

Conclusion

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By way of conclusion I will extract a few themes from the stories I regard as relevant to take into consideration for the purpose of supporting the women who told their stories and advancing their case.

Rape in the context of other violations and victim support

A comprehensive listening and engagement is imperative to truly hear what the women are saying.¹ The women speak about rape through which they were targeted as Tutsi women; rape which the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) recognized in 1998 as a form of genocide on the ground that it was perpetrated because of both a woman's ethnicity *and* her gender.² It was the first time in history that rape was prosecuted as a crime of genocide. The stories suggest, however, that less strategic forms of rape also occurred during the genocide and its aftermath. The 'messy' realities of the genocide facilitated a variety of types of rape.³

The stories are multifaceted. They contain more than rape. Rape is often singled out as a vortex that captures most of the inner energy. However, the stories are also about the workings of other violence experienced during the genocide as well as the numbingly routine social violence of everyday life related to their own survival and that of their children. To really under-

stand the women's suffering and the support they need, the focus should be on the comprehensiveness of it all and should in particular include engagement with the mundane. Nonetheless, specific attention continues to be needed for the trauma of rape because it is an important component of women's suffering and in many ways hampers their daily functioning.

Justice for rape survivors

It is only of late that much attention has been paid to the conceptualization of rape as a component of international human rights and humanitarian law, with as yet inconsistent conclusions. According to De Vito, rape still does not stand on its own as an enumerated international crime.⁴ As a result, she has attempted to determine and assess some of the theoretical implications for rape that emerge once it is placed, as has been done recently, within the international crimes of torture and genocide. Bergoffen, on the other hand, argues that rape in war should certainly be distinguished from torture.⁵ Despite their strong family resemblances, rape and torture constitute different violations of our humanity. For rape to be considered as torture as internationally defined, proof would be needed of bodily harm and physical pain. Based on women's testimonies before the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (ICTY and ICTR) about the rape they had experienced, these tribunals identified the right to sexual integrity, which is identified as the right to sexual self determination, as the right that was violated, and not specifically the right to be free from

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torture or for that matter from genocidal intent. The women of the stories do not make these distinctions. They experienced the rapes as acts of severe physical and emotional violence, which deprived them of their humanity. Nevertheless, paying attention to the way acts of rape in the context of war and genocide are defined is of the greatest importance, since it determines how these acts are addressed at the international and national level, which in turn may determine the capacity at the local level for justice and reparation for rape survivors.

The struggle by the international women's movement to have rape in war accepted as a crime against humanity has had positive repercussions in Rwanda. Women activists there succeeded in having sexual violence categorized as one of the most serious crimes (category 1) in the 1996 Genocide Law instead of as a crime of the same significance as the stealing of non-human property (category 4) as was proposed in the draft bill.⁶ As indicated in the Introduction, the transfer in 2008 of all genocide rape cases to the Gacaca courts threw up a number of specific obstacles for women to testify against their rapists.⁷ For reasons presented in the stories, the women did not expect any positive outcome of speaking out in Gacaca. In addition, an experience of deep shame prevented them from breaking the silence; as well, they lacked an adequate linguistic response to the unspeakable dehumanizing effect of rape. Keeping silent was probably the best the women could do, given the experiences of the 16 women who had testified about their rape in Gacaca interviewed by Brounéus.⁸ All 16 women were subjected to threats, harassment, and violence after giving testimony in Gacaca, while the act of testifying itself unleashed severe psychological and emotional suffering. For these women intense

insecurity began with Gacaca.^(see also 9) The heavy sentences for rape as a category 1 crime must have contributed to this harassment as well as to the denial of rape among its perpetrators. The 10 stories in this Supplementum indicate that what the women prefer is a broad form of social justice to improve the quality of their lives without necessarily having to make their rape experience publicly known.

Steps towards healing

The women's stories give various entry points for reflection on what it is that has helped them to take some crucial steps towards healing. Here, I only touch upon the speech aspect of the process women went through. Even women who had received support (including counselling) from many organisations before sociotherapy came into their lives gained something valuable from sociotherapy that was new to them, which they characterized as the freedom to speak. Recovering from trauma is not just an individual act but a collective process: it demands dialogue. Sociotherapy made this dialogue possible for women whose previous prison of silence had isolated them.

Sociotherapy provides a safe social space for the women to search for and find words for their experiences that before were primarily embodied and unspeakable. The sociotherapy group functions as a speech community, because for speech to be meaningful it has to be understood, so listening is as crucial as speaking. The regaining of their voice and being listened to is experienced by the women as liberating, as a release of their heart. In the wake of that emancipation at least some of their other health problems also disappeared or became less troubling, such as severe headaches or somatic panic attacks, and often enough addictive behaviours. In their stories the

women speak in particular about the healing aspect of social reconnection, for which they used a variety of symbolic expressions. The change women experience in their lives is succinctly captured in the self-chosen titles of their stories.

The interview process, itself a dialogue, also contributed to the women's healing. We noticed that women at first spoke in a 'we-style', by saying, for instance, "We suffered a lot," "We lost our children," "I survived like other women survived." We gently began to move the respondent to focus on her own particular situation and speak for herself instead of attributing the story to others. This helped the women to connect to their individual experiences, to explore their own suffering in more depth and to gain the increased capacity to regulate their emotions. As a result we made the intentional choice to present the stories in the I-style. In the feedback we received after the women read their own stories for the first time, they affirmed that the stories were authentically in their own voice, expressing their own emotions. The result is, as one woman said, that after reading their own story the women no longer feel imprisoned by it.

Sociotherapy is certainly not the only intervention that can reach the effects we describe. Zraly and Nyirazinyoye found similar effects among a different kind of female genocide survivor groups in Rwanda.¹⁰ What is needed is more of the research as conducted by Bass et al. Their controlled trial among Congolese female survivors of sexual violence provided evidence that community-based group psychotherapy effectively reduced post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and combined depression and anxiety symptoms and improved functioning.¹¹

What the women hope their stories will achieve

The women explicitly wish that their stories will not only reach other women but also perpetrators of rape. They hope that the men who have caused them, and others, so much pain may, through reading the stories, come to understand what their past actions have caused in terms of suffering among the women they violated. The stories should also contribute to, and I now paraphrase what the women expressed, a collective memory of what women in Rwanda went through; a memory that, unjustly so, has so far not been produced by the many humanitarian organizations working in Rwanda, the various memorialization activities in the country and Gacaca.

Before and after the publication of the original 19 stories in Kinyarwanda the authors of the stories gave the book¹² with stories to family members (in particular their children), friends and neighbours to read. The feedback so far about the reception of the book is that it meets a deep need for oral history. It convinces me that if distributed broadly the book will help many people in Rwanda to process their pain with constructive results. One woman said in a feedback meeting: "If we do not distribute the book widely, then what is the point?" Another woman added: "Here in town, people suffered much. But they also had some support. During the mourning week, yes, people here have red eyes, but they are not screaming. In other areas people are still screaming." The implication was that the stories might help to quiet the screaming by showing that the thread of life can be picked up again.

Each woman concludes her story with a piece of advice to other women, in particular women who continue to suffer in silence from genocide-related pains. The advice

ranges from encouraging other women to join sociotherapy to at least sharing their suffering with someone they trust. With others who have experience in sociotherapy, I attribute value to sharing one's intimate secrets with a trusted person. However, participation in a group that is methodically taken through the various sociotherapy steps may in many instances have more effect in terms of healing. In sociotherapy, participants together create a space where they feel safe. Within this space they are connected with others again and assist each other in a process of rebirth and resurrection.

The women and the reception of their stories among the Rwandan population have convinced me that a story project like the one represented in this Supplementum can in fundamental ways make an important contribution to the healing of genocide and rape related suffering.

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