


The aftermath of gendered violence: Kinship and affect in post-genocide Rwanda

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Abstract

Thousands of women and girls experienced sexual violence during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and many became pregnant as a result of rape. Based on two years of ethnographic research in Rwanda, this article discusses how kinship is (re-) established in the aftermath of sexual violence by focusing on the lived experiences of young people conceived in genocidal rape. The article explores what forms of relationships become possible, impossible, enabled or dismissed, in the aftermath of a period of extreme violence. Through detailing the delicate establishment of affective ties, I hope to show the subtle work that goes into containing genocide memories in the everyday. The article suggests that young people engage in careful and ‘attuned’ kinship practices in an environment that changes throughout their life course. In exploring how young people carefully navigate the mending, protecting, and accepting of ‘family’, the article emphasizes the possibilities and limitations of kinship in the aftermath of collective violence.

Keywords

sexual violence, genocide, youth, kinship, care, post-genocide Rwanda

‘I didn’t ask much more because it seemed difficult for her’, says Caleb,¹ explaining a situation where he asked his mother about his biological father. He picked up on something in his ‘felt sense’, an empathetic attunement to his mother that caused him to assess the situation and make the decision to not ask more about his father. For Caleb, a 25-year-old² young man in Rwanda, this ‘seeming difficult’ might be revealed by subtle signs in a mother’s face or in her body, or invisible signs. A sensitivity to the mood in the

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room slightly changing, a prolonged silence or language used can preclude the surfacing of memories. The precarity of touching upon topics or feelings related to genocide and its risks are navigated by young people with refined skills that are at work in their everyday family lives. Subtle displays of genocide memories entering a space can be invisible to others but are carefully controlled by Caleb and other young people having interactions with their mothers in managing the constant moving of memories of genocide between the past and present.

This article explores the ‘post-ness’ and presence of violence as genocide memories moved through time and space in a situation where the anticipation of the past surfacing in the present ‘does not allow rest to anyone’ (Wale et al., 2020: v). Medical anthropologists and social psychologists Yuko Otake and Teisi Tamming (2021) found that experiences of distress and healing occur along the axis of temporality; ‘remembering’ and ‘thinking too much’ (Backe et al., 2021) about the past worsened symptoms of distress, while healing pathways traced a process of imagining the future. The hard work of making this happen goes on in private, invisibly and through silences, as constant grappling with the axis of temporality in managing relationships and containing memories of genocide in the everyday.

In this article, I first explore the past and presence of genocide, and how it surfaces in spaces within and between people in the subtle interactions of ordinary life. By looking at the invisible of the everyday, I hope to show the hard and subtle work that goes into containing the effects of genocide. In this affective work, we see people’s attunement, vigilance, and private work towards containing and managing situations where genocide memories enter the present moment. In this exploration, I use ethnographic examples of young people and their mothers who I met in their family homes as they grapple with the past in their present. During my fieldwork I worked with organisations supporting genocide survivors and began to trace how young people had come to learn about the circumstances of their conception and how they made sense of their place in kinship relations that exist in the aftermath of rape. Slowing down and looking at the most subtle moments within my fieldwork experience created an understanding of the delicate work that goes into young people’s day-to-day skilled control and creativity in managing their social worlds. Veena Das explains that ‘the creativity of everyday life lies not only in the small changes and forms of attentiveness, but also in the volatility that might lie just below the surface of habits’ (Das, 2018: 538). Young people’s understanding of this volatility, especially as it related to their mothers’ experiences, enabled them to feel, hear, sense and anticipate it as part of everyday practices.

In order to explore these affective landscapes, I draw on the concept of ‘attunement’ to think about this affective life, which Daniel Stern, in studying the interpersonal world of infants 9 to 15 months old, calls ‘affect attunement’ (Stern, 2018: 139). He asks ‘how one can get “inside of” other people’s subjective experience and then let them know that you have arrived there, without using words?’ (2018: 139). The term refers to the sharing of inner states of feelings, a way of relating by ‘getting inside of’ other people’s inner experiences, which are acknowledged in this invisible but felt communicative space.

The Kinyarwanda verb *kumva* means to hear, taste and smell; it also means to feel, to sense and to understand. This polysemic notion combines experiencing the empirical with

the metaphysical (Purdeková, 2015). *Kumva* shows how culturally the seen, the felt and sensed are integral parts of social interactions. Locally, a deviation from *kumva* is *kumvikana* – to understand one another. *Kumvikana* refers not solely to people hearing or feeling each other, but that they have a deeper understanding between them – which can be understood as attunement. In the context of this research, this fusion of the physical and metaphysical forms an important part of affective landscapes and explains partly what happens when genocide memories enter a space. *Kumvikana* explains emically the physical and non-physical attributes that are sensed (*byumvikana* – they are sensed and made sense of).

Second, this article explores young people's attunement not only to the invisible cues that emerge in everyday interactions, but perceptions about them that manifest in their lives. A perceived connection to a violent past, a violent conception that carries through in the present at times dictates young people's relationships with kin. Thus, young people were seen to take active decisions to ease tensions within potentially fraught and at times volatile family relationships based on attunement not only to the present moment but to the meaning of their own existence as part of the family. In these situations, their experiences with the physical aspects of *kumva*, such as hearing people call them 'bad names' (*amazina mabi*) coexists with a deep understanding between their own being and that of the other, *kumvikana*. My research also suggests that the meaning of their position within families could be transformed as they went through different stages of the life course. As young people moved from childhood to adulthood and parenthood, their assumed roles and responsibilities within the family and wider society offered opportunities to transcend the perception of being 'conceived in rape' through the work of care.

Methodology

This article presents findings from my doctoral research exploring how kinship works in the aftermath of violence, particularly looking at the family relations and social worlds of young people conceived in genocidal rape during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.³ Ethnographic research took place from January 2019 to July 2021⁴ and was conducted in close collaboration with two NGOs (non-governmental organisations) that organised youth camps to bring young people together to share experiences and connect. Initially, I attended and observed these youth camps, as well as other NGO community-based activities, and then proceeded to invite young people to participate in the research and volunteer to be interviewed. The interviews took place either at the youth camps, or a location of young people's choice. A total of 32 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with young people and 7 interviews with their mothers.⁵ Over the years, I stayed in touch with young people and visited them at their homes, their universities, and I was invited to meet their families.

In all meetings with young people, Christian, my translator, and I visited young people together and our presence requires careful consideration. In exploring the containment of genocide memories in everyday life, it is important to note that my presence, or Christian's, was not part of everyday life, they were ruptures to it. This rupture may have brought up other ruptures within present moments which allowed memories to emerge

that otherwise would not have. My association with NGOs may have increased this likelihood, as young people and their mothers may relate speaking of or thinking about genocide with the NGOs, and hence with me. This is critical in any analysis that follows in this article, when I speak of families descending into the ordinary (Das, 2007), that my presence was inherently extraordinary, and hence the moments in which my observations and interactions took place were too.

Ethics

The research was approved through the University of Cape Town and the Rwanda National Ethics Committee.⁶ The research had to be conducted with the support of organisations who provided access to young people and their mothers. All research participants were aware of the circumstances under which they were conceived through the supporting NGOs, while many other young people in Rwanda might not have been told about their conception and therefore could not be included in the research for ethical reasons. Within this context we therefore need to assume that the experience of young people who receive NGO support might be different from the experience of others, who may be on their own.

Measures to protect research participants, their families and myself went beyond the use of consent forms and counselling support – they became everyday practices. Young people's conception was often not openly known to their communities and their association with me as a researcher could potentially raise questions. I consistently reflected on what I said and did not say, to whom, what I said where and who would see me – any connections between myself and participants had to be carefully considered. These everyday concerns gave me a small glimpse of the lengths young people and their mothers go to so as to protect themselves and their children from others knowing about the rapes and the circumstances of a child's conception.

The aftermath of genocidal sexual violence

The aftermath of rape during the 1994 genocide has resulted in many women and their children either being ostracised by their hostile family and community environments (Hogwood et al., 2017; Mukamana and Brysiewicz, 2008; Mukangendo, 2007). Mukangendo (2007) found that caring for children in the aftermath of genocide was extremely difficult as mothers lost their marital status and rights to land, causing severe economic and social hardship. Children conceived through rape became a source of conflict among family members because they were seen as a permanent reminder of what happened during the genocide (Mukamana and Brysiewicz, 2008). In many instances, mothers and their babies were chased away and many lost the support of their extended families. The stigma associated with rape was passed down to children, who are perceived both as 'illegitimate' and as the 'enemy', through biological association with their perpetrator father (Akello, 2013; Denov et al., 2020; Hamel, 2016; Uwizeye et al., 2022). Labels such as 'child of a killer' link the child's identity to the violent acts of the perpetrator father (Erjavec and Volčič, 2010; Van Ee and Kleber, 2013). Denov et al. (2020: 46) found that 'this often

translated into youth “inheriting” the blame and being perceived as if they were their fathers’, leading to stigmatisation and marginalisation. Erjavec and Volčič (2010), in their study of adolescents born as a result of rape conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, revealed key themes, including adolescents experiencing a continued sense of hostility and stigma even after the end of the war, and feeling as if they belong to the ‘other’. Children were also found to experience guilt and reversed roles in the parental relationship, becoming carers of their mothers (Kahn and Denov, 2022). Rwandan cultural relational ontologies are constituted by social networks and defined by relational roles such as that of a parent or a child (Eramian, 2017). Thus, children being perceived as ‘children of killers’ is profoundly limiting in creating a sense of selfhood when, due to stigma and isolation, the social networks that are supposed to constitute a sense of self do not exist. Yet the reversal of roles in care allows for children to be perceived differently.

Relations of care are elaborated on by Nina Haberland in her article in this issue. She addresses the state taking on a ‘parental force’ in family welfare in post-socialist Tanzania, where welfare officers ‘educated their clients to become “better” citizens by being “proper” parents’ (2023, this volume). Nayanika Mookherjee (2007: 342), in her work on raped women during the Bangladesh 1971 civil war, also comments on the ‘parental role of the state’ in dealing with ‘war babies’ conceived during the war. Her research showed the state’s effort to protect women from ‘the emotions of motherhood’. In enforcing a post-war ‘state of exception’ around abortion and adoption laws, the state aimed to limit ‘illegitimate motherhood’ (that is, mothering illegitimate children of rape) as central to nation-building, as women then became available ‘for legal marriage alliances and motherhoods’ (Mookherjee, 2007: 349–50). In Rwanda, ‘illegitimate motherhood’ was not regulated by the state, but finds regulation within communities and families, as the ‘emotions of motherhood’ play out in the everyday. Nation-building in Rwanda has erased the public mention of ethnic differences under the ‘*Ndi Umunyarwanda*’ (I am Rwandan) programme,⁷ causing those conceived in rape to not have a place in the national collective memory of ‘survivors’ and ‘perpetrators’. Mookherjee, in her work *Spectral Wound* (2015), shows the visceral contrast between the public stage of collective memory and the intimately private of the everyday for women who were raped and their families. She explains that, in contrast to public memory, in private everyday interactions ‘violence is shown, rather than talked about’ (2015: 125). For young people in Rwanda, violence is shown within the emotional lives in the home, through the sensing of turmoil, but also when it is talked about, and shown, in direct reference to them as embodiments of the past.

The ‘post-ness’ of genocide

Carol Kidron, in her work with Holocaust survivors, calls for a ‘listening to descendant accounts of their phenomenological experience of silent traces of the past in the survivor home’ (2009: 6). Kidron, questioning existing explanatory frames for analysing descendants’ silent memory work, proposes an alternative ‘knowing’ of the Holocaust, ‘a knowing without words, narrative, or history, a knowing through the body that wakes up at night, night after night, through the habitual taken-for-granted practice of covering one’s head with a pillow [...] all silent practices and tacit knowing’ (2009: 6). Building on

Kidron's notion of a 'knowledge' of genocide through the body, a knowledge without words, passed on to survivors' children as they grow up, we can explore how this 'knowing' takes shape in some families in Rwanda.

In a similar example, Clara Han (2021) illustrates this intergenerational transmission through 'knowing' by describing her childhood memories. Han grew up living with the memories of violence of her parents, who fled from North Korea to South Korea and ultimately the United States, displaced by the Korean War. She described her memories of the first few years after moving to the US – she was 3 years old – as 'disconnected moments, particular tones of voice, smells, an image' (2021: 36). She recalls a moment where she felt the mood change:

I look up from the concrete patio where I am squatting next to a muddy sandbox and see my father's face through the backyard screen door. He yells at us to get out of the mud, even though we are not in it. A terrible feeling of impending doom began to take shape in my small body as we were living in that house, the house where my father still lives. I do not know when I began to pray to God for world peace, but I began to do so every night before I fell asleep in the bed that I shared with my sister. (2021: 36)

Through her account of her childhood experience and later as a mother to her own child, she shows how children learn to accept a violent past as part of their everyday life. Han also shows the lethality of such prevalent memories as part of kinship relations when she argues:

The reverberations of my mother's illness and the lethality that grew in me have made their appearance in different ways over the years. I find it difficult to say that there is any single kernel of 'trauma' that progressively reveals itself. Instead, these reverberations crisscross the flux of my life. (2021: 51)

The reverberations of trauma within the family pulse below the surface of the everyday, as children not only 'know' a violent past, but learn to respond to this 'knowing', how to mobilise this knowledge and use it in relationships of care and protection. In a situation where the safety and care of the present moment is in danger of disruption at any time, what Veena Das (2018) describes as the 'volatility below the surface', or what raped women in Bangladesh referred to as 'fire, storm and cyclone' (Mookherjee, 2015: 115), keeping that danger at bay is an ongoing effort. This ongoing threat of the memory of violence and disruption, indicates little 'post-ness' to genocide in everyday lived experiences of young people and their mothers in Rwanda. In this context of life in homes facing threats of invisible yet powerful disruptive forces,⁸ I started 'tracing the work that goes into making everyday life inhabitable' (Das, 2018: 537).

Managing memories

One afternoon, Christian and I made a social visit to Sonia's house, where she lives with her mother. We spoke about various topics. At one point, Sonia's mother joined us in the

living room and we exchanged pleasantries. It was the first time we met Mama Sonia, but Sonia had told her that people from an organisation she was involved in were coming to visit.⁹ We continued speaking about Sonia's job, the house, the cow that we heard in the background, and Mama Sonia asked me if I was married and had children. She thanked me for caring so much about hers and other children when I do not have children myself – a remark that touched me.

While speaking to Mama Sonia, I saw Christian looking at his phone for a while. Then he abruptly said to Mama Sonia that we had to speak to her daughter about something private and asked if she would excuse us. She left the room. I was confused by this sudden interference, but he told me he would explain later. I had just asked a question about the neighbours which instigated a reply where Sonia's mother started speaking about how she was taken captive to be raped (*kubohoza*) during the genocide, and this is how Sonia was conceived. At that point, Sonia sent Christian a text message that warned him that her mother would 'stay in it, she is going to be in a place of distress (*akabazo kihungabana*)'.¹⁰ Christian did not immediately know how to address the situation but told me later that Sonia then sent another message saying: 'help me (*mfasha*), don't engage with her (*umureke*)'. This then led to Christian taking the decision to interrupt our conversation and ask Mama Sonia to leave.

Later Sonia explained to us that she can see and anticipate when her mother goes to a place of traumatic crisis (*ihungabana*) and stays there if she is not interrupted or guided out of it. Unlike Christian or myself, Sonia has received training organised by an NGO on how to handle situations like this, when her mother's trauma surfaces, so we trusted her judgement. Before we left, I asked if we should ask a counsellor to check on her mother, but Sonia assured me they would be fine, and we agreed I would check in on them by calling in the evening.

My visit to Sonia and Mama Sonia alerted me to the subtle way in which memories of genocidal violence lurk very close to the surface of everyday life. These memories can be activated by what appear to be innocent conversations, which reveals how fraught the 'normalcy' of the everyday really is. Whether it was my presence or knowing people from the NGO came to visit, Sonia's mother felt it necessary to speak about her experiences. Jennie Burnet (2012), in her ethnography of women's lives in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, elaborates on the way these memories are intruding, as 'sometimes the unexpectedness of everyday life (the recognition of a moment in time, a place, a sound, an object, an action, or a confluence of these and other factors) breaks through' because 'these remembrances are embedded in everyday life' (2012: 1718). The visit to Sonia and Mama Sonia speaks to Sonia being sufficiently 'attuned' to her mother, which enabled her to intuitively sense her impending crisis.

Similarly, a young man, Charles, was 'attuned' to his mother's inner world when he chose to conduct our interview outside of his home, as he sensed that meeting us would be distressing for his mother. He was waiting for us at the bus station of his town where we picked him up and then found a place to conduct an interview. When we sat down, Charles immediately apologised. He said 'I'm very sorry that I could not invite you to my house, but because I live with my mother and it is April, this is not a good time for you to come and speak to me about my life.' His remark referenced the fact that the 1994 genocide

started on 7 April 1994 and that, since then, April is designated a national commemoration month.¹¹

Charles's decision to meet away from home shows how he anticipates situations that might cause suffering to his mother. He factored in the time of year as well as what might be said in our interview for her to hear, and perhaps even my presence as a foreigner. It also shows that young people take conscious action to safeguard the ordinary of the day-to-day in their home environments.

It transpired in our conversation that Mama Charles met the man who is now her husband after the genocide, and they have two younger children together. Charles told us that his mother did not tell her husband that she had been raped during genocidal attacks, and that Charles was conceived through rape. His interpretation was that she did this to shield him, her other children, her husband and herself from what she assessed to be the possibly perilous effect this knowledge would have on her husband. She did tell Charles about his conception in 2015, when he was 20 years old. Two years later, when Charles was 22 years old, her husband accidentally found out about the rape and Charles's biological parentage and, as Mama Charles had anticipated, the situation deteriorated as her husband turned violent. According to Charles, one day his mother's husband beat his mother and Charles jumped between them to stop the beating. The husband moved out, saying 'I cannot live with a son of *Interahamwe*¹² while they killed my family.'

After the event, Charles and his mother continued to live together and he later commented that his mother's choice to live with him rather than her husband was unusual, emphasising that his mother could have sent him to live on his own, because he was old enough, but decided to let her husband leave instead.

Mama Charles's decision to keep the story of his conception a secret to protect the stability of the family home was not uncommon and is the reason that several NGOs in Rwanda offer support services to women seeking to 'disclose' the traumatic origins of children's conception and birth. In another case, Mama Maurice did not tell Maurice about his conception, even though she attended such counselling sessions, as she found Maurice 'still too young' at 25. Another mother, Mama Keza, told me when I interviewed her: 'You are still young to listen to such stories.' In my interpretation, this parallel shows that rather than being 'too young' referring to a specific age at which someone should be able to process this, mothers want to protect others, especially their children, from having to live with 'poisonous knowledge' (Das et al., 1997). As Das argues, women violated during the Partition of India kept the knowledge of the events to themselves, a fact that manifested in a submerged sensibility which is 'constantly mediated by the manner in which the world is being presently inhabited' (Das et al., 1997: 221). Along similar lines, my research in Rwanda shows that, indeed, mothers and young people make decisions for each other to keep the poison of genocide out of the home.

Building on this, 'how does one contain and seal off the violence that might poison the life of future generations?' (Das et al., 2001: 4). Mama Maurice sealed off the violence from her son by not telling him about his violent conception, Sonia sealed off her mother's memories by not giving them a chance to fully erupt, and Charles worked hard to prevent any poison from entering his mother's house, while his mother in turn sealed off the knowledge of Charles's conception by keeping it secret from her husband. All of these

actions may seem small, but the hard work that goes into concealing these facts is based on a constant negotiation with the past, because sealing off a poisonous past involves a persistent grappling with the threat of memories of violence, and the acknowledgement of what it has the potential to unleash. Illustrating collective trauma in the context of Freetown, Sierra Leone, after the civil war from 1991 to 2002, Aminatta Forna beautifully introduces this idea in her novel *The Memory of Love* through a symbolic comparison to the surgical amputation of limbs, ‘the nerves continued to transmit signals between the brain and the ghost limb. The pain is real, yes, but it is a memory of pain’ (2010: 184). Even when one tries to seal off past violence, the memory of violence remains – and the pain is real. The nerves, the past, continues to cause immense pain at unexpected moments, but not unexpectedly. Young people and their mothers live with a ‘severed limb’ that is invisible to others, but of which they are acutely aware.

Being perceived as the past

Whereas memories of genocidal violence lie below the surface of family life, the expressions of this violence can be more explicit. Young people not only have to deal with memories of genocide but are also seen as embodied memory themselves, often in a very material sense. Studies and reports in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide found that children conceived in rape were called ‘little killers’ (Wax, 2004), ‘devil’s children’ or ‘*les enfants de mauvais souvenir*’ (children of bad memories)’ (Nowrojee, 1996). Young people confirmed that throughout their childhood they were called a ‘child of *Inter-ahamwe*’ or other ‘bad names’. I did not press to know these exact names whenever this topic came up, as usually during this part of interviews young people would say these were some of their worst childhood memories and it shone through in their voices, or through their tears. They would be called these ‘bad names’ by other children at school, on the street when walking home, or when they would visit their mother’s extended family. We have already learned of Charles’s mother’s husband’s reaction, which, even if driven by multiple causes, found expression in the question of the relation between violence and conception, notwithstanding a long life together. Another young person said that when he was young, his mother would have traumatic crises (*ihungabana*) and would yell at his younger siblings: ‘This child will kill you!’ Clearly, these children were seen as a manifestation of a violent, dangerous past, or as a way that the violent past might materialise in the present. It is through these experiences during childhood that young people have become very aware and attuned to how they are perceived by others, regardless of whether they were explicitly told about their mothers being raped. It was through being called ‘bad names’ that they understood they were marked as enemies. Even when they could not understand what the words meant they sensed this was the case.

Being perceived in the present

As young people moved from childhood to adulthood, they felt it important to be seen to achieve things in life, to be seen, as one young man described it, as ‘a person of value’ (*umuntu w’ingirakamaro*). At the time of this research, most young people had recently

left high school and were in a transitional phase, a point in their life course where they were moving out of their school environments or mother's home, looking to have their own land, get married, at university or to find a job elsewhere. Moving away from home to attend boarding school or university, they created chances for themselves to challenge perceptions of them being 'children of bad memories'. In these life-course stages they carved out spaces for themselves away from the limitations and exclusions they experienced through their connection with past, a past that holds a constant, albeit uncertain, place in their social worlds. Thus, many moved to places where other people did not know their families or histories, an opportunity they did not have in their home villages, where people widely 'knew'. In this newly found space of 'anonymity', they were able to be seen as individuals removed from connotations of the past make themselves and 'build themselves' (*kwi'yubaka*) into a 'person of value' who could take care of themselves and others. For young men especially, this meant to do well financially in order to support their mother and other family members, just as is expected from any young man in the given context. In doing so, young men said this opened possibilities for reconciliation with family members who had rejected them, and allowed them to 'come back' – in their words. Thus, notions of how full personhood can be achieved in the aftermath of collective trauma can be intricately linked to the reconstruction of kinship.¹³

A relevant example was the trajectory of Eric, who I first met in 2019, when he lived with his mother, her husband and five siblings in a small village. Mama Eric and her husband were married before the genocide and had had a son, Eric's older brother. During the genocide, his mother and her husband fled and were separated. Eric's mother was raped and became pregnant. After the genocide, Mama Eric and her husband found each other and continued to live together, having more children together. When Eric was growing up, Mama Eric's husband¹⁴ treated him differently from his other siblings and their relationship was particularly strained as Mama Eric's husband refused to pay for his school fees and materials, while he would pay for the expenses of Eric's siblings. This, Eric said, was the worst thing to happen to him during his childhood, because it did not allow him to study and pursue his intended career path. Despite this, he is now a successful salesman. When I returned to Rwanda in November 2020, he invited me to visit him at his growing business, geographically far away from the village where he grew up. I could see how comfortable he was in this place and with his co-workers. I asked what they knew of his conception and he said that he told only one of his co-workers, a friend who helped him find this job. Clearly, the anonymity of his current space allowed him to choose who tell and who not to tell, unlike in his home village environment, where people in his community all 'knew'. Here, on the other side of the country, he is seen as a hard-working person who does his job well and how he is perceived reflects his own actions instead of other people's actions in the past. In addition, Eric's own development in his career and life choices had a direct impact on his strained relationships with his mother and her husband at home, which had improved.

It was a similar story for Maurice, who I had met for the first time in 2019. Maurice lived by himself, close to his workplace. He had experienced violent abuse at the hands of his mother's siblings who had survived the genocide. They told Mama Maurice that 'this child is not of any use'. She was also beaten by her brothers as she brought a 'bastard'

(*ikinyendaro*) into their family and they ultimately sent her and Maurice away to live by themselves. Growing up, Maurice did not speak to his mother's family members and they had no relationship at all. When Maurice first got a job as a driver for his current boss, his mother advised him not to trust her brothers. Later on, his boss promoted him to become a manager of one of his companies. Maurice said: 'After I finished high school and my life continued to change, my family members became closer to me, because I have a vision for my life, and I am settled.' He explained that family started calling him, but he was 'not ready' to meet them in person. In turn, they also started calling and visiting his mother occasionally. When I visited Maurice in 2021, he had moved to Kigali to live with his cousin, the daughter of his mother's brother, and her young child. The parallels between Maurice moving to Kigali and being promoted in his job, and his family members reaching out to him, ultimately living with his cousin, show how kinship relations can be transformed across the life course.

Clearly, young people's financial contributions to their families, and becoming 'a useful person' financially, created possibilities for family members who had refused or denied them as kin in the past, to 'come back'. These are not solely financial transactions but are rooted in deeper meanings of entering adulthood (Christiansen et al., 2006). As Eric put it: 'You are alive, you cannot let the burden of your history overshadow the chance that you have by being alive, so take that chance and work hard for it.'

Parenthood appears also to be transformative. A few young people became parents in the period the research took place and they said it changed the way they were perceived by their communities. Rather than being a 'child of' (rape, genocide, killers), they became the 'parent of' their child. The concept of having children has great importance in Rwanda. Having a child in Rwandan society gives men and women status, perhaps it also makes a person 'a person of value'. Zraly et al. (2013: 424–31) found, in their study on motherhood among genocide rape survivors, that mothering gave women a 'life purpose' and a resource for 'imagining and shaping possibilities for postgenocide living'. As in many contexts, mothers in Rwanda are usually not referred to by their first name but as 'mama (name of firstborn)'. A young man, Mugabo, told me that his community's perception of him and reactions to him drastically changed when he became a father: 'I am no longer seen as born from rape but as a father.' Moreover, Mugabo said that his relationship with his mother improved when he became a father: 'She calls me all the time now and before she never called.' Burnet states that 'motherhood is the best light in which females can be seen in Rwandan society' (2012: 1034), which aligns with other African ideas about parenthood. Dyer (2007: 74), in her study of the value of children in African countries in relation to infertility, found that 'fatherhood conferred a sense of achievement, continuity and belonging'. Naturally, there are important gendered differences in the way parenthood makes a full person, but children and young people conceived in rape, a large number of whom struggle with finding a sense of belonging within their social worlds (Hamel, 2016), can possibly find a sense of belonging in parenthood.

Conclusion

A violent past has the potential to be brought into a present moment, even when the delicate layers of affective life work to carefully seal off the memories of genocide. Young people and their mothers in post-genocide Rwanda meticulously navigate their everyday moments, interactions, and relations, while holding memories of genocide at bay and attuning to and offsetting these memories or imaginaries when they arise.

Through this anticipation and vigilance, I have shown that repair between people who would ordinarily be seen as kin is possible. At the same time, kinship is made impossible through perceptions and imagined attributes imposed onto young people conceived in rape. Yet, these seemingly impossible ties have the ability to be transformed as young people grow into adults and parents. As I have described, kinship – in the absence of ‘post-ness’ of genocide within family life – takes on shapes that cannot be homogenised. I found spaces where broken ties still linger, where the affective force of violence is not, and perhaps cannot be contained. These lingering effects are dynamic and can change instantly, as young people and their mothers anticipate the, in Eric’s words, ‘burden of [their] history’.

Kathleen Stewart (2017: 197), in her work on affect, describes ‘a world under pressure, the way a present moment can descend like a curtain on a place, the way a world elaborates in prolific forms, taking off in directions, coming to roost on people and practices’. It is this that young people grapple with, the curtain can descend in a moment, such as during my encounter with Mama Sonia, or it is a lingering curtain attached to how young people’s being is not separated from their conception; and the lifting of the curtain allows for kinning to work.

Janet Carsten’s (2000) analytical notion of relatedness provides a view of kinship as a continual process, as fluid and processual rather than a fixed entity, not solidified by birth, and where people become complete social beings in society through a process of becoming kin. For young people in Rwanda, kinning emerges when a complete social being or a ‘person of value’ (*umuntu w’ingirakamaro*) has been formed. The possibilities and limits of kinning can be further explored by using Carsten’s focus on substances in relationality, particularly those of blood and money as both, through literal qualities and metaphorical associations, have ‘a close association with life itself or life-giving properties’ (2011: 30). Local Rwandan interpretations of blood as a substance in biological kinship ties allow young people to be seen as descendents of their perpetrator fathers. Metaphorical associations with blood make it so these young people are seen as carrying ‘dangerous substances’ within them. As much as blood has ‘life-giving’ properties, in Rwanda blood is also widely associated with death. This life-taking force is then placed on the person – as in ‘This child will kill you’ – since the blood of a killer flows within. Yet money as a substance also flows between people. Carsten (2011: 28) states: ‘like blood, money may flow and is perceived as generative’. This generative quality transforms the idea that a child carries substances within them that might be dangerous, into the idea that they may be carrying substances that allow for care. The fluidity of these substances, as they run within and between people, shows the fluidity of how young people’s relatedness

can be understood, as different substances are exchanged and shared while they themselves navigate various trajectories.

As young people move through different stages of their life course, different types of relationships become possible, that were dismissed when they were seen as ‘conceived in rape’. By working towards becoming a ‘person of value’ (*umuntu w’ingirakamaro*), young people carve out spaces for themselves and enable relationships where previously rejection towards a ‘child of rape’ existed. Taking on positions of responsibility was something that young people strived towards; though one has to be careful in ascribing responsibilities to young people to create these possibilities for transformation. It is not their burden to fix what was broken.

Through the lens of the containment of ‘poisonous knowledge’ and genocide memories within the home, as well as the notion of *kumva* and *kumvikana* – to sense and make sense of, to deeply understand each other – kinship is made possible in the home. I have described the subtle ways in which young people are attuned to the genocide memories within their mothers and actively protect them and their homes from their effects. In turn, mothers shield their children from living with knowledge of the past. I have suggested that Veena Das’s argument that violence is absorbed in the everyday rather than transcended helps in understanding how the past sets the stage for kinship. In the aftermath of genocidal sexual violence in Rwanda, violence is absorbed in everyday life and managed through affect and care, but young people’s perceived connection to this violence through their conception can be transcended.

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Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of research participants. Locations and other possible identifiers have been changed. The names of organisations have been omitted to prevent identification through association with organisations and support programmes, due to the implications of these associations.
2. All research participants were between 24 and 26 years old throughout the course of the research.
3. Hereafter referred to as the 1994 genocide, for ease of reading. In referring to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi as the 1994 genocide, I do not intend to eclipse the deliberate targeting of the Tutsi population. I also recognise that Rwandans from other ethnic groups were killed, and raped, as well.
4. From March 2020 to October 2020, I left Rwanda due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, I stayed connected to the research participants remotely and continued the journey of understanding more about their lives.
5. Interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda with the support of a male translator, Christian Ngombwa. My own comprehension of Kinyarwanda allowed me to pick up on nuances in answers and I was able to build rapport with participants in their own language. It is very likely that Christian's gender influenced certain answers we received, as did my own gender and racial background. I asked Carine Ingabire, a female translator, to support me during the interviews with mothers. In addition, a counsellor, whom the women have known intimately for many years, spoke to them after each interview to ensure their well-being, and made themselves available to the young people to support them as needed.
6. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Rwanda National Ethics Committee (RNEC) with numbers 029/RNEC/2019 and 025/RNEC/2020. Statements of Informed Consent were obtained from all participants in this research; these were reviewed and cleared by RNEC and the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (CNLG).
7. The *Ndi Umunyarwanda* national programme aims to enhance social harmony by emphasizing that all Rwandans are Rwandans, rather than identifying as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.
8. I use 'forces' rather than 'memories' to emphasise the powerful agentic effects of memory, as traumatic memory breaks through the schema of everyday life and ordinary routines and has enormous power.
9. I met Sonia through an NGO that provided me with access to young people and their families, so it was common for research participants to associate me with the organisation.
10. The word *ihungabana* indicates mental instability, disturbances, and distress. It is closely related to the word *ihahamuka* which literally means 'breathless with fear' and indicates trauma or a traumatic crisis. A person can experience both *ihungabana* and *ihahamuka*, through short episodes or as a constant.
11. While April is the official yearly month of remembrance, the genocide commemoration period runs from April to July each year, for the 100 days that the Genocide against the Tutsi took place. Families and communities usually have specific times in this period when they

‘remember’ (*kwibuka*) through shared ceremonies. There are moments within these months that are particularly difficult for individuals mourning specific dates and events. These dates affect the way that memories and emotions are managed.

12. *Interahamwe* in *Kinyarwanda* translates to ‘those who work together’ or ‘those who attack together’. The *Interahamwe* were a Hutu extremist militia group that played a major role in carrying out the Genocide against the Tutsi.
13. Of course, the opposite can also be true, where kinship can prevent achieving full personhood.
14. Eric refers to him as his mother’s husband, rather than his stepfather or his siblings’ father. He refers to his biological father as his father (*papa*), which was also the case for the majority of young people who are part of this research.

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