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Suffering of silenced people in northern Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

To contribute to understanding the association between silence and suffering in the context of war and political repression, this study sheds light on the meaning-making process and explores the underlying mechanisms by which silence leads to suffering and how this suffering could be alleviated. The ethnographic research was conducted in 2015–2016, with 43 participants from northern Rwanda, who survived massacres after the 1994 genocide but were prevented from speaking about the experience by political constraints. The findings first describe their suffering, through grief, social isolation and loss of meaning in life and death (expressed as existential questions). Their suffering was worsened by 'unspeakability'; that is, the political context that prevents victims from speaking freely about their war experience, including discussion of those who killed and those who were killed. Unspeakability exacerbated suffering since participants were obstructed from applying ready narratives (e.g. funerary rituals, traditional reconciliation systems) or constructing their own narratives which could ordinarily help them to process mourning and reconciliation and to make sense of the loss. They selectively employed silence for coping and protection, avoiding speaking about the past to maintain everyday life. However, at the same time, unprocessed mourning remained a serious problem, resulting in mental health problems such as hallucinations of the spirits of the dead; participants expressed a strong need for mourning rituals. Overall, this paper highlights the ways in which the suffering of the silenced population worsens when meaning-making processes are obstructed. To alleviate the suffering, it is essential to secure mourning rituals for all survivors, particularly those who, as part of the defeated group of war, are silenced and marginalized in history.

Keywords: Rwanda, Suffering, Silence, Narrative, Grief, Ritual, Culture, War

1. Introduction

Narrative plays a significant role in the healing and mitigation of suffering. Classic anthropological theories suggest that narratives, including storytelling, rituals and symbols, give meaning to suffering which does not make sense to the sufferer, transforming it into what is acceptable to the individual, as well as society (Levi-Strauss, 1963; Kleinman, 1988; Kirmayer, 1993). However, in the context of war and political repression, narratives of suffering and healing are often silenced or strongly hampered (Lykes, 1994; Daniel, 1996; Das, 2007; Akello et al., 2010; Burnet, 2012). This paper considers the issue of silence in Musanze, northern Rwanda, where the majority of citizens experienced officially-unacknowledged massacres and cannot freely talk about their experience and suffering due to ongoing political constraints.

1.1. Silence among the people of Rwanda

Since the colonial era, people in Rwanda have experienced a sequence of tragedies within pendulum swings of political domination and power abuses between Tutsi and Hutu elites. In societies which had been organized by ethnically-flexible clans (Newbury, 1980; Newbury and Newbury, 2000), German and Belgian colonizers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries installed a distinct sense of ethnic identity, Tutsi, Hutu and Twa, by allocating ruling positions to Tutsis under the Tutsi monarchy (Prunier, 1995). The suppressed Hutus revolted and built an independent Hutu-dominant republic (1959–1961); Tutsis were exiled, and in the next generation, formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and began a civil war to reclaim the country (1990–1994) (Prunier, 1995). At the end of the civil war, in 1994, the Hutu-led government and militias waged genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Des Forges, 1995; Prunier, 1995). The civil war and the genocide were ended by the victorious RPF and Tutsis eventually regained rule of Rwanda.

Many Hutu civilians then became refugees and settled in camps in eastern Zaire, where the RPF army perpetrated massacres against them on the pretext of preventing Hutu extremists from rearming in the camp (1994–1997) (HRW, 1997; UNHCHR, 2010). While unarmed Hutu civilians who survived the massacres returned to Rwanda, Hutu extremists who remained in eastern Zaire began an insurgency in northwest Rwanda. The RPF-led government called them '*abacengezi*' (pronounced abacyengezi, meaning 'infiltrators') and deployed counter-insurgency operations; this developed into the *abacengezi* war, or 'the insurgency in the northwest' (1997–2000) (AI, 1997; 1998; AR, 1999; HRW, 1999). During the *abacengezi* war, civilians, mainly Hutus, in the northwest Rwanda were massacred by both parties, although principally by the RPF army (AI, 1997; 1998; HRW, 1999; Reyntjens, 2013). It is significant that while power abuses rotated between Tutsi and Hutu political elites as described above, in reality, amongst grassroots citizens, ethnic identity did not necessarily decide who became victim or perpetrator. Social dynamics shaped by diverse forms of identity and personal circumstances, such as kinship, friendship, personal desire and conflict, complexly intertwined toward perpetration and survival (Fujii, 2009; Burnet, 2012). Thus, simplistic classifications of Tutsi victims and Hutu perpetrators, or vice versa, do not appropriately reflect the grassroots reality.

Since the wars in the 1990s, the country has maintained stability under the RPF regime and achieved remarkable socio-economic development with international aid. However, grassroots citizens have had to confront another significant problem in that they are prevented from speaking about their experience in the 1990s. To foster the united identity of 'Rwandans', the RPF-led government disallowed ethnic divisions and criminalized any speeches, expressions or acts based on ethnicity (RoR, 2001). Meanwhile, the formal definition of genocide was transformed from 'genocide and massacres' (assuming both Tutsi and Hutu victims) to 'the genocide against the Tutsi' (RoR, 1998; 2008a; Sasaki, 2011), codifying the RPF's official view: 'only Tutsi are victims of genocide' (Pottier, 2002: 126). Another law gave legal grounds to support survivors of the Tutsi genocide and other human rights crimes committed between 1990 and 1994 (RoR, 2008a) but excluded survivors of massacres in eastern Zaire and northwest Rwanda between 1995 and 2000, most of whom are Hutus. The most impactful

legislation on constructing silence is the genocide ideology law (RoR, 2008b). Amnesty International (2010) reports that the law is misused to criminalize criticism of the government and prosecution of RPF-perpetrated massacres. Moreover, some politicians and journalists who criticized the government have ‘disappeared’ (AI, 1998; Sundaram, 2016). This series of regulations gradually pushed Tutsi genocide survivorship to the center of the state's narrative, marginalizing and silencing other's suffering (Longman and Rutagengwa, 2004; Burnet, 2012; Rutayishire and Richters, 2014).

Burnet (2012) observes that victims of the RPF massacres are silent about their experience for fear of imprisonment, torture and assassination. The silence is then amplified as Tutsi genocide survivors speak out in public and Hutus are labelled, using simplified and stereotypical moral classifications as ‘offenders’ and ‘bad’ people, even if they did not participate in perpetration. Moreover, Zraly (2010) argues that Tutsi genocide-rape survivors, too, keep quiet in the presence of government authorities, particularly regarding their ongoing mortal danger within the community, since they know that the authorities can further endanger them by forcing them to testify in public. These studies contribute greatly to understanding how silence is produced in post-genocide Rwanda but they do not examine how silence leads to suffering. To understand the associations between silence and suffering, the next section reviews literature from other war-affected settings.

1.2. Silence in war and political repression

A body of literature has described victims' silence, or speechlessness, about their experience of violence in the context of war and political repression. Victims often become silent due to fear produced by the authorities and suffer as a result. Daniel (1996) describe show Tamil victims of the Sri Lankan civil war become silent or speechless as a result of psychological terror rather than physical threat. Daniel notes that silence or speechlessness is one of the main and most pervasive effects of violence. It can interrupt the process of reception, transformation and production of meanings shared by others, and thus fundamentally threatens humanity. Drawing on her research on Mayan victims of war and the state violence in Guatemala, Lykes (1994) argues that silence due to terror destroys trust and solidarity and increases isolation amongst victims. Burnet (2012) suggests that the enforced silence reinforces ethnic division, documenting Hutu victims’ silence produced and amplified as the government propounds Tutsi genocide survivorship in Rwanda. In the context of war and political repression, attention must also be paid to silence on sexual violence. Fujii (2010) reports on this silence among women and community members because of shame and social stigma in post-genocide Rwanda.

However, importantly, silence is not only a cause of suffering but also a coping strategy that is widely preferred by victims to protect themselves from the impact of war and to alleviate their suffering. For example, Harnisch and Montgomery (2017) report on ‘avoidant coping’ among former forcibly recruited people in northern Uganda, who prefer not to talk about their experience of rape, torture and exposure to death but ‘keep on going’ to survive war-related impacts and reintegrate themselves into the local community. As observed by Akello et al. (2010), in northern Uganda, silence is also considered as a sign of strength and value and is rewarded with appreciation and praise. These studies reveal positive impacts of silence which enable victims to better preserve self-worth and their way of living.

Yet silence has more complex associations with both suffering and healing. For instance, victims of sexual violence are often unable to talk about their experience due to shame and stigma, but also prefer to be silent as a way of protecting themselves (Das, 2007; Fujii, 2010). Das' (2007) ethnography on Partition and massacres in India describes how silence is often chosen by victims of violence and sexual abuses as a coping mechanism that permeates everyday life and family culture. Other studies, however, report that the suffering can be silenced by victims themselves and then be embodied as physical wounds and somatic symptoms, thus becoming visible and more talkative than speech (Ghazali, 2014; Akello et al., 2010). One example is Ghazali's (2014) ethnography on Somali Bantu refugees in the United States who wish to forget about the past and collectively attempt to heal and survive a new life. While their suffering is buried deeply in unconscious memory through the strategic use of silence, it is

embodied as physical injuries and health problems resulted from difficulties of the refugee life. Sometimes, victims who usually prefer to be silent begin to talk about their experience in a different context. In Harnisch and Montgomery's report (2017), while former forcibly recruited people in northern Uganda employed silent coping to comfort and to maintain well-being, they also gave positive feedback on talking and sharing their suffering with the research team. The authors reflect that participants appreciated being listened to because they were isolated and stigmatized within their community or possibly they attempted to build a positive rapport with the Western researchers in the expectation of financial benefits.

These studies suggest the need for a nuanced understanding of the ways in which silence and suffering are associated with each other. However, the mechanisms by which silence results in suffering in the context of war and political repression are still unclear. By exploring these mechanisms, this study aims to contribute to understanding of suffering in these contexts and to improvement of support for local communities.

2. Methods

The ethnographic research, including observation and in-depth interviews, was conducted in the Musanze district between August 2015 and May 2016, built on my prior life and work experience in local communities as an aid worker for a Japanese governmental agency over two years. Research techniques from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) informed the whole research cycle of sampling, data generation, analysis and writing.

2.1. Research site

The research was conducted in the Musanze district where citizens have been silenced about their massacre experience in the wars of the 1990s due to ongoing political constraints as discussed earlier. The region has had an extremely high proportion of Hutus since before colonialization (Newbury,1980). According to the pre-genocide census, the proportion of Tutsis in Musanze was only 0.5%, much lower than the country's general proportion of 10–15% (RR, 1991 in Fujii, 2009). Given the small proportion of Tutsis, the number of genocide survivors in Musanze was 1,893, only 0.6% of all genocide survivors across the country (INSR, 2008). However, Musanze was part of the main battlefield of the *abacengezi* war, during which citizens were calamitously slaughtered (AI, 1997; 1998; AR, 1999; HRW, 1999). Although no official data on victims of this tragedy are available, the district survey traced its impact eight years after the end of the war; 21% of children in Musanze were orphans (NISR, 2008), which was 5% higher than the national average (NISR, 2010/2011). Despite the serious consequences, specific support to victims of the *abacengezi* war is extremely limited. Based on my three-year observation, only a small number of local nongovernmental organizations provide healing and reconciliation programs with very limited funding.

2.2. Research team

I conducted the research with the assistance of local residents from Musanze. To maximize the variety of participants' backgrounds and narratives, I asked three residents who have different ethnicity (all references to ethnicity in this paper relate to pre-genocide identities as all citizens now have ‘Rwandan’ identity), gender and occupation to assist the recruitment and interpretation of interviews. Four additional assistants helped with transcription and translation. Amongst them, a Tutsi man had full involvement in the whole research process. He was present at most of interviews as an interpreter and also checked the quality of all transcriptions and translations produced by others with me. As a field officer of a local non-governmental organization, he always communicated with people across Musanze and nurtured wide ranging networks regardless of ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status. Despite his Tutsi background, he was generally perceived as part of the local community who shared tragic experiences; therefore, participants talked to him openly and comfortably due to their trust of, and friendship with, him. Additionally, my background as a Japanese woman, who is neither politically nor

historically related to any ethnic identities or political parties in Rwanda, played a role in building trust with him and the participants, and facilitated the telling of stories by both men and women.

2.3. Research participants and sampling strategy

To collect common narratives of suffering among local residents of Musanze, participants were approached in villages through networks that my assistants and I had already established. In the fragile post-war context, trust built on existing networks was vital to gain access to the research site, participants and their stories. Sampling was conducted in two stages, initial and then theoretical sampling until the analysis reached theoretical saturation according to the grounded-theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). The initial sampling began in the area which showed the highest percentage of orphans according to the recent district survey (NISR, 2012) as a benchmark of massacres. It gradually involved neighboring areas to include a maximum variation sample of participants' characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, socio-economic status, and home village, in order to facilitate analysis of experience of suffering. After the initial analysis, the research moved to theoretical sampling which sought relevant data to examine the coding schemes, analytical questions and a provisional hypothesis emerged from the initial analysis. The coding schemes were developed and refined through the cyclical process of theoretical sampling and analyses through constant comparison and memo-writing. The sampling process was terminated when information provided by new interviewees began to exceed the research scope, not just repeat the obtained data, which shows that the research had reached ‘saturation’ (Charmaz, 2006).

A total of 43 local residents gave informed consent as individual participants in in-depth interviews. But three did not complete interviews for fear of being monitored and imprisoned by the government as a consequence of relating their experiences, which is not an unusual attitude when state monitoring penetrates grassroots communities (AI, 2010; Purdeková, 2011). Thus data from 40 participants (24 women and 16 men, aged 22–84 years) were analyzed. Some participants were repeatedly interviewed to collect further information based on theoretical sampling. Although I did not ask about ethnicity during the interview because any reference to ethnicity is criminalized (RoR, 2001), at least eight participants were believed to be Tutsis before the genocide, based on information from my local assistants. See Table1 for participant characteristics (ethnicity is not presented due to insufficient quality of information). All participants were given 2kg of rice (worth approximately $1.5, August 2015), which provided two days’ food for a family, as an honorarium for participation.

Table 1

Characteristics of research participants.

	Number (total 40)
Gender	
Female	24
Male	16
Age (ranged from 22 to 84 years)	
20–29 years	8
30–39 years	17
40 years and over	15

2.4. Data generation and analysis

Data were generated through ethnographic observation and in depth interviews. The ethnographic observation focused on suffering and healing in everyday life and social activities, including community meetings and commemoration ceremonies during genocide memorial week in April 2016, during which I took field notes for analysis. Information gained from informal interviews, which were part of the ethnographic observation, also contributed to the analysis. Additionally, I held in-depth interviews with participants who had given informed consent individually.

Almost all the in-depth interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda (four were in English). Although I speak Kinyarwanda, I had a local assistant act as interpreter during the interviews since interviewees could have suspected that I was a government inspector or was working for Hutu extremists if I had conducted interviews in Kinyarwanda by myself. I needed to gain access to potential participants through my networks and those of my assistants based on trust. I produced interview topic guides through close discussions with assistants and refined them before use by conducting pre-tests with a few participants to ensure that the questions and wordings were comprehensible for them. The topic guides were designed to be loosely structured and conversational, using three key questions to facilitate story telling about suffering and healing. The key question which facilitated narratives of suffering and informed this paper was; ‘can you tell me your experience during wartime (1990–2000) and how you have survived until today?'. Interviewees were told to feel free to say whatever they wanted for as long as they needed. The number of key questions, probes, and interpretation during the interview was minimized to prevent interruption of stories. All interviews were transcribed and double checked by me and my assistants according to agreed guidelines. One assistant translated the Kinyarwanda transcriptions into English, after which I checked and refined them in conjunction with another assistant and produced the final translation. While producing translations, assistants provided rich cultural and contextual accounts which I transcribed and analyzed as data.

Since this research concerned narratives of suffering and of silence, I considered not only what is spoken but also how it is spoken, what is unspoken and how the participant acted during interviews as part of the data, according to narrative approaches (Mattingly, 2007; Riessman, 2008; Hydén,2013). Observation of such non-verbal expressions during interviews is particularly important in the study of trauma and silence since traumatic experience and suffering are often unspoken, instead, represented by pauses, interruptions, actions, emotional or emotionless expressions, which still convey meaning (Daniel, 1996; Hydén, 2013; Ghazali, 2014). Hence, guided by narrative and ethnographic approaches (Emerson et al., 1995; Charmaz, 2006; Mattingly, 2007; Squire, 2013), I made notes on non-verbal expressions and contextual information during the interviews (e.g. pauses, tone of voice, facial expressions, behavior, interaction with me and the interpreter) without disrupting interviewees' storytelling, then interpreted, analyzed and presented them as data. Data for analysis included70 interview transcriptions and seven A4sized field notes. I conducted 61 of the interviews and my assistant 9; I took all the field notes. I conducted data analysis constantly through the lifecycle of the ethnography, developing coding schemes manually and refining them through constant comparison and memo-writing. To ensure that my interpretation and analysis of data appropriately represented participants' subjectivity, ‘member check’ (Charmaz, 2006) was conducted with participants and assistants from the researched communities.

2.5. Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Rwanda National Ethics Committee, the Ministry of Education and the Ethics Committee of London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine as part of a larger ethnographic study on community resilience in northern Rwanda (Otake, 2017). I was able to obtain local ethical approval through a relationship of trust between the government and civil stakeholders.

3. Narratives of suffering from war

The suffering of the people of Musanze resulted from the war period 1990–2000, which an informant called ‘the decade of darkness’. During this period, participants experienced four tragedies: the civil war (1990–1994), the Tutsi genocide (1994), being refugees in eastern Zaire (1994–1997), and the *abacengezi* war (1997–2000). Given the extremely small proportion of Tutsis, participants reported that the genocide was much less active in Musanze than other parts of the country. While several participants reported witnessing the genocide near the central town, some Tutsis reported that no-one was killed during the genocide in their village. However, amongst different tragedies over the decade, the *abacengezi* war (1997–2000) was commonly reported to be the most calamitous incident since Musanze was part of the main battlefield of this war and massacres against civilians, regardless of ethnicity, took place on daily basis making survival extremely difficult. Participants reported that during this war they lost around five (least one, most 18) family members (*umuryango*, referring to kin members who are cohabiting in the same kin compound). Some lost all their family members. All except three had risked their lives and narrowly survived massacres. At least three women reported having been raped or sexually assaulted as teenage girls or even younger during the *abacengezi* war.

The participants commonly expressed suffering using the local concepts *ibikomere(pl.)/igikomere(sin.)*, which refers to ‘wounded feelings’ (see Otake, 2017, 2018). *Ibikomere* encompassed various feelings, such as sadness, depression, hopelessness, anxiety, fear, anger and mistrust; however, the most common *ibikomere* were feelings of social isolation and grief—i.e. isolation, loneliness, and helplessness, due to the loss of family members. For them, loss of family members was the main cause of suffering. Those who had not lost family members (three participants) said, for example, “I had no big *ibikomere* because no one in our family was damaged [killed or injured] by war” (woman, 30s, interview, Dec-20-2015).

The story of *ibikomere* commonly traced a sequence that began with a massacre, then loss of family and finally social isolation and grief. One recurrent sequence began with a massacre in which male villagers were summoned to meetings by soldiers and never returned. Some participants reported that soldiers dug large holes and threw in both dead and living people (including those who had been summoned) by day and night during the *abacengezi* war. These disappearances created many widows in Musanze. A woman who lives in front of one such hole recounted her story:

> At that time, they [soldiers] dug the large hole, here, and took sand out of it. […] They killed them here, at that large hole there, many people were stacked inside the hole and they died. Then they [soldiers] took other people as well by saying that they are going to have a meeting. But they [those who were taken] did not come back. They were our grandfathers, our fathers, our fathers-in-law [these ‘fathers’ refer to any elder male villagers], our friends, and many people. I was witnessing all of them [being killed].

“*Igikomere* that I will never forget ...” she continued:

> Can you imagine that you had lived with many neighbors and you see all of them were killed and stay alone in that area? I can never forget this situation in my life. I never forget that I had all of my parents [including elder relatives and neighbors], but few of them survived. Many siblings and friends died and I stay …I stay with few of them. I have only few of them survived. (40s, interview, Dec-162015)

While telling these stories, her voice became weaker until she was almost whispering. She sometimes interrupted her speech, remembered something in silence, and dabbed her eyes.

Another common narrative began by describing a massacre when soldiers visited each household in the village, demanding money, food, clothes and anything else the villagers had; household members who could not satisfy their demands were killed immediately with guns, knives and stones. One male participant provided a detailed story of such an experience, in which he lost seven family members.

That day, his family had a small dinner party with other kin members and neighbors. Then suddenly soldiers surrounded his house, four of them came in and shouted:

> “Everyone, go out!” I asked them: “Why do you say that we should go out?” They say: “Please go out without asking anything.” And some soldiers come [to me]; “you don't want to go out? I can kill you.” Then they take a big, a big knife, I remember, and they say that “I'm going to kill you”, putting it to me, here [his throat].

Then the soldiers called his grandmother and threatened to kill her son if the family did not give them money. The grandmother attempted to negotiate but failed and angry soldiers took all the family members outside and forced them to the ground face down:

> One says, “We know you sell banana beer. Why don't you give us money?”, and I say, “today I don't have money. Please forgive me. But tomorrow I will try to give you money”. And they say: “No. Here in this family, you don't give us honor today. It's the reason why everyone who is here can die immediately. […] If I say one, two, three, please do what you can do.” And that soldier says: “One, two, three!”…A lot of … bullets, a lot of, like fire, for us! And, I don't know how I… I… running. I don't know … (30s, interview, Dec-182015)

He ran across the banana forests. Although the soldiers continued to shoot, they missed him and he found himself far from home, unable to explain how he got there. Later he became mentally disturbed and was an inpatient at Ruhengeri hospital in Musanze in a coma for two days.

4. The role of unspeakability in suffering

The suffering of Musanze citizens worsened in the context of ongoing political constraints arising from the genocide ideology law (RoR, 2008b). The law was established to prevent genocide ideology but is misused to criminalize politicians and journalists who prosecute RPF perpetrated human rights abuses (AI, 2010). The concept of ‘genocide ideology’ is also abused among grassroots citizens in everyday settings (AI, 2010). During the fieldwork, I often heard of someone abusing this concept to threaten and control another when s/he had a conflict or personal hatred, and that people are scared of imprisonment as a direct or indirect consequence of a conflict with others. In this context, Musanze citizens are reluctant to speak out about their experience of the RPF-perpetrated massacres during the *abacengezi* war for fear of imprisonment. I use the term ‘unspeakability’ to refer to apolitical context whereby victims are prevented from speaking freely about their war experience or from discussing those who killed and those who were killed. The unspeakability worsened suffering of the research participants resulted from loss of family, grief and social isolation. But what are the mechanisms by which unspeakability worsens suffering? To explore this, this section will describe in more depth participants' suffering and what the loss of family means to them.

4.1. Loss of meaning of life and death

Describing how the loss of family leads to suffering, one elderly man said: “For example, you think about sharing something (*gusangira*) with a person who used to be close to you, and you realize that you are no longer with him or her. […] You see that it is also *ibikomere* …” (50s, interview, Apr-9-2016). “Sharing something” for him meant sharing everyday life, ceremonies, life-stories over drinks and food, as ordinary Rwandans do with their family members, neighbors and friends. The Kinyarwanda word ‘*gusangira*’ very frequently appeared in participants' narratives as an important element of the life they lost because of the war and needed to retrieve. The above account exemplifies what the loss of family means to those who are left, the loss of shared life.

Loss of shared life then resulted in the loss of meaning of life and of death. For instance, the man who earlier recounted his narrow survival of family killing asked; “My brothers, my sisters, my parents died immediately without [committing any] sin. Why me [alive]? I’m [here] for what?” (30s, interview, Dec-18-2015). Another man prays to God to understand the meaning of the deaths of his family members,

neighbors and friends; “Yeah … I go to pray and can think about it every time. Because God is there. There must be [a reason] why those people passed away.” (30s, interview, May-10-2016). These existential questions were frequently narrated as resulting from the destruction of shared lives. The war destroyed a shared life and tore community members into the living and the dead. Being unable to accept the deaths and separate their lives from the deaths, survivors were haunted by the question: Why did I survive while others died?

4.2. Unspeakability and unprocessed mourning

The loss of meaning of life and deaths becomes complicated in the context of unspeakability. Unspeakability has prevented survivors from processing their mourning and reconciliation, made them struggle to make sense of the deaths, and consequently, worsened *ibikomere*. The issue of unspeakability particularly emerged during genocide memorial week in April 2016. This is part of an official period of mourning genocide victims, during which the government organizes commemoration ceremonies and village meetings across the country. The media also broadcast genocide memorial songs, announce the names of all genocide victims, and show their photographs on television. The genocide survivors sometimes see the memorial period as a way of re-traumatizing them and manipulating their suffering (Burns, 2011). Musanze citizens who are not genocide survivors, too, increase their distress during the memorial period; they remember the whole war period, not only the genocide but also the *abacengezi* war. Some participants then articulated the difficulties that victims of the *abacengezi* war experience when they are unable to mourn their family members. One participant described the pain of being unable to say “‘I want to remember our neighbors.’ If you say that, you go to prison. It's a problem, very difficult problem.” (man, 30s, field notes, May-20-2016). It becomes particularly difficult when people have to explain the situation to their children. A young woman lost her brother during the *abacengezi* war and suffers most when his two children ask her why they cannot remember their father:

> Those children come to my home during memorial week and ask me; “my daddy died during the war, why my daddy is not included in people who are remembered?” You see, this is very difficult. How can you explain to this child? This is also *igikomere* which is stronger than others. […] There are many children like them. […] You know that the *abacengezi* war and the genocide are different things. But during the memorial week, we remember only those who were killed during the genocide and we can't remember those who were killed during the *abacengezi* war. […] They know the place where their fathers are buried. But they have no opportunity to remember them. (20s, interview, Apr-20-2016)

Adults also expressed the same problem. One man described the massacre of his grandmother's family members during the *abacengezi* war;

> On that day, so many people were killed. So many people. They [his grandmother's family] lost 18 people from their family. Then we collected all [dead] bodies, because it was so many, so many, and did like that … [miming hiding dead bodies under leaves], because *inkotanyi* [RPF] can come in a few minutes to kill us again, then we did quickly like this [hide them] and ran [away]. We couldn't bury them. We couldn't burn either. […] The bodies are still there but we can't do anything. […] Maybe I can go in secret and do this [putting his hands together in a gesture of prayer] … but …

He stammered. I asked if he would like to burn or bury them even now. He said loudly: “Of course! I want to!”, then continued:

> There are so many people who want to do so.… But if you say “I want to burn the bodies of my family”, the government will say that “you have the genocide ideology” and you have to go to prison. […] So that's why many people decided “don't say anything”. […] Even because you can't bury them, you can't do any ceremony [funeral]. People continue to think about them [those who were killed]. (30s, field notes, May-21-2016)

The fact that survivors of the *abacengezi* war cannot hold a funeral or process their mourning through the usual funerary rituals separates these deaths from the available narrative structures which ordinarily give meaning to a death; people "continue to think" about the dead people. "Continue to think" or "thinking too much" in isolation is cited by many participants as a condition to developing severe mental illness, *kurwara mu mutwe* (illness of the head) which includes symptoms of hallucinatory hearing and seeing dead people.

A man and his nephew who survived a collective killing described how unprocessed mourning can result in such symptoms. They could not hold funerals or dig graves but just buried the dead in the soil. This was in front of the house where the man lives now, and thus people step on the soil coming in and out of the house. Later, he developed *kurwara mu mutwe*. He looked back to when he was extremely ill:

> I had…illness of thinking a lot about things that I don't know where they came from. [… These things were] taking me far away in … people who died long ago [… I was] having hallucinations (*kurotaguzwa*), dreaming about cemeteries, things like that … (30s, interview, 28-Oct-2015)

During his illness, unknown entities were coming and taking him far away in the land of the dead. His nephew had also manifested similar symptoms after the collective killing. Although the nephew recovered over time, he reported seeing ghosts during genocide memorial week in April 2016:

> In front of my uncle's house, you know there are … I think around 8 people are buried. When I pass there, in front of that house, I sometimes see my grandfather [who was killed] …Some people say, "the reason why your uncle had that mental illness is because you didn't bury them next to the house [but in front]".

He also spoke about one of large holes in his village where dead and living people were thrown during the *abacengezi* war:

> When I pass there at night, near that hole where *inkotanyi* put a lot of people, I have this digging heart [palpitation due to fear]. I feel that a lot of dead spirits are accompanying me. And I run and when I arrive at home, I look back if there is no one and I quickly shut the door. (30s, field notes, Apr-8-2016).

In local views of life and death, while the body returns to the soil after a death, the soul goes to Heaven or Hell depending on good or bad deeds the person did before death. The soul of a bad person can become an evil spirit and return to attack the living. Holding this belief led some residents to avoid passing places where many people were killed and buried during the night. There is no opportunity to remember those victims and the holes are now either filled and growing potatoes, or used as a dump. At the end of these episodes, he said; "maybe my *ibikomere* is not ended."

4.3. Unspeakability and unprocessed reconciliation

The fact that victims cannot speak about the *abacengezi* war, including discussion of those who killed and those who were killed, not only makes it difficult to process mourning but also obstructs the reconciliation process. Reconciliation (*kwiyunga*) is a highly important issue for Rwandans who are recovering from the decade of war because they have to continue to live with perpetrators in the same village or even in the same kin compound. Generally, there is a traditional reconciliation process that Rwandans follow after an incident: first a perpetrator asks a victim for forgiveness, then the victim forgives. If the perpetrator does not ask for forgiveness, the victim can visit the perpetrator to ask for an apology. When both sides are afraid of meeting in person, they can call a mediator (*umuvugizi*) such as religious or community leader or a mutual friend. However, participants are prevented from processing this traditional reconciliation due to unspeakability; they cannot identify perpetrators who may be RPF soldiers, or family members or neighbors who were recruited by the RPF army at the time.

Identification of perpetrators can lead to accusations of holding genocide ideology and possibly from there to imprisonment.

The participants generally said they had already forgotten or stopped thinking about the perpetrators; it was a way of maintaining everyday life for them. Most of them said that they "don't know who killed" their family members; if they really did not know, they preferred to continue not knowing. One young woman said: "I wouldn't like to know who they [killers] are for [maintaining] my current life [… because] he may be someone living with me, may be a member of my group … or may be a member of my family." (20s, interview, Apr-202016). If they knew the perpetrators, and if the perpetrators were RPF solders, they still avoided naming them for fear of imprisonment. In any case, they have apparently given up processing reconciliation and try to live with unidentified or undesignated perpetrators.

Yet the suffering that some participants expressed due to unprocessed reconciliation cannot be ignored. Those of higher socio-economic status than me and my interpreter felt sufficiently safe and comfortable to speak out about this issue during the interviews. For example, one elderly man expressed anger mixed with sadness because he could not identify those who killed his relatives and neighbors. He said:

> If I [could] know them, I would ask them the reason why they killed those people and who gave them the mission. If I see it necessary, I can give them forgiveness. If I see it necessary, I bring them to the prison. […] If it was a goat [which was killed] I can forgive them because they [would have] had hunger. But if it is a person … two, three, four people [and more] …. it was many. (60s, interview, Apr9-2016)

He needed to understand "why they killed" his relatives and neighbors. In terms of seeking meaning in the deaths, his question is the other side of the coin of the question "why me [alive]?"(When everyone else died) discussed earlier. While some participants attempted to make sense of the deaths through prayer, he emphasized the need for the process of justice and reconciliation. In fact, all the other elderly male participants expressed this need in some way: by law, by the traditional reconciliation system, or by God. However, the problem was that this process was not available to them because they do not know who the killers are, or even if they know, they are prevented from identifying them.

The political constraints against identification of the RPF as perpetrators were immense, therefore, some participants transformed the perpetrators in their narratives from RPF/*inkotanyi* to abacengezi. For example, one young woman, narrating her suffering from the unprocessed reconciliation with perpetrators, described the loss of family members and her experience of being sexually abused by '*abacengezi*'. She said:

> The *abacengezi* were calling my name every time they came. […] When they come, they always came with …, for example, they were masking their heads with baskets, just to disguise themselves so that we could not recognize them […]. Then they called my name. And it was always at midnight. […] To be honest, I cannot forgive some of my family members [who were among the perpetrators]. (20s, interview, May-26-2016)

Her voice became stronger, periodically, expressing her suppressed anger and hatred along with her words "I cannot forgive". After the interview, her close friend who was present in the interview observed: "She sometimes cut her words and changed phrases. For example, she wanted to say '*inkotanyi* killed my family' but she was about to say and cut it." (30s, field notes, Mar-26-2016). She sometimes tells him the same story but the perpetrators were her family members who were then soldiers of *inkotanyi*, not *abacengezi*. For participants, *inkotanyi* refers to the RPF army and *abacengezi* the rebel troops against the RPF. Although both perpetrated massacres against civilians, more were killed by *inkotanyi*. To avoid accusing the government-led army, some participants replaced the perpetrators with *abacengezi* as in the above narrative. Others anonymized the perpetrators using terms like "soldiers", "they" and people they "don't know," at least when the voice recorder was switched on.

Similar narrative transformation was observed regarding the incident that victimized them. Some participants attempted to locate their narrative of the *abacengezi* war into that of the genocide. For example, a widow of the *abacengezi* war narrated her story as if she were a genocide widow; "I stayed alone with my children after the genocide…" (40s, fieldnotes, 28-Oct-2015). The young woman also often interrupted her speech to search for words better suited to the genocide narrative that the government propounds, although she was talking about her experience during the *abacengezi* war. At the end of the interview, she commented: "I think your research is important because of the 'genocide'". In fact, her stories described almost nothing about the 1994 genocide. Through these transformations and anonymizations, the real perpetrators were lost in their narratives of suffering.

Whether participants know who the killers are or not, some prefer to stop thinking about the killers, try to forget about the past and continue their everyday lives. For others who want to understand 'why' the offences happened, being unable to identify the offenders brings serious problems. One was that the existing reconciliation processes which can help people rationalize offences, such as traditional reconciliation and the court process, is not available to them, as discussed by the elderly man. Another problem, exemplified in the women's narratives, may be more serious; because they cannot speak about offenders, victims transform their narratives, and thus cannot place offenders and their offence in ways that make sense to them.

5. Socio-economic consequences of unspeakability

The suffering of the Musanze citizens is worsened by unspeakability, which denies them the opportunity to mourn and make sense of their loss. Additionally, the unspeakability is combined with socio-economic deprivation due to war and further escalates suffering among the participants. The decade of wars brought socio-economic consequences to Musanze citizens, such as poverty, interrupted education and unemployment. Generally, in Rwanda, the genocide survivors and returnees are entitled to intensive support from the government and government-affiliated local and international organizations, including monthly financial support, housing, school fees, income-generating activities, and counselling services under Rwandan law (RoR, 2008a). However, very little compensation exists for the loss and deprivation due to massacres in the refugee camps of eastern Zaire and during the *abacengezi* war that took place after 1994. As a result of providing support selectively for one part of communities for 20 years, the socioeconomic gap between the genocide survivors and others is gradually widening and becoming visible across the country. An international aid worker who supports grassroots reconciliation said, "I don't know what to say when I see that Tutsi genocide survivors are living in beautiful houses whereas moderate Hutu families who helped them and even had devastating injuries live in poor broken houses just in the same corner." (man, 40s, field notes, Aug-18-2015).

Such circumstances provoke feelings of inequality, grievance and complaints against the government among people in Musanze. An elderly man recounted:

> I can tell you that.… they are getting support. They are getting food. […] I came back from Zaire [as a refugee] but they [the government] have never supported me. […] Who does not have *igikomere* in the heart? […] Who did not experience the war? Everyone, everyone has been living with problems. But why don't they include 'others'? […] We have wounded feelings (*ibikomere*), which are very difficult, but where can we go [to seek for help]? (60s, interview, May-6-2016)

While speaking he stumbled, clicked his tongue out of anger and sighed out of depression. He attributed having no support to his ethnicity, Hutu. In his view, victimhood of Musanze people in refugee camps and during the *abacengezi* war is unacknowledged by the government because they are not genocide victims. They are labelled as 'perpetrators' due to their Hutu ethnicity during the genocide, and thus are considered "not a 'right' person", although they were not involved in the offence. After the *abacengezi* war, the number of orphans left in Musanze was higher than the national average (NISR, 2008; 2010/ 2011). However, support from the government and international aid organizations tended to focus on

the genocide survivors in other parts of the country. Local communities in Musanze have raised their orphans on their own with little support. “Our hearts are broken. We can commit suicide because of… [the difficulty in raising] our children …”, he said and fell silent.

6. Discussion

This paper elaborated the suffering of people in Musanze, northern Rwanda, whose silence about their war experience was enforced by ongoing political constraints. Examining associations between silence and suffering, my findings contribute to the understanding of suffering, silence and meaning-making in the context of war and political repression. The participants fundamentally suffered from grief, social isolation, and loss of meaning represented by existential questions, which was in line with previous reports from other war-influenced settings (Ventevogel et al., 2013; Rasmussen et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2016). I then argued that a key contributor to their suffering is ‘unspeakability’; that is, the political context that prevents victims from speaking freely about their war experience, including discussion of those who killed and those who were killed. Unspeakability, produced by legal abuses, fear and mistrust, then worsened suffering. In this section, I discuss the mechanisms by which the unspeakability worsens suffering and what support could be helpful for them.

The findings showed three common ways in which the unspeakability worsens suffering. Firstly, prevention of speaking about those who killed and those who were killed has obstructed the application of existing narrative structures for mourning and reconciliation, such as funerary rituals and the traditional reconciliation system. These structures would ordinarily help participants to comprehend an offence or a death and give meaning to the participant's life. Unable to hold funerary rituals, some continued to think about the dead, searching for meaning in life and death, resulting in mental disturbance and hallucinations of spirits of those they lost. Similarly, participants who were unable to access either legal or traditional reconciliation systems maintained anger and depression and continued to question why their loss had occurred. Secondly, being unable to name offenders, participants transformed their narratives, and thus could not locate offenders and offences within those narratives in ways which make sense to them. Finally, unspeakability was combined with socio-economic deprivation during and after the war period, resulting in feelings among the silenced participants of inequality with those who can officially speak about their suffering and receive support from local and international aid organizations. In short, unspeakability exacerbated suffering since survivors could neither apply ready narratives nor construct their own narratives to make sense of what had happened and give meaning to life and death. Further, unspeakability produced socio-economic inequality and grievances.

These findings reiterate previous studies in terms of reporting ‘thinking too much’ (Yarris, 2014; Betancourt et al., 2011), harmful spirit possession (Warbner, 1991; Hagengimana and Hinton, 2009; Akelloetal.,2010) and interrupted reconciliation (Lykes, 1994; Burnet, 2012) in the context of war and political repression. However, through examining the underlying mechanisms, this research shed light on the significance of the meaning-making process which was disrupted by enforced silence. For example, a condition of ‘thinking too much’ is globally seen with wide variations across cultures (Patel et al., 1995; Yarris, 2014; Kaiser et al., 2015; Betancourt et al., 2011). Kaiser et al.'s (2015) systematic review shows that ‘thinking too much’ is commonly characterized by thoughts on current concerns or past events, such as traumatic experience and death of a family member, and possibly results in severe mental illness including delusions or hallucinations. My findings add that ‘thinking too much’ about the death of family members may lead to hallucinations in the absence of appropriate mourning rituals.

Hallucinations are also reported in other war-affected populations as harmful spirit possession (Werbner, 1991; Hagengimana and Hinton, 2009; Akello et al., 2010). One example is *cen* among former child soldiers in northern Uganda, a mental disturbance by spirits of people they have killed who return seeking revenge; feelings of guilt and remorse underlie this symptom (Akello et al., 2010). Ethnography from Zimbabwe describes *ngozi*, a vengeful ghost of a family member unjustly killed

during the war; the family consulted a spiritual healer to return the dead family member home, appeasing the *ngozi* (Werbner, 1991). While sufferers of *cen* seek spiritual cleansing by herbs and prayers to mitigate guilt and remorse, and those of *ngozi* seek the return of the killed family member, my participants emphasized the importance of mourning rituals to give meaning to the deaths and make sense of their own survival. Added to the unprocessed mourning, my findings support the argument that the interrupted reconciliation process is an important consequence of forced silence in the context of war and political repression (Lykes, 1994; Burnet, 2012). Shedding light on the meaning aspect of participants' experience, this research explains that the interrupted reconciliation process exacerbates suffering since sufferers are unable to make sense of the offence.

While silence is forced by the authorities and worsens suffering through obstructing the meaning-making process, it is also important to note that victims may prefer silence as a coping strategy and a way of healing better suited to context and culture. In this research, participants who suffered from unspeakability rarely expressed a need for speaking out. Rather, they preferred to keep silent about the offenders and the offences to protect themselves mentally as well as politically and maintain their current everyday life and heal. Such silence is described as 'silent recovery' (Last, 2000: 377) or 'the practice of silence' (Jackson, 2004: 55) in other African post-war settings. In this regard, silence is not a way of evading or repressing tragic experience but alleviating suffering (Jackson, 2004). Meanwhile, it is also notable that silenced victims speak in a certain context, for example, towards an audience they trust or for the purpose of seeking help. For instance, a few participants disclosed information on the state dictatorship and human rights abuses to me, a foreign researcher who they trusted, navigating a delicate balance between a call for international support and the danger of being imprisoned. Some other participants, who transformed their narrative to accommodate the mainstream genocide narrative in the interview, shared their authentic experience with close friends and neighbours in every day settings; they carefully chose when to speak, what to say and to whom. Similar finding is reported by Zraly (2010) with Rwandan genocide-rape survivors, who become quiet about the ongoing mortal danger in the presence of government authorities, as a strategy to navigate danger and protect themselves. As noted by Purdeková, Rwandans navigate their voice and silence in dynamics of the 'political management of expression, and the limits of this endeavor' (Purdeková,2015:45). Taking my findings and literature together, while victims suffer from unspeakability, they may also prefer to be silent for healing, transform their narratives for protection, or speak out the unspeakable calling for support, depending on the context.

Some previous studies argue the need to break the silence to recover from political repression (Lykes, 1994; Herman, 1997; Burnet, 2012). Likewise, in war-affected settings, many interventions for healing and reconciliation provided by international aid organizations are designed to encourage speaking about traumatic experience, based on Western psychotherapeutic technologies. However, this research emphasizes the significance of a nuanced understanding of silence. It revealed that survivors of war and political repression may live in an environment where speaking out is not always safe, and thus, they may become silent or transform their stories in line with the mainstream narratives the authorities propound. At the same time, silence may be a locally and culturally adapted way of alleviating suffering, therefore, preferred by survivors. Given the above, breaking the silence or speaking about traumatic experience may not always be the best route to recovery in the context of war and political repression. Instead, leaving it to survivors to decide when to speak, what to say and to whom, according to the way that makes sense to them, may be more therapeutic and protective for them.

Notably, rather than breaking the silence or speaking out about traumatic experience, the participants expressed a particularly strong need to hold funerals for victims of massacres during the *abacengezi* war. As discussed earlier, the absence of mourning rituals led to visual and sensory spirit hallucinations among participants. In many cultures, funerary rituals play a significant role in processing a death. Hertz's (1960) classic anthropological thesis shows that death in many societies is a social process through which a series of mourning rituals allows the living to accept the shift of the social identity of

the dead. During the transition period, the soul of the dead is often conceived as staying in limbo between the lands of the living and the dead and possibly harming the living. Boss' (1999) 'ambiguous loss', a psychological notion, also explains suffering from loss in terms of unprocessed mourning and grief which can help the living to understand the loss. Empirically, Hagengimana and Hinton (2009) report that mourning rituals helped to mitigate hallucination of lost family members in Rwanda; a genocide survivor recovered from harmful spirit possession through proper burial rituals combined with psychiatric consultation. However, importantly, this research showed how strongly the usual burials and funerals can be impeded in the context of war and political repression; some genocide survivors are able to officially mourn their loss but this is not available to all Rwandans. How can this issue be resolved? One alternative mourning proposed by previous literature is to use materials as a symbol for the mourning ritual. For instance, in the recent Ebola experience, traditional burial rituals of touching the corpse with the hands were prohibited by public health interventions. Sierra Leone's local communities adopted alternative rituals which had been practiced during the civil war such as leaving a piece of metal at the place where the person is believed to have died (Maxman, 2015). Werbner (1991) also describes various mourning processes in post-war Zimbabwe, including not only funerals and burials but also distributions of the dead's possessions to the living, through which the living can cope with suffering and vengeful ghosts caused by the neglect of the dead during the war. Alternatively, prayer in everyday life may work as a mourning ritual and comfort (Otake, 2017, 2018).

Overall, this paper sheds light on the suffering of the silenced population, both living and dead, who are marginalized in the victor's history and reveals their need for mourning. Fassin (2007) notes that the world is characterized by the inequality of lives and international aid provision frequently focuses on survivors who were victorious in war and conflict. This paper recommends giving equal value to all deaths through conventional or alternative mourning processes for final farewells. If there is assistance which the international communities could provide but have not so far offered, it may be to admit the loss suffered by all victims, particularly those who, as part of the defeated group, are silenced and to help them to mourn this loss in a way that makes sense in local culture and ontology. It would also help to mitigate the feeling of inequality and grievance among silenced people and prevent ethnic division and future conflict.

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