

Review

Sexual violence against women during the Rwandan genocide: A narrative review

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The Rwandan genocide was characterized, in addition to brutal killings, by equally brutal acts of sexual torture, mutilation, and enslavement as weapons against Tutsi women and girls on a mass scale. Existing scholarship on sexual violence has enhanced a general increased understanding of the contexts and challenges confronting survivors. Though the raping of women in combat and occupation zones is very common, it is never justified and will always be a serious human rights violation. This is a narrative review of sexual violence against women during the Rwandan genocide. Sexual violence was an intentional strategy of genocide. The study relied on literature review to analyze the sexual violence cases that were committed during the Rwandan genocide.

Key words: Rwandan genocide, sexual violence, rape, gender violation, sexual assault, genocidal rape, opportunistic rape.

INTRODUCTION

Though scholars over the past decades have paid relatively greater attention to sexual violence than before, its existence during conflict has been a bit neglected (Mullins, 2009b). The Rwandan genocide was characterized, in addition to brutal killings, by equally brutal acts of sexual violence on a mass scale. Existing scholarship on sexual violence has enhanced a general increased understanding of the contexts and challenges confronting survivors (Denov et al., 2020). Though the raping of women in combat and occupation zones is very common, it is never justified and will always be a serious human rights violation. Sexual violence, during and after the genocide, was characterized by acts of sexual molestation, mutilation, rape and sexual enslavement. Tutsi women and girls were the main victims and rape was a tool to humiliate and annihilate the ethnic Tutsi population (Amnesty International, 2004; Hamel, 2016).

The rape occurred in all sorts of weird places such as on the streets, at checkpoints, in cultivated plots, in or near governmental offices, hospitals, churches, and other public buildings (Nowrojee, 2005). Even some Hutu women who could not prove their identities and looked like Tutsi were raped as they were regarded as Tutsi women in disguise (Nowrojee, 2005). An estimated 250000 -500 000 Rwandan women were raped (Banyanga et al., 2017; Haffajee, 2006). Rape during the Rwanda genocide was well organized and encouraged by those with military and political power and was part of the broader genocide event (Mullins, 2009b).

On the 6th of April 1994, the Rwandans woke up to the the news that Rwandan President Habyarimana's plane had been shot down. Militia members set up roadblocks throughout the streets of Kigali and began house-to-house searches, killing anyone who was deemed an

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enemy (Awoh and Nkwi, 2017). Victims were carefully selected and early killings were being carried out from a list of Tutsis that had been prepared months in advance. The list expanded to all Tutsis and any Hutu sympathizers (Reyntjens, 2016). The killings spurred the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi rebel group operating in exile, to re-start war. This led to a government encouraged 100 days of mass slaughter. Hutus and Twas across the country began to slaughter their Tutsi neighbours, along with Hutu and Twa that were married to, sympathetic, or just friendly with Tutsi (Reyntjens, 2016). Sexual violence, especially against women was also rife.

The act of rape is often violent, humiliating and causes immense psychological trauma to victims and affected families. It does not matter if the rape occurred during conflict or not. Rape survivors struggle to accept their fate and need a lot of psychological and social support to promote their reintegration into society and give them a chance of, once again, living a normal life. Bringing these cases of rape to light through publication and encouraging disclosure by victims are some ways of helping rape victims heal and move on in their lives. The purpose of this narrative review is to discuss the rape that occurred during the Rwandan genocide, the motive behind it, the perpetrators, its effects, attempts of justice, and to suggest opportunities for addressing the sequel to promote normal living among survivors. As has been said, literature focused on sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide. Literature was narrative synthesized and findings were presented under various topics relating to sexual violence namely; the magnitude of violence, forms of sexual violation, possible causes, perpetrators, effects of violence, any attempts at justice, and opportunities for rehabilitation of survivors. This study focuses on sexual violence against women, causes of sexual violence, effects of sexual violence, challenges to justice and reparation, and opportunities for healing.

Sexual violence against women

As the general state of security in the country declined, members of the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi militias, the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), and others took advantage of the chaotic conditions to commit acts of sexual violence with impunity. Local government officials advised women to wear both shorts and underwear beneath their skirts as an impediment to rape rather than wearing nothing per custom (Burnet, 2012). While official reports of rape were almost non-existent, Human Rights Watch reported in 1993, 'Rwandan soldiers frequently rape women, but because they are never punished for the crime, victims rarely report the attacks. Women know that to accuse soldiers is futile and may well lead to further harassment or even death' (Human Rights Watch, 1993).

As mentioned earlier, acts of genocide and sexual violence were committed by men of varied classes and professions. Rape became a hegemonic aspect of society; Hutu men used rape as a routine tool to dominate and destroy Tutsi women. The overwhelming majority of men who participated in the Rwandan genocide were ordinary men who did not have a history of violence or military involvement (Straus, 2006, p96). Many Hutu men joined militia groups out of fear of the punishment they could face for not getting involved (Straus, 2006). However, this was not the only reason Hutu men became involved in attacks. Others chose to join the attacks to counter the advancement of Tutsi rebels, to steal goods from houses being ransacked, or due to deep loyalism to the Hutu ethnicity (Straus, 2006). Although ordinary Hutu men made up the largest group of perpetrators of violence against women during the Rwandan genocide, Hutu women also played a key role as agents of violence against Tutsi women.

Violence in genocides most clearly manifests itself in the methodologies used to destroy the intended group. According to the United Nations (2002, p3) definition, genocidal acts include "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group [and] imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group". Genocidal rape is defined as a systemically organized military tactic of terror and genocide. It is used to generate fear in a subdued population, humiliate the population (both men and women), derogate women (through spoilage of identity), and create a cohort of mixed-ethnic children to maintain the humiliation/spoilage/domination. Such use of sexual assault is an orchestrated tactic of warfare (Mullins, 2009a).

Some common tactics of genocide are public executions, mass killings, and starvation. Within the Rwandan genocide, the Hutu militia, also called the *Interahamwe*, used such methods to kill Tutsi men, women, and children. However, there was one method of genocide that existed within Rwanda that stood out: rape. Rape as a tool of genocide was present prior to the Rwandan genocide, such as in Armenia in the early twentieth century, but it was not used systematically and extensively until the Rwandan genocide (Mangassarian, 2016).

Fear of rape is a common emotion that all women near or within a combat zone experience; the widespread existence of this type of assault clearly enhances the stresses and anxieties already experienced by civilians (Mullins, 2009b). Genocidal rape capitalizes upon this and elevates assaults to a tactic of terrorism. Another primary motivation for mass rape is the humiliation of male community members. In Rwanda men were made to watch as their wives and daughters were assaulted; isolated reports of soldiers forcing men to rape their own daughters have also emerged (Chang, 1997). Such actions are vivid demonstrations of the newfound powerlessness of men in the combat zone.

Interahamwe militiamen often raped or sexually tortured Tutsi women before killing them. Perpetrators sometimes mutilated women during the rapes or before killing them by cutting off their breasts, puncturing the vagina with sharp objects, or disfiguring body parts that looked 'Tutsi' such as long fingers or thin noses (Alison, 1999). In other cases, Tutsi women were gang-raped, sexually enslaved, or 'married' by *Interahamwe* militiamen in exchange for having their lives saved.

Within the Rwandan genocide, rape specifically targeted women. Rwanda's patriarchal, the militaristic society reinforces the notion that women are property and, therefore, are part of the plunder of war (Kantengwa, 2014). The use of rape in Rwanda went deeper than just men satisfying their sexual needs "in a forceful demonstration of hyper-masculinity," which often underlies rape in a domestic setting (Mullins, 2009b, p721). Instead, rape was used to dehumanize and terrorize Tutsi women, by both common Hutu men and members of the Hutu militia (Totten and Ubaldo, p 2011: 31, 111). The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Rwanda, stated "rape was the rule and its absence was the exception," emphasizing the fact that almost all Tutsi women and girls were raped during the genocide.

Research on sexual violence in Rwanda has emphasized rape and other forms of sexual violence as conscious strategies on the part of the perpetrators to terrorize and control women, girls, and other civilians (Brunet and Helal, 1998). Sexual violence includes forcible sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or oral cavity by a penis and/or of the vagina or anus by some other object, and sexual abuse, such as forced nudity. Sexual violence goes beyond physical as it includes offenses such as forced nudity and the mental torture associated with it (Askin, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a narrative review of previous researches on the Rwandan Genocide. A number of scholars and non-government agencies have published extensively on the Rwandan Genocide. This study specifically targeted previous studies that focused specifically on the effects of the genocide on women and girls.

FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Mullins (2009a) argued that there were three broad types of assaults during the genocide, namely: opportunistic assaults, episodes of sexual enslavement; and genocidal rapes, which were framed by the broader genocidal endeavours occurring at the time.

Opportunistic rape

Opportunistic rape is defined as "sexual assaults that arise out of general chaos and confusion of military

engagement" (Mullins, 2009b, p726). This type of rape presents itself not just in instances of genocide, but also in many wartime conflicts. In the context of the Rwandan genocide, opportunistic rape occurred least frequently. Opportunistic rape relates closely to the "pressure cooker" theory of rape during wartime. According to this theory, men's instinctual sexual aggression mixed with the chaos of war and combat creates a "pressure cooker" which causes rape (Gottschall, 2004, p133). Opportunistic rapes were motivated by individualistic drives and arose out of the general chaos and confusion of a military engagement. They were the least frequently occurring and were not necessarily part of the military campaign. The relatively lower incidence of this type of assault can be an artefact of data because only the most severe and specifically genocidal assaults were more likely to be included at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). A number of cases could have just gone unreported (Mullins, 2009b).

Sexual enslavement

Sexual enslavement describes situations in which one woman would experience multiple sexual assaults over a brief period of time while being confined, usually in the house of an *Interahamwe* soldier (Mullins, 2009a, p727). This confinement separates sexual enslavement from other forms of rape. Additionally, sexually enslaved women were threatened with intense violence unless they gave in to the will and requests of the soldiers. For example, one woman was threatened with being pierced by a spear after initially refusing sex (Mullins, 2009b, p727). Sexual enslavements also referred to cases where a woman was detained, typically in the house of an *Interahamwe*, and subjected to repeated sexual assaults over a period of days (Sitkin et al., 2019). Genocidal rapes were more brutal and their motivation and consequences went beyond mere sexual assault. They were one of many broader attempts to eliminate the Tutsis and typically arose out of the direct involvement of local leadership.

Genocidal rapes

Genocidal rapes are those whose motivation and consequences go beyond more mundane catalysts for sexual assault. These violations are part of a broader attempt to eliminate a category of people in whole or in part, with sexual violence being only one of many tactics used. In the Rwandan genocide of 1994, genocidal rapes typically arose out of the direct involvement of local leadership. One case such as this was presented in the case against Alfred Musema. Leading a group of 30 *Interahamwe*, Musema flushed six women out of their hiding place in some bushes off the road. As the witness recounted to the ICTR, "we thought we were going to be

killed in the bush,” so they revealed themselves to the Hutu forces. After forcing them into a line, Musema selected a 25-year-old Tutsi woman who was eight months pregnant. Telling his troops that “he would give them an example as to what to do with the women...the young men should take the Tutsi women and see how they are made,” he raped the woman then stabbed her in the throat. After their leader was finished, the militiamen fell upon the rest of the women, “raping them and after raping them, they stuck some pointed sticks into their private parts...those who did not die were finished off either with clubs or with machetes.” After the initial sexual assault, Musema spent the time his men were raping the other five women shooting at men trying to flee into the hills. Sexual violence took many forms, some of them very humiliating. While some women were raped behind closed doors, some were raped in very public places. Other victims were forced to parade nude in front of their perpetrators (Nduwimana, 2004; Nowrojee, 1996). Some mothers were made to watch while their daughters were being raped, while some fathers and brothers were forced to rape their own daughters. Genital mutilation was also very rife. There were also incidences of anal and forced oral sex. Moreover, victims were denied health care if they contracted sexually transmitted illnesses and abortions if they had unwanted pregnancies (Nduwimana, 2004). Some women were also forced to abort their babies in unsafe environments and quite a number died from obstetric complications. Some had their pregnant bellies cut open in full view of their families and loved ones. Some young girls were forced to marry people who had raped them or even killed their parents. Even older women were forced into marriages (Nowrojee, 1996).

Justification for sexual violence against women

Sexual assaults on women and girls increased dramatically following the advent of the civil war in 1990. While it is almost certain that rape and sexual violence existed before then, they were not widely recognized as problems, and women’s organizations did not mobilize on the issue. There are a number of factors that perpetuate sexual violence against women during conflicts. This ill-treatment relates to issues of property rights and women are regarded as men’s property. Women have also been historically considered as spoils of war. During war times, women are abducted and become sexual and domestic servants (Mullins, 2009b). The subordinate and unequal status of men and women in society persist during conflict times and it puts them at risk for sexual violence. Many African governments promoted an ethos of restorative masculinity, and political culture in the new nations expressed authoritarian and militarist legacies (Gallimore, 2008). Moreover, cultural beliefs in most African societies reinforce male beliefs about sexual

privileges and access by perpetuating sexual assault that organized and regulated such behaviour as occurred in Rwanda. Sexual assault is also a form of derogation and identity spoilage of the rape victims (Mullins, 2009b). Genocidal rape was an organized military tactic of terror and genocide used to generate fear in a subdued population. Moreover, the creation of a cohort of mixed-ethnic children also served to maintain the humiliation and will always serve as an unpleasant reminder of the genocidal events. Fear of rape is a common emotion that all women near or within a combat zone experience; the widespread existence of this type of assault clearly enhances the stresses and anxieties already experienced by civilians. Genocidal rape capitalizes upon this and elevates assaults to a tactic of terrorism (Mullins, 2009b). Mass rape also served to humiliate male community members. Tutsi men and to some extent Hutus were made to watch as their wives and daughters were assaulted and some were even forced to rape their own daughters. This resulted in powerlessness among the Tutsis and having to be forced to participate in violation of their own women and girls was great torture (Mullins, 2009b).

According to Day (1994), rape is commonly defined as ‘non-consensual sex’ or ‘non-consensual sexual intercourse.’ This definition raises some significant conceptual problems when used in Rwanda (and many other African countries) because women in these cultures usually do not give explicit, verbal consent to sexual intercourse. Among Rwandans as well as many other African groups, modesty is a feminine ideal and unmarried girls and women are expected to uphold a cultural model of the ‘modest virgin’ devoid of any sexual knowledge or urges (Jefremovas, 1991). Since explicit expressions of sexual desire are considered immodest, female consent is usually signalled implicitly through non-verbal cues or ‘situational consent,’ that is, a woman or girl’s willingness to be in a particular place, at a particular time, with a particular person.

Leaders were also responsible for the mass violence as they made frequent calls to rape. This was the highest level of harm and shame done to victims, their families, and communities, as Hutu killers were incited to commit greater and more atrocious levels of violence against Tutsi women (Sitkin et al., 2019). Long-standing ethnic squabbles between the Hutus and Tutsi were escalated by these calls. Some scholars have proposed the substitution argument that maintains that combatants with irregular access to prostitutes, camp followers, or willing civilians, often turn to rape. In such instances, rape becomes a recreational activity (Wood, 2009). Some have also proposed that military people often do not have enough resources to hire sex workers. However, during the Rwandan genocide, rape was more ethnically motivated and might not have had anything to do with the availability of money to pay for sexual favors. There was a targeting of particular groups of women, especially the

Tutsi, and in some cases, non-rape sexual torture (Wood, 2009).

Perpetrators of sexual violence

There were a number of different perpetrators of sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide (Mullins, 2009a; Nowrojee, 1996). The major culprits were the militia and other law enforcement agents. Thousands of women were raped and sexually tortured by Hutu extremists in an effort to eliminate the Tutsi population (Sitkin et al., 2019). Other perpetrators were the *Interahamwe*, a Hutu paramilitary organization backed by the Rwandan government, Rwandan soldiers and officers, National Police, and elite soldiers of the Presidential Guard (Nowrojee, 1996). Leaders were too powerful within their communities and were also major culprits (Sitkin et al., 2019). Individuals with other personal motivations were also involved in rape. In some instances, Hutus who had failed to get a chance of marrying a Tutsi woman saw it as their opportunity to “taste” a Tutsi. Some Hutu women were sexually abused by soldiers from the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in revenge for what Hutu men had previously done to Tutsi women (Banyanga et al., 2017). Women were also involved in abuses of other women (Brown, 2014; Jessee, 2015). The ICTR established sexual violence as an explicit strategy of the genocide and yielded the first judgment of rape as a genocide crime in an international court. The ICTR convicted Jean-Paul Akayesu, Burgomaster (Mayor) of Taba commune, of using rape as a weapon of genocide even though he did not participate in sexual violence (Mullins, 2009a). Instead, he ordered others to rape and engages in sexual violence as part of the genocide (Mullins, 2009b). Other leaders ordered militiamen and other community members to rape and also committed rape themselves. In 2011, the ICTR found Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, a woman and Minister of Women’s Development in the interim government in power during the genocide, responsible for aiding and abetting rapes and ordering the rape of Tutsi women during the genocide. Unfortunately, due to errors committed during the trial by the prosecutor’s office, the court did not find her guilty of rape as a crime of genocide (Mullins, 2009).

EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Physical violence

The rape resulted in a lot of unwanted pregnancies. Between 2000 and 20000 children were born as a result of forced impregnation during and after the genocide (de Brouwer et al., 2009; Mukangendo, 2007). Besides pregnancy, rape in the long term can result in HIV and AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

(Banyanga et al., 2017). There was a dramatic increase in HIV and AIDS cases after the genocide with some studies reporting prevalence as high as 66.7% among female victims (Amnesty International, 2004). Much of the dramatic increase was attributed to intentional transmission by HIV-positive Hutu men while a significant number of Tutsi women were given as gifts to Hutu men who had excelled at killing Tutsis. In 2001, 70% of the 25000 members of a group called Association des Veuves du Genocide d’Avril, were HIV positive (African Rights, 2004). Brutal rapes and killings also left many women maimed for life, while some sustained physical injuries arising from rape, mutilation, battering, and being forced to live in unhygienic spaces especially where rape involved enslavement (Nowrojee, 1996). Even incidences of diseases such as Malaria rose. Some communicable diseases such as tuberculosis affected women the most since they were caregivers.

Psychological

Wartime rape potentially results in mental and neurotic disorders, somatic disorders, post-traumatic stress, psychological distress, and major depressive disorder. It can also lead to social dysfunction, concentration difficulties, and generalised anxiety disorder (Zraly et al., 2011). Victims were left with psychological wounds and psycho-social challenges (Zraly et al., 2011). Even physical problems such as unwanted pregnancies exert a huge psychological burden on the victim. Rape trauma syndrome is real (African Rights, 2004). Alarming high rates of HIV and AIDS and persistent psychiatric suffering were reported among Tutsi women survivors in Rwanda (Nduwimana, 2004). Tutsi women were constantly living in terror. The overall extent of the sexual violence was not known and women often left their hiding places in the hope of some protection, and in most cases their judgment was wrong. Somatic anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder can render a victim powerless (Cohen et al., 2009; Neugebauer et al., 2009; Zraly et al., 2011). In some instances, a vicious cycle was started where victims manifested risky behaviours such as poor health-seeking, risky sexual behaviour, non-initiation, delay or defaulting of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), and reduced ART adherence (Walstrom et al., 2013).

Beyond physical brutality, sexual violence in the genocide consisted of symbolic and psycho-social violence. Perpetrators targeted the normally privileged role of Rwandan women as mothers. They disembowelled pregnant women while still alive and cut their fetuses out of their wombs (Human Rights Watch, 1999). They raped and sexually mutilated women and then told them bullets should not be ‘wasted’ on them because they would ‘die of AIDS,’ presumably contracted during the rapes (de Brouwer et al., 2009). Extremist rhetoric

targeted Tutsi beauty and desirability, militiamen were promised the opportunity for sexual intercourse with Tutsi women as a reward for their 'work,' that is killing Tutsis and others identified as enemies of the state. Survivors frequently reported that perpetrators said that they wanted to see if 'Tutsi women were like Hutu women' (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Many perpetrators raped Tutsi women as punishment for 'their supposed arrogance' since Tutsi women were 'said to scorn Hutu men' (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Rape is violent and destabilizing (Fallon, 2018; Walstrom et al., 2013). Stigma is real and also influenced by cultural factors. In the context of war, it becomes even worse as rape victims may raise suspicion within their communities. They tend to get abandoned by their communities and are accused of collaborating with the enemy (Mukangendo, 2007). As a result, they are marginalized and are prone to more human rights abuses. Some women were forcibly displaced from their homes and this put them at even more risk of sexual assault as refugees. Unmarried women who have been raped are typically no longer considered desirable for marriage. In most cases, they have nowhere to turn for survival, resulting in them starving or marginalized in society (Mullins, 2009b).

The Rwandan women who were raped are ignored and marginalized by their families and communities, and the children born as a result of rape were not accepted in their communities, instead, they were considered as social burdens (Mukamana et al., 2018). The use of sexual violence in war and genocide leaves an entire society with long-term suffering (Clark, 2014). A woman who has been raped may be left with horrific bodily injuries that impair her sense of what it means to be a woman, and the act of being raped may rob her of the opportunity of ever finding a husband or of having a family of her own. Thus, some raped Rwandan women and girls have found it harder to find a partner (Banyanga et al., 2017). Some raped Tutsi wives of imprisoned Hutu men were denied access to genocide survivor organizations because they were not perceived as real survivors (Burnet, 2012).

Political-economic weapon

Rape during the genocide also became a political-economic weapon. The Rwandan state sought to eliminate the Tutsi ethnic group through the destruction or systematic stripping of assets. Tutsi homes and businesses were looted and burned; soldiers, militiamen, and civilian perpetrators were 'rewarded' for their work with property taken from Tutsis. Within this context, Tutsi women and girls were often treated as war booty or property (Turshen, 2001). For example, Rwandan soldiers ordered the Director of a nursing school to hand over female students and raped female employees of a

Roman Catholic seminary as 'a contribution to the war effort' (Human Rights Watch, 1999). In some communities, local authorities worked to keep the Tutsi wives of Hutu men alive only because 'depriving a man of the productive and reproductive capacities of his wife harmed his interests' and could diminish his willingness to support the genocide. Women's land rights were sometimes part of the 'reward' for militiamen. One survivor recounted how the head of the local militia gave her and her sisters to militiamen as 'wives and their father's land were split among the 'husbands' (Des Forges, 1999). Women and girls' greater survival rates can in part be explained through this use of women and girls as economic pawns to acquire land and property through so-called 'marriages'.

CHILDREN BORN OUT OF RAPE

Many women and girls who were raped became pregnant. While abortion was illegal in Rwanda in 1994, in some hospitals and medical clinics nurses and physicians quietly offered an unknown number of these women abortions as a treatment for their physical and psychological trauma. Nonetheless, a significant number of women and girls gave birth to children who were commonly called 'children of bad memories' in Kinyarwanda (Burnet, 2012). The exact number of children born of genocidal rape in Rwanda remains unknown, but it is estimated to be between 10,000 and 25,000 (Hogwood et al., 2018). Rape also has a negative impact on the children born as a result (Kahn and Denov, 2019). Such children are especially prone to suffering from severe psychological disorders like depression and anxiety (Kahn et al., 2014), parental neglect, and have a higher chance of becoming street children and being trafficked (Hamel, 2016). There should be no reason to punish these children as they had absolutely no choice in what happened to them (Denov et al., 2020; Hogwood et al., 2018). Children also have an identity crisis as they are not identified with both the father's and the mother's families (Mukahigiro, 2019). Regardless of the increased attention for the suffering of raped women, little attention has been directed at the neglected children born as a result of rape, and their life situations in their communities (Anderson and Van Ee, 2019; Kagoyire and Richters, 2018; Mukamana et al., 2018). Male babies are at risk of being viewed as future enemies growing in the community. In many families, these children are a source of conflict and major division between their mothers and stepfathers (Hogwood et al., 2018). Some families have raised children of rape with as much love and care (Walstrom et al., 2013).

Despite these obstacles, children born of rape become central to some sexual violence survivors' agencies: these survivors redefined themselves as mothers and made decisions to protect the well-being of their children.

In Rwanda as elsewhere in Africa, motherhood is the best light in which a woman can be seen. By re-inventing themselves as mothers, although as single mothers, these rape survivors recovered their dignity and reclaimed their agency (Walstrom et al., 2013). The radically transformed social context wrought by the genocide made this option more practical. In the aftermath of the genocide, single motherhood became less stigmatized and parents became less willing to enforce customary sanctions, such as pregnant daughters' banishment or sending the infants to orphanages.

CHALLENGES TO JUSTICE AND REPARATION

Rape, like genocide, will not be deterred unless and until the stories are heard. People must hear the horrifying, think the unthinkable, and speak the unspeakable (Tompkins, 1994). There has not been any effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators; hence, nothing deterrent is in place to protect women (Nowrojee, 2005; Price et al., 2010; Warren, 2008). There is a general disregard for the suffering of women and girls post-conflict because there are inadequate services for survivors of wartime sexual assault. There is a lack of commitment to facilitating rape survivors' reintegration into society (Abi-Falah, 2019; Jefferson, 2004). As with any court proceedings, presentations were limited to specific actions without the general depiction of the events and the sexual violence that was embedded in the broader homicidal events (Warren, 2008). Only those witnesses whom the ICTR could locate, interview, and were willing to appear in the trial had access to the judiciary. This obviously left a lot of victims with psychological wounds emanating from rape events (Mullins, 2009b). Besides some have since died, leaving the burden of the trauma on their loved ones. Some victims could not travel freely to the office of the prosecutor. The majority of Rwanda was too dangerous to allow free movement of ICTR personnel and, rather, could only travel with UN armed escorts, seriously limiting their access to survivors and information. Maintaining the secrecy of witness identities was also essential. Some women, out of shame, chose not to report (Eramian and Denov, 2018). Women could also not well articulate the horrific events due to hesitancy to use the explicit language of penis or vagina or sexual organs (Fletcher, 2021). While such linguistic semantics do not prevent facts and events from being analyzed, they present the events in a less graphic form than expected (Fletcher, 2021; Mullins, 2009a).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALING

There are a number of opportunities in Rwanda for justice and reparation of the victims. The presence of women in decision-making positions should be utilized as an

opportunity to pursue justice for survivors of rape victims (Abbott et al., 2018). Rwanda has more female ministers than males with women now making up 52% of the cabinet (Mogoathe, 2019). The rebuilding of the public health system should provide a platform for mental health care for survivors. From 1997 to 1999, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) national-level program was implemented to support female victims of violence with education campaigns, and the provision of medical supplies and basic psycho-social training to health care and social service providers (Zraly et al., 2011). A number of Non-Governmental Organisations operating in Rwanda should maximize efforts to bring both physical and psychological healing to rape survivors. There are Women Genocide Survivor associations whose purpose is to support survivors (Zraly et al., 2011). These obviously need a lot of funding. There is also a need to promote the district and sector level associations composed of genocide survivors such as Abasa. Informal community health services such as support or self-help groups are available in the community but that is not part of the formal health and welfare system, need to be supported in terms of human and material resources' (Zraly et al., 2011). Youth born out of the rape that occurred during the genocide could be viewed as symbols of reconciliation rather than a source of unending suffering (Denov and Kahn, 2019).

Anderlini (2000) argued that it is important for women to participate in peace building processes because compared to men, women are likely to put gender issues on the agenda, introduce other conflict experiences, and set different priorities for peace building and rehabilitation, and may also generate wider public support for peace accords. The UN (2002) pointed out that the participation of women and men has the potential to incorporate human rights provisions in new constitutions, introduce equal participation in elections, demand participation of women and men in decision-making, institute law against gender-based violence, and special measures to set gender-sensitive police forces and other key institutions, and greater gender balance, inheritance rights and access to land, property, housing, and credit.

CONCLUSION

Social interventions in post-genocide Rwanda focused mostly on Tutsi victims, leaving other rape survivors to cope on their own. Rape survivors who do not fit the Hutu perpetrator/Tutsi-victim dyad remained mostly silent because their experiences did not fit the dominant paradigm of Rwandan history promoted by the RPF government. Hutu women raped by FAR soldiers or *Interahamwe* militiamen during the civil war or genocide did not dare speak out publicly because they risked not only disbelief (because Hutu women are not perceived as genocide targets) but also a rejection by their husbands and families because of the 'shame' of being raped. Tutsi

women who were coerced into sex or forced into marriage with RPF soldiers had little or no access to social services for sexual violence survivors unless they adjusted their narratives and called the perpetrators *Interahamwe*. Finally, an unknown number of (Hutu and Tutsi) women have remained in marriages that began as 'forced' marriages (Burnet, 2003). Many women were sexually violated during the Rwandan genocide (Costello, 2016; Denov and Piolanti, 2020; Henry, 2016; Morris, 2016; Uwizeye et al., 2021). Though they could be other motivations for the assault, it was mainly perpetrated in the context of the genocide and was fuelled by ethnic differences existing before the killing of April 6, 1994. There were various groups of perpetrators and sexual violence that resulted in immense suffering physically, psychologically, and socially. Justice denied is justice delayed. It still remains important, that victims of the assaults be identified, encouraged to come out and speak out about their experiences. This is part of transitional justice, and it brings truth-telling, prosecution, reparation, and healing to victims. There is an urgent need to institute measures to stop or reduce the exploitation of women during conflicts. Some of the measures include women empowerment through integrated multi-sectoral approaches, education to address social and cultural perspectives on gender, and promoting and implementing laws against gender violence (WHO, 2013).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest.

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