The season of commemoration begins on the 7th of April each year and lasts until the 4th of July, acknowledging the duration of the genocide in 1994. During this period, community groups gather to listen to talks and to share stories, and there are large scale commemorative events where hundreds gather. The exceptional nature of Rwanda's history and the extreme brutality of the genocide have implications for remembrance which go beyond the scope of this article. There is evidence that participation in communal acts in the aftermath of a disaster may build hope, trust, and solidarity, but participation in public acts of commemoration has also led to further traumatic episodes for some people.⁶³ There is equally a

⁵⁹ R. Harré and F. Moghaddam, 'Introduction: The Self and Others in Traditional Psychology and in Positioning Theory,' in *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political, and Cultural Contexts*, eds. R. Harré and F. Moghaddam (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003), pp. 1-11.

⁶⁰ L. E. R. Blackie and N. Hitchcott, "'I am Rwandan": Unity and Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, (2017) (forthcoming)

⁶¹ Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives In Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) and County Reports, 2014.

⁶² Harms, p. 20.

⁶³ S. Bloom, 'By the crowd they have been broken, by the crowd they shall be healed: The social transformation of trauma', in *The LEA series in personality and clinical psychology. Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes in the aftermath of crisis*, eds. R. G. Tedeschi, C. L. Park, and L. G. Calhoun (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), pp. 179 - 213; R. Tedeschi, 'Violence transformed: Post-traumatic growth in survivors and their societies', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 4, 3, (199), pp. 319-341 and R. Sabah, 'Lorsque vous connaissez vos bourreaux. Rencontre avec Naasson Munyandamutsa, psychiatre rwandais', *Journal Humanité* (2004), [Accessed 9 February 2018] <<https://www.humanite.fr/node/310814>>.

danger of engagement with official remembrance practices happening at the expense of more complex individual articulations of post-traumatic adaptation. Private spaces such as meetings with therapists and counsellors could serve as contexts for exploring these complexities. The complexity of national memorial practices and constructing comprehensive narratives of the past has been addressed by other scholars.⁶⁴

Other narratives of influence include religious narratives, which should also be taken into account when analysing post-traumatic growth.⁶⁵ The prevalence of the national growth story highlights the need for encouraging individuals to articulate their own experiences of growth and/or lack thereof, within a model which allows for individual specificity. The interviewees whose testimonies were gathered by the Genocide Archive of Rwanda were aware their testimonies would be accessible to scholars and researchers, thus were undoubtedly conditioned by that awareness, and the concomitant conditions of Rwanda's political climate. The space of a private therapy session should provide conditions of confidentiality and trust which allow individuals to speak freely, and will arguably allow for comprehensive expression of both positive and negative change experienced in Rwanda. The PTGI tool provides a potentially helpful way of prompting individuals to speak about themselves when they might not readily do so otherwise, but it can also invite reflections on individuals' socio-political context. Lastly, since in Rwanda practices of commemoration have such an important role and are so strongly government-led, there is a danger that individual stories become overshadowed or side-lined. Opportunities for individuals to express their own stories and to explore future-oriented perspectives on life are to be encouraged. It is important for people to tell their stories in ways which will be restorative for them.⁶⁶ The life story model and a focus on post-traumatic growth involve individuals reflecting on how they have moved through different stages of life and giving structure and organisation to a range of experiences, and this can bring a sense of resolution which benefits individuals.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See: L. Major, 'Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda', *Critical African Studies*, 7, 2 (2015), pp. 164-181; S. Guyer, 'Rwanda's Bones', *boundary*, 2, 36 (2009), pp. 155-175 and N. P. Eltringham, *Discourse and Genocide: the contest for 'reality' in post-genocide Rwanda* (Thesis: University of London, 2001).

⁶⁵ A. Shaw, S. Joseph and A. Linley, 'Religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth: a systematic review', *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 8, 1 (2005), pp. 1-11.

⁶⁶ P. Blackburn, 'Speaking the unspeakable: bearing witness to the stories of political violence, war and terror', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3, 4 (2005), pp. 97-105.

⁶⁷ J. Pennebaker, 'Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process', *Psychological Science*, 8, 3 (1997), pp. 162-166.

Conclusion

In different cultures, growth may include different aspects. Although the possibility of growth from the struggle with adversity is universal, how this growth is experienced and articulated will vary from culture to culture.⁶⁸ This article has explored how cultural and socio-political context affects Rwandans' articulation of growth, given the specific experience of mass violence and trauma in Rwanda, and the ways that is remembered at a national level. Thematic analysis of archive testimonies has shown that the semantics and politics of expressing individual psychological growth are influenced on a number of levels. This has a series of implications for therapeutic work in Rwanda, and for the adaptation of existing models of measuring growth and change, such as the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory.

The contextual correlates of community, language, and narratives of influence must be considered when adapting tools for therapeutic use in Rwanda. We must pay attention to areas of growth specific to post-genocide Rwanda, which may be absent from existing questionnaires, as well as understanding how dominant public stories will affect individuals' readiness to express their own experiences. The existing PGTI could be re-structured, as other adapted versions of this inventory have come up with a modified factor structure. Based on data from refugees of the Bosnian war only three factors were found: changes in self, philosophy of life, and relating to others.⁶⁹ Different cultural assessments have resulted in restructuring the inventory to feature certain factors in different domains, for example in Turkey 'compassion for others' was repositioned in the spiritual growth domain.⁷⁰ So it is worth asking for Rwanda whether, for example, forgiveness would feature in that domain or in 'relating to others'. What is more, domains of growth will be linked to types of coping employed by individuals and valued in their environment.⁷¹ It would, therefore, be interesting to trace whether individuals who participate in sociotherapy report more growth in relating to others, and individuals who attend church services report more spiritual growth.

No model should be used in isolation. A number of self-report measures of growth after adversity have been developed, but they must be adapted according to different cultural contexts. The PWB-PTCQ (see Appendix B) can be utilised in clinical settings to complement more traditional

⁶⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 191.

⁶⁹ Weiss and Berger, p. 70.

⁷⁰ Weiss and Berger, p. 56.

⁷¹ *IBID*, p. 58.

measures of symptom severity and explore changes in narrative themes and directions which might not otherwise be obvious in therapeutic conversations. Unlike the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, it allows for positive and negative expression of change (Joseph et al 2012). Other models include the Perceived Benefit Scales (McMillen and Fisher 1998), Changes in Outlook Questionnaire (Joseph, Williams and Yule 1993), Stress-Related Growth Scale (Park, Cohen and Murch 1996) and the Thriving Scale (Abraido-Lanza et al 1998), though these do not focus on post-traumatic growth as such. Alternative models offering a more open format would allow individuals to speak about growth in their own terms. Analysis of testimonies underlines the restorative potential of storytelling, and a narrative approach (rather than a questionnaire) may thus be more helpful, as well as more appropriate and culturally-sensitive given traditional modes of expression in Rwanda. Structured storytelling exercises, or a life story model approach are avenues worth exploring for the adaptation of the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, as well as options for reflecting on both positive and negative change. These considerations will be taken forward in a workshop with therapists, clinical psychologists, and counsellors in Kigali in March 2018. The aim is to assess the most helpful elements of the PTGI and to formulate a tool which will be relevant and usable for therapeutic work in Rwanda. The identification of coping strategies used by survivors may contribute to a better understanding of factors that facilitate adaptive functioning, and for this reason post-traumatic growth should be integrated into therapeutic interventions in the aftermath of trauma.⁷² Processes which facilitate living and functioning well in the aftermath of trauma need to be understood better.⁷³ The interaction and mutual influence of relational, social, cultural, and political elements in any given context must be taken into account as background to these processes. Harms urges, 'so fundamental is culture to our interpretation and experience of the world that it needs to take a much stronger central role in understandings of trauma and resilience'.⁷⁴ It is also an ethical imperative for clinicians and researchers to be sensitive to cultural elements in their work.⁷⁵ In order for researchers, clinicians, and clients to better understand a range of responses to trauma in Rwanda, a clear and contextually-appropriate / culturally-sensitive tool is required. It is hoped that this article and the project work of 'Rwandan Stories of Change' will provide some first steps in that direction.

⁷² Weiss and Berger, p. 266.

⁷³ G. A. Bonanno and A. D. Mancini, 'Beyond resilience and PTSD: Mapping the heterogeneity of responses to potential trauma', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 4, 1 (2012), pp. 77.

⁷⁴ Harms, p. 174.

⁷⁵ R. Tedeschi and L. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth in Clinical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013).

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Appendix A

https://www.emdrhap.org/content/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/VIII-B_Post-Traumatic-Growth-Inventory.pdf

Post Traumatic Growth Inventory

Client Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of the crisis/disaster, using the following scale.

- 0 = I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.*
- 1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 2 = I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 3 = I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 4 = I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis.*
- 5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis.*

Possible Areas of Growth	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life.						
2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.						
3. I developed new interests.						
4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.						
5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.						
6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.						
7. I established a new path for my life.						
8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others.						
9. I am more willing to express my emotions.						
10. I know better that I can handle difficulties.						
11. I am able to do better things with my life.						
12. I am better able to accept the way things work out.						
13. I can better appreciate each day.						
14. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.						
15. I have more compassion for others.						
16. I put more effort into my relationships.						
17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.						
18. I have a stronger religious faith.						
19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.						
20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.						
21. I better accept needing others.						

Appendix B

Psychological Well-Being: Post-Traumatic Change Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ)

Think about how you feel about yourself at the present time. Please read each of the following statements and rate how you have changed as a result of the trauma.

5 = Much more so now

4 = A bit more so now

3 = I feel the same about this as before

2 = A bit less so now

1 = Much less so now

___ 1. I like myself.

___ 2. I have confidence in my opinions.

___ 3. I have a sense of purpose in life.

___ 4. I have strong and close relationships in my life.

___ 5. I feel I am in control of my life.

___ 6. I am open to new experiences that challenge me.

___ 7. I accept who I am, with both my strengths and limitations.

___ 8. I don't worry what other people think of me.

___ 9. My life has meaning.

___ 10. I am a compassionate and giving person.

___ 11. I handle my responsibilities in life well.

___ 12. I am always seeking to learn about myself.

___ 13. I respect myself.

___ 14. I know what is important to me and will stand my ground, even if others disagree.

___ 15. I feel that my life is worthwhile and that I play a valuable role in things.

___ 16. I am grateful to have people in my life who care for me.

___ 17. I am able to cope with what life throws at me.

___ 18. I am hopeful about my future and look forward to new possibilities.