

**WRITING TRAUMA: THE VOICE OF THE WITNESS IN  
RWANDAN WOMEN'S TESTIMONIAL LITERATURE**

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## Abstract

During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, acts of extreme violence were committed against women. This thesis aims to explore how Rwandan women genocide survivors respond to and communicate such a traumatic experience. From a perspective of trauma theory, it engages with the published testimonies of Rwandan women survivors, seeking to understand how the genocide is remembered in both individual and collective memory and the challenges Rwandan women face in the ongoing process of surviving trauma. Exploring the ways in which Rwandan women position themselves as witnesses, the first chapter addresses the crucial questions of who is a witness and who has the right to speak about a traumatic historical event. It distinguishes between different categories of witness and looks at the levels of witnessing in Rwandan women's testimonies, as well as considering the role of the reader-witness in the act of testimony. Responding to an imperative of memory, the women are speaking on behalf of other survivors and honouring the memory of the victims. At the same time, the experience of genocide is shown to be deeply individual, and the second chapter provides a detailed analysis of the narrative strategies Rwandan women adopt to communicate the particularity of their experiences. Through a range of 'translation' techniques, the women reconstruct their individual chronologies and challenge the notion of the unsayability of trauma. However, the extremity of what the women have lived through can be incomprehensible to the reader, who is often unwilling to hear the story. One of the ways in which cross-cultural communication can be achieved is through collaboration, a process which is examined in the third chapter. The collaborator plays a complex role in the production of the testimonies, functioning not only as empathic listener, but also as writer, editor, and mediator of the story. This chapter draws out the problems associated with collaboration and also highlights its potential value for the Rwandan women as it is ultimately through the collaborator that they are able to convey their story to a Western audience. Gaining access to the Western publishing industry is just one of the many obstacles the women must face in communicating their stories, and the majority of survivors continue to be silenced. The role of silence both within and surrounding Rwandan women's testimonies is the focus of the fourth chapter, which looks at the physical manifestations of silence within the narratives as well as the silencing of survivors in Rwanda and across the diaspora. The silencing of survivors' stories has strong implications for the recovery of the individual, often preventing her from moving from *surviving* to *living*, a notion that is examined in the final chapter. Testimony is shown to play a central role in this transition. Yet, in the face of the politically motivated processes of national reconciliation, justice and commemoration, Rwandan women struggle to regain control over their narratives. This final chapter emphasises the importance of the community in helping women to reclaim their voice and tell their stories on their own terms. Overall, women remain marginalised figures in the writing of history, and this thesis seeks to underline the necessity of developing new ways of listening to the diversity of Rwandan women's voices, in order not only to gain greater insight into how traumatised individuals remember but also to hear the challenge they pose to conventional Western modes of responding to trauma.

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Last but by no means least, thank you to my family, to Eren, and to all my friends who have supported me and believed in me through the highs and lows of the last three years. I could not have done it without you.

Moi aussi je dois parler, écrire, me souvenir. Ne serait-ce qu'une dernière fois. Avec l'espoir d'un autre jour. L'espérance de la libération, et que s'imprime à jamais la vie de tous les miens. Pour qu'ils survivent à l'oubli. À la force d'inertie. Au pacte de l'indifférence. Une dernière fois, revivre l'enfer des Tutsis. Une dernière fois, me souvenir. Je me souviens.

***IBUKA!***

(Annick Kayitesi, *Nous existons encore*)

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### List of Abbreviations

TLD	=	Pauline Kayitare, <i>Tu leur diras que tu es hutue</i>
NE	=	Annick Kayitesi, <i>Nous existons encore</i>
DV	=	Berthe Kayitesi, <i>Demain ma vie</i>
SV	=	Esther Mujawayo, <i>SurVivantes</i>
FS	=	Esther Mujawayo, <i>La Fleur de Stéphanie</i>
LM	=	Yolande Mukagasana, <i>La Mort ne veut pas de moi</i>
NP	=	Yolande Mukagasana, <i>N'aie pas peur de savoir</i>
IC	=	Scholastique Mukasonga, <i>Inyenzi ou les Cafards</i>
FPN	=	Scholastique Mukagonga, <i>La Femme aux pieds nus</i>
JR	=	Chantal Umuraza, <i>Une jeunesse rwandaise</i>
CL	=	Marie-Aimable Umurerwa, <i>Comme la langue entre les dents</i>

## Introduction

The twentieth century was undeniably a time marked by historical catastrophe. From world wars to civil wars, violent political regimes and genocides, such events have shaped contemporary history. The way we interpret and respond to these events determines how individuals and societies identify themselves socially, culturally and politically. Testimony has emerged as a primary response to traumatic events, as groups and individuals give voice to their suffering and seek justice for the wrongs done to them. As Leigh Gilmore has observed, a ‘culture of testimony’<sup>1</sup> has developed since the Second World War that accords the survivor of traumatic events a special status in Western society. Beyond testimony produced in the legal domain, the contemporary fascination with the figure of the survivor has given rise to an abundance of testimonial narratives circulating in the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> As a result, numerous approaches to understanding testimony have been developed across a range of disciplines, primarily in the fields of mental health, human rights, and the documentation of history, as well as in the creative arts. This diversity serves to underline what Gilmore describes as ‘trauma’s centrality to contemporary self-representation’.<sup>3</sup>

It is into this vast arena of testimonial literature that the narratives of Rwandan women genocide survivors emerge. As members of a group destined for eradication, these women shed light on both the individual and collective

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<sup>1</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous stories by survivors of both individual and collective trauma – such as illness, rape and sexual abuse, political torture, mass violence, and natural disasters – have appeared on the literary market in recent years. This study will only examine the testimonies of survivors of a trauma that has been intentionally inflicted by one group of people on another, namely genocide.

<sup>3</sup> Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 3.

nature of trauma as they bear witness to the horrors of the 1994 genocide and its aftermath. This thesis seeks to explore the questions of how Rwandan women respond to trauma and how they represent the traumatic experience through testimonial narrative. While a great deal of scholarship has been produced on the genocide in Rwanda – primarily in the fields of human rights, history and politics – relatively little work has focused on the published testimonies of survivors.<sup>4</sup> The corpus of Rwandan women’s testimonies should not remain overlooked, for they can tell us a great deal about the events of 1994 and give insight to the ongoing impact of trauma in post-genocide Rwandan society, both at an individual and a collective level. This introduction will provide a brief background to the genocide before going on to discuss the testimonies and their position within the current surge of trauma narratives. It will also examine the crucial link between trauma and testimony and establish the theoretical framework for the subsequent chapters.

### *Background to the Genocide in Rwanda*

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda remains one of the most brutal and rapid massacres of the twentieth century. In the space of just 100 days, between the months of April and July of 1994, as many as one million Rwandans were

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<sup>4</sup> Numerous studies have been written in both English and French by historians, political scientists and academics, including: Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch and FIDH, 1999); Dominique Franche, *Généalogie du génocide rwandais* (Brussels: Editions Tribord, 2004); René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London and New York: Verso, 2004); Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst & Co., 1995); Josias Semujanga, *Récits fondateurs du drame rwandais. Discours social, idéologies et stéréotypes* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998); Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).



systematically slaughtered.<sup>5</sup> Although the genocide primarily targeted the Tutsi, politically moderate Hutu were also massacred as being ‘traitors’ to the state.<sup>6</sup> Parallels have been drawn between the genocide in Rwanda and other genocides, notably the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War, and such comparisons are often made by scholars, journalists, and human rights groups, as well as by survivors themselves.<sup>7</sup> While it will be useful to draw on these comparisons throughout this thesis, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind the specificities of the situation in Rwanda and to avoid a universalising, normalising approach to the question of genocide. The genocide in Rwanda was unique in terms of the organisation and rapid execution of the massacres and the mass participation in the killings.<sup>8</sup> As Phil Clark states:

What distinguishes the Rwandan genocide from other cases of mass murder in the twentieth century, and in particular from the genocide of Jews during the Second World War, is the use of low-technology weaponry, the mass involvement of the Hutu population in the killings, the social and cultural similarities of the perpetrators and victims, and the astonishing speed of the genocide.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, it was not enough to simply kill: the perpetrators resorted to torture, rape, and other atrocities as part of what Claudine Vidal describes as ‘la pratique collective de l’extrême cruauté’.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as Linda Melvern observes, the rape of women during the genocide was so extensive that the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) consequently made the ‘historical

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<sup>5</sup> Although the exact number of people killed will never be known, estimates vary between 500,000 and one million deaths, with most sources agreeing that the total was over 800,000. For a discussion of the differing statistics see Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup> See Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 5: Mamdani claims that between ten and fifty thousand Hutu were killed, as well as between 500,000 and a million Tutsi.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the various analogies drawn between the Holocaust and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, see Chapter 3, ‘The Holocaust: The Comparative Debate’, in Nigel Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 342, n. 60: Prunier estimates that 100,000 civilians assisted the FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises), the Presidential Guard and the *Interahamwe* militia in their campaign of genocidal violence.

<sup>9</sup> Phil Clark, *The Gacaca Courts, Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice Without Lawyers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Claudine Vidal, ‘Les politiques de la haine’, *Les Temps Modernes*, 583 (1995), 6–33 (p. 26).

determination that systematic rape was a crime against humanity and that sexual violence constituted genocide in the same way as other acts'.<sup>11</sup>

Drawing on Leo Kuper's work on the political uses of genocide in the twentieth century, Daniela Krosiak provides a concise definition of genocide as 'a co-ordinated plan of different actions aiming at the annihilation of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of exterminating the group itself'.<sup>12</sup> Krosiak underlines a crucial but often overlooked element in this definition: the denial of the right of existence of the group. In Rwanda, the Tutsi – and anyone considered to be their sympathisers – were victimised as if they had no right to exist. During the genocide, not only were men, women and children killed, but they were also mutilated, women were raped and infected with HIV, and entire social networks were destroyed, meaning that if there were any survivors nothing would be as it was before.

As the numerous historical accounts of the genocide have indicated, the genocide in Rwanda was not the result of a sudden eruption of ethnic violence, but the bloody culmination of decades of social tension. The Tutsi minority had ruled over Rwanda for centuries, and this existing hierarchy was maintained under Belgian colonial rule.<sup>13</sup> In pre-colonial Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi were flexible social categories: a Hutu who accumulated more wealth could become Tutsi and vice versa.<sup>14</sup> During the colonial period, however, the Belgian administration took the existing socio-political Hutu/Tutsi distinction and

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<sup>11</sup> Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, pp. 253–54.

<sup>12</sup> Daniela Krosiak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of how the colonial authorities used the incumbent Tutsi elite as intermediaries for colonial administration, see Chapter 4, 'Dual Colonialism', in Catharine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Newbury explains how social mobility was possible in pre-colonial Rwanda based on the control of wealth (particularly cattle): see Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression*, pp. 11–12.

‘racialised’ it by advancing the ‘Hamitic hypothesis’, which held that the Tutsi were of Abyssinian descent and thus evolutionarily closer to Europeans.<sup>15</sup> This hypothesis stems from the fact that, as Gérard Prunier notes, for the Europeans, ‘it seemed unthinkable at the time that “totally savage negroes” could have achieved such a degree of political and religious sophistication’, and the ruling Tutsi must therefore have been a ‘foreign’ race.<sup>16</sup> As Mahmood Mamdani highlights: ‘Through this distinction between alien and indigenous, the Tutsi came to be defined as a race – the Hamitic race – different from the Hutu, who were constructed as indigenous Bantu’.<sup>17</sup> In the eyes of the colonisers, this justified Tutsi superiority over the Hutu majority and led them to award positions of power to Tutsi and restrict access to Hutu.<sup>18</sup> However, in the midst of growing anti-Tutsi rhetoric, the Belgians switched their allegiance and the 1959 election saw a Hutu government overthrow Tutsi dominance. In the wake of what has come to be known as the ‘social revolution’,<sup>19</sup> Rwanda gained independence from Belgium in 1962 and the cycles of violence in the years that followed resulted in bloodshed with many Tutsi driven out of the country.<sup>20</sup> Both the governments of Grégoire Kayibanda (1962–1973) and

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<sup>15</sup> Mamdani explains that the ‘Hamites of Africa’ were perceived to be ‘the hidden hand behind every bit of civilization on the continent’: see Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 80. For a detailed discussion of the Hamitic myth and its application in Rwanda, see the section ‘La Fable du Hamite’ in Catherine Coquio, *Rwanda. Le Réel et les récits* (Paris: Belin, 2004), pp. 13–67. See also Chapter 2, ‘The Hamitic Hypothesis in Rwanda and Burundi’, in Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> Prunier details how the Belgians reinforced the existing Mwami Kingship (Tutsi) and chiefly hierarchy until the 1950s: see Chapter 1, ‘Rwandese Society and the Colonial Impact’, in Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of this period see Chapter 4, ‘The “Social Revolution” of 1959’, in Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*.

<sup>20</sup> Waves of massacres against the Tutsi occurred in the early 1960s and again in 1973, following the 1972 massacres of Hutu in neighbouring Burundi. For an analysis of the effects of the events in Burundi see Chapter 9, ‘Burundi 1972: A Forgotten Genocide’, in Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*.

Juvénal Habyarimana (1973–1994) installed divisive regimes and fostered policies of ethnic discrimination and persecution.

In October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), consisting of mostly Tutsi refugees from Uganda, invaded northern Rwanda and sparked a civil war, which was quickly suppressed with the help of French troops.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to maintain power and incite division, the Hutu elite resurrected the Hamitic myth in order to create a community of fear and hatred, claiming that the Tutsi were inherently evil, foreign conquerors who wanted to enslave the Hutu people.<sup>22</sup> Under increasing international pressure for democratisation, the Habyarimana government later signed a power-sharing agreement with the RPF as part of the 1993 Arusha Accords. However, meticulous preparations for the extermination of the Tutsi had been underway for some time. As Krosalak notes, the establishment of militias, an extremist propaganda campaign, and large-scale massacres were signs of the ‘visible radicalisation’ in the country in the years preceding the genocide.<sup>23</sup> When President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994, Hutu extremists blamed the RPF and a killing campaign immediately ensued.<sup>24</sup> Days after the killings began, the RPF rekindled the civil war and gained control of the country by mid-July, establishing a new government. But by the time the RPF came to power, as

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed account of French involvement in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994 see Krosalak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*.

<sup>22</sup> See Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> See Krosalak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Until January 2012, no one was entirely sure who was responsible for the president’s assassination, although different theories ascribed blame to the RPF, the Hutu extremists, and even the French soldiers: see the section ‘Deux Français impliqués dans l’attentat’ in Colette Braeckman, *Rwanda: Histoire d’un génocide* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), pp. 188–97. Prunier argued that the most probable theory was that Hutu extremists were responsible, given that *Interahamwe* road blocks were set up and the killings began in Kigali less than an hour after the plane went down. See Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 223. This theory now appears to have been given official credence – and the RPF exonerated – in a report commissioned by French judges, released on 10 January 2012, identifying the launch site of the missile that brought down the plane as Kanombe Military Barracks, which were under control of the presidential guard at the time.

many as three quarters of the Tutsi population had perished as well as tens of thousands of Hutu. Moreover, as the RPF advanced into the country and quelled the genocidal killings, thousands more Rwandans fled into the neighbouring DRC (formerly Zaire) where they spent years living in appalling conditions in refugee camps until they were forcibly repatriated.<sup>25</sup>

### *Testimonial Narrative and Genocide*

Despite the fact that most of the survivors of the genocide were women, only fifteen Rwandan women – and even fewer men<sup>26</sup> – have published testimonies in French to date.<sup>27</sup> There are also a number of other types of testimonial texts in French bearing witness to the genocide, which are important to summarise briefly here. Beyond the individual survivor testimonies, there is a small number of compilations of testimonies, including the volume of widows' testimonies published by the Association Duhozanye,<sup>28</sup> the trilogy by Jean Hatzfeld (both survivor and perpetrator testimonies),<sup>29</sup> and Yolande Mukagasana and Alain Kazinierakis's collection of photographs and testimonies, *Les Blessures du silence* (2001).<sup>30</sup> There currently exists a small

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Zaire between 1995 and 1997, see Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, and Gérard Prunier, *From Genocide to Continental War: The 'Congolese' Conflict and the Crisis of Contemporary Africa* (London: Hurst, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> To my knowledge, only four men have published full-length texts in French: Vénuste Kayimahe, *France-Rwanda: les coulisses du génocide. Témoignage d'un rescapé* (Paris: Dagorno, 2001); Maurice Niwese, *Le Peuple rwandais: un pied dans la tombe. Récit d'un réfugié étudiant* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001); Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa, *Un Rwandais sur les routes de l'exil* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005); Révérien Rurangwa, *Génocidé* (Paris: Editions J'ai lu, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> There is a small corpus of women's testimonies published in English, such as Immaculée Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell* (London: Hay House, 2007 [2006]) and Illuminée Nganemariya, *Miracle in Kigali: The Rwandan Genocide – A Survivor's Journey* (Huntingdon: Tagman Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save regroupées dans l'association 'Duhozanye'* (Rwanda, Butare: Association Duhozanye, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Jean Hatzfeld, *Dans le nu de la vie. Récits des marais rwandais* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); *Une saison de machettes* (Paris: Seuil, 2003); *La Stratégie des antilopes* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Yolande Mukagasana and Alain Kazinierakis, *Les Blessures du silence* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2001). There are similar volumes combining both photographs and testimonies that have been

amount of testimonial fiction in French written by Rwandan authors, the first of which is Benjamin Sehene's *Le Feu sous la soutane* (2005).<sup>31</sup> There are also a small number of fictional texts written by non-Rwandans, including Québécois author and journalist Gil Courtemanche's novel, *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* (2000),<sup>32</sup> and the texts written by the participants of the Fest' Africa project, 'Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire'.<sup>33</sup>

Critical scholarship on Rwandan women's testimonial literature remains relatively limited. Alexandre Dauge-Roth's *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda* (2010) is one of the few full-length studies of representations of the genocide, comparing testimonial texts with fiction and film.<sup>34</sup> The more well-known testimonies – primarily Mukagasana's *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* and Esther Mujawayo's *Survivantes* – are examined in articles and books such as Catherine Coquio's *Rwanda. Le réel et les récits*

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published in English, for example, Anne-Marie De Brouwer and Sandra Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me: Rwanda Survivors of Sexual Violence* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009), and Scott Straus and Robert Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide* (New York: Zone Books, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Sehene, *Le Feu sous la soutane. Un prêtre au cœur du génocide rwandais* (Paris: L'Esprit frappeur, 2005). Just one year later appeared Joseph Ndwaniye's novel, *La Promesse faite à ma sœur* (Liège: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2006). For an examination of Sehene's text, see Nicki Hitchcott, 'Benjamin Sehene vs Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka: The Fictional Trial of a Genocide Priest', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 24.1 (2012), 21–34.

<sup>32</sup> Gil Courtemanche, *Un dimanche à la piscine à Kigali* (Québec: Boréal, 2000)

<sup>33</sup> Ten African authors visited Rwanda in 1998 as part of the commemorative Fest' Africa project, 'Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire'. Rwandan survivors Vénuste Kayimahe and Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa were among the group. As well as Kayimahe's testimony *France-Rwanda* and Rurangwa's essay *Le Génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger* (Bamako/Lille: Le Figuier/Fest' Africa, 2000), seven other texts were subsequently published, including four novels, a travel narrative, a collection of poetry, and a collection of essays and short stories: Boris Boubacar Diop, *Murambi: le livre des ossements* (Paris: Stock, 2000); Monique Ilboudo, *Murekatete* (Bamako: Le Figuier, 2000); Koulsy Lamko, *La Phalène des collines* (Paris: Motifs, 2002); Tierno Monénembo, *L'Aîné des orphelins* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Véronique Tadjo, *L'Ombre d'Imana. Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2000); Nocky Djedanoum, *Nyamirambo!* (Bamako/Lille: Le Figuier/Fest' Africa, 2000); Abdourahman Ali Waberi, *Moisson de crânes. Textes pour le Rwanda* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Alexandre Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History* (Lanham/Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010).

(2004) and Zoe Norridge's *Perceiving Pain* (2013).<sup>35</sup> Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Fuir ou mourir au Zaïre* has also received a certain amount of critical attention, and was the focus of a special issue of the *African Studies Review* in 2005.<sup>36</sup> Several studies examine the fictional texts published as part of the Fest' Africa project.<sup>37</sup> There are also a small number of articles that focus on the compilations of testimonies by Jean Hatzfeld and Yolande Mukagasana.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note that, at the time of writing, all the Rwandan women to have published testimonies were living in exile in the West,<sup>39</sup> and their testimonies have been published in France or Belgium and seem to be targeting a predominantly Western audience. These texts are not widely available in Rwanda and have not been translated into English.<sup>40</sup> In Rwanda itself, the act of giving testimony is often restricted to a judicial context, as

<sup>35</sup> See Coquio, *Rwanda. Le Réel et les récits*; Zoe Norridge, *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> This special issue included articles by well-known Rwanda scholars such as Danielle de Lame, René Lemarchand and Catharine Newbury.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Nicki Hitchcott, 'A Global African Commemoration – Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45.2 (2009), 151–61; Madeleine Hron, 'Itsembabwoko "à la française"? – Rwanda, Fiction and the Franco-African Imaginary', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45.2 (2009), 162–75; Martina Kopf, 'The Ethics of Fiction: African Writers on the Genocide in Rwanda', *Journal of Literary Theory*, 6.1 (2012), 65–82; Josias Semujanga, *Le Génocide, sujet de fiction? Analyse des récits du massacre des Tutsi dans la littérature africaine* (Québec: Nota bene, 2008); Audrey Small, 'The Duty of Memory: A Solidarity of Voices after the Rwandan Genocide', *Paragraph*, 30.1 (2007), 85–100.

<sup>38</sup> See Audrey Alvès, 'Comprendre le processus de médiation testimoniale du génocide. L'exemple de l'œuvre de Jean Hatzfeld', in Catalina Sagarra Martin, ed., *Le Génocide des Tutsi. Rwanda, 1994: Lectures et Écritures* (Laval: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), pp. 129–43; Madeleine Hron, 'Gukora and Itsembatsemba: The "Ordinary Killers" in Jean Hatzfeld's *Machete Season*', *Research in African Literatures*, 42.2 (2011), 125–46; Zoe Norridge, 'Bleeding Scars from Rwanda: The Interplay of Text and Image in Alain Kazinierakis and Yolande Mukagasana's *Blessures du silence*', *French Cultural Studies*, 20.2 (2009), 133–48.

<sup>39</sup> The majority of them continue to do so, apart from Mukagasana who has since returned to live in Kigali.

<sup>40</sup> Two of Mukagasana's texts have been translated into Italian: *La Morte non mi ha voluta*, trans. by C. Sciancalepore (Molfetta: La Meridiana, 1999); *Le Ferite del silenzio. Testimonianze sul genocidio del Rwanda* (Molfetta: La Meridiana, 2008). Mukagasana has also published a text in Italian aimed at younger readers: *Un giorno vivrò anch'io. Il genocidio del Rwanda raccontato ai giovani* (Molfetta: La Meridiana, 2011). Mujawayo's testimonies have been translated into German and Italian: *Auf der Suche nach Stéphanie*, trans. by Jutta Himmelreich (Berlin: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2007); *Ein Leben mehr: Wie ich des Hölle Ruandas entkam*, trans. by Jutta Himmelreich (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 2007); *Il fiore di Stéphanie*, trans. by Barbara Ferri (Rome: E/O, 2007).

required by national and international judicial institutions. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, a ‘culture of silence’ seems to have been established around the genocide; only certain survivors are permitted to tell their stories in certain circumstances.<sup>41</sup> This underlines the importance of published testimonies, where those texts published outside Rwanda can speak for the survivors in Rwanda and raise awareness of the ongoing silencing they face in their everyday lives. Indeed, this is a deliberate aim of many of the women writing their testimonies to break the silence surrounding the genocide and bring the plight of survivors in Rwanda to the fore. Their testimonies bear witness not only to the horrors of genocide but also to the complexities and struggles of post-genocide Rwandan society and the enduring impact of the traumatic experience.

As Kalí Tal notes, when studying the literatures of trauma, it is crucial to take into account the complex context from which the narratives originate:

The critic of trauma literature must determine: the composition of the community of trauma survivors; the nature of the trauma inflicted upon members of the community; the composition of the community of perpetrators; the relationship between the communities of victims and perpetrators; and the contemporary social, political, and cultural location of the community of survivors.<sup>42</sup>

In order to understand and interpret Rwandan women’s testimonies, none of these factors can be overlooked as they are integral to the women’s experiences of violence and survival, and dictate what can and cannot be said. The following chapters will examine not only what is said in the testimonies, but also the contexts in which the act of bearing witness takes place. In particular I

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<sup>41</sup> The designated spaces for testimony principally comprise *gacaca*, the modified traditional local justice system reinstated to try the backlog of genocide cases, and official commemoration ceremonies. The problems and limitations posed for survivors by both of these fora will be examined in Chapter 5.

<sup>42</sup> Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17.



will examine the communities of survivors – such as the genocide widows of AVEGA<sup>43</sup> – who have come together in the aftermath of the genocide and provide a safe space within which individual survivors can share their stories. I will also consider the factors in post-genocide Rwandan society which prevent both individuals and groups from speaking out about their experiences. My final chapter in particular will address the wider issues of cohabitation, reconciliation, forgiveness and justice as they are played out in the testimonies.

### *Presentation of the Corpus*

Intended to be a comprehensive study of the existing body of Francophone women's testimonial literature bearing witness to the genocide in Rwanda, my thesis will examine not only the content of the testimonies but also the issues surrounding their publication, the collaborative process, and the way in which the texts are presented and marketed. When I began this study, I was only aware of approximately eight testimonies that had been published in French. The corpus has inevitably grown over the course of the last three years, as new testimonies have been published.<sup>44</sup> My corpus currently comprises a total of fifteen testimonies published by twelve different authors. The earliest testimony was published just three years after the genocide in 1997, Yolande Mukagasana's *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*. Mukagasana expands on this testimony in her second text, *N'aie pas peur de savoir*, published in 1999. Over the next fifteen years a steady trickle of testimonies has appeared, particularly in the late 2000s, and the latest testimony to appear was Pauline Kayitare's *Tu*

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<sup>43</sup> L'Association des Veuves du Génocide d'Avril.

<sup>44</sup> Several of the texts are difficult to obtain, such as Laetitia Umuhoza Kameya, *Rwanda 1994: Le génocide. Témoignages et réflexions* (Rwanda: I.P.N., 2011), which is not available outside Rwanda.

*leur diras que tu es hutue* in 2011. While I do not wish to exclude Hutu from the category of ‘survivor’, this thesis will only analyse the narratives written by Tutsi survivors, as they were the direct targets of the genocidal ideology (i.e. it was the Tutsi group that was denied the right to exist). All the testimonies by Tutsi authors will be addressed to a certain extent during the course of the thesis, although some texts will be more central to my discussion than others. This is because, given my interest in both the individual and collective dimensions of trauma, certain testimonies have more scope for detailed analysis, particularly those which show a self-aware reflexivity and are speaking for others, not just for the self.

Table 1 (below) shows a chronological list of all the publications of testimonies written in French. It also indicates the name of the publishing house and of any collaborator. The fact that the majority of the testimonies were written in collaboration suggests that the women needed what Richard Watts terms the ‘sponsorship’ of an already established Western author in order to be published.<sup>45</sup> The implications of this shared authorship will be discussed in Chapter 3 where I will explore collaboration both in terms of facilitating testimony and providing access to the publishing industry, but also in terms of the manipulation and even appropriation of the survivor’s story.

Author	Title	Publisher	Date of Publication	Collaborator
Yolande Mukagasana	<i>La Mort ne veut pas de moi</i>	Fixot	1997	Patrick May
Yolande Mukagasana	<i>N’aie pas peur de savoir</i>	Robert Laffont	1999	Patrick May

<sup>45</sup> Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (Lanham and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), p. 3.

Marie-Aimable Umurerwa	<i>Comme la langue entre les dents. Fratricide et piège d'identité au Rwanda</i>	L'Harmattan	2000	Patrick May
Marie Béatrice Umutesi	<i>Fuir ou mourir au Zaïre. Le vécu d'une Réfugiée Rwandaise</i>	L'Harmattan	2000	---
Annick Kayitesi	<i>Nous existons encore</i>	Michel Lafon	2004	Albertine Gentou
Esther Mujawayo	<i>SurVivantes. Rwanda dix ans après le génocide</i>	Éditions de l'Aube	2004	Souâd Belhaddad
Chantal Umutesi	<i>La Paix dans l'âme</i>	Klanba	2004	---
Madeleine Mukamuganga	<i>Rwanda, du bonheur à l'horreur</i>	Éditions Cultures Croisées	2005	---
Esther Mujawayo	<i>La Fleur de Stéphanie. Rwanda entre réconciliation et déni</i>	Flammarion	2006	Souâd Belhaddad
Scholastique Mukasonga	<i>Inyenzi ou les Cafards</i>	Gallimard	2006	---
Scholastique Mukasonga	<i>La Femme aux pieds nus</i>	Gallimard	2008	---
Chantal Umuraza	<i>Une jeunesse rwandaise</i>	Karthala	2008	Marie-Paule Richard
Berthe Kayitesi	<i>Demain ma vie. Enfants chefs de famille dans le Rwanda d'après</i>	Laurence Teper	2009	---
Dancille Campagna Gwiza	<i>Rwanda 1994: mémoires tristes, justice improbable</i>	Books on Demand	2009	---
Pauline Kayitare	<i>Tu leur diras que tu es hutue. À 13 ans, une tutsie au cœur du génocide rwandais</i>	André Versaille	2011	Patrick May

Laetitia Umehoza Kameya	<i>Rwanda 1994: Le génocide. Témoignages et réflexions</i>	I.P.N.	2011	---
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Table 1: List of publications.

The publishing houses are all based in the Paris area, with the exception of André Versaille in Brussels. They range from well-known, long-established publishers such as L'Harmattan and Gallimard, to relatively unknown organisations such as Klanba and Éditions Cultures Croisées.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, the texts with the least professional levels of production and editing are published by these two more marginal publishing houses and are both written by Hutu survivors (Chantal Umutesi and Madeleine Mukamuganga).<sup>47</sup> Both texts exhibit obvious inconsistencies in the format and editing, as well as in terms of the information contained in them (dates, names, places, etc.).<sup>48</sup> Dancille Campagna Gwiza's testimony is published by the French branch of the international organisation Books on Demand, which allows individuals to self-publish online. Copies of the books are only printed when ordered.<sup>49</sup> While this form of publishing enables individuals to promote and distribute their work more easily, the resulting editorial standards are not guaranteed. In this instance, while Campagna Gwiza's testimony appears to be fairly consistent in

<sup>46</sup> Both these establishments are non-profit associations publishing works by Francophone African authors. According to their website, Éditions Cultures Croisées 's'est donné pour objectif de favoriser l'expression de l'inter culturalité en offrant un appui à l'écriture et à la publication des ouvrages, bénévolement et dans les limites de ses moyens', [www.ed-cultures-croisees.fr](http://www.ed-cultures-croisees.fr). Similarly, Klanba Editions declares: 'Nous sommes un tremplin pour l'écrivain, africain, émergence d'une fonction de la littérature', [www.klanba.com](http://www.klanba.com).

<sup>47</sup> However, it is important to note that the first testimony to be written by a Hutu survivor, Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Fuire ou mourir au Zaïre*, was published by L'Harmattan and has been translated into English.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Chantal Umutesi writes Habyarimana's name as 'Habyalimana' and refers to 'la préfecture de Ruhengeli' instead of Ruhengeri: see Umutesi, *La Paix dans l'âme* (Paris: Klanba, 2004), p. 33, p. 40; p. 41. Given that the Rwandan pronunciation of 'l' and 'r' is very similar, these spellings suggest that the testimony may in fact have been spoken and transcribed by a non-Rwandan.

<sup>49</sup> For further information see [www.bod.fr](http://www.bod.fr).

terms of format and editing, there are occasional errors such as an incomplete sentence at the end of a chapter.

Just as the editorial standards of the publication differ, the styles of writing in Rwandan women's testimonies also vary enormously, from elaborate and stylised texts such as Mukagasana's testimonies, to Chantal Umutesi's *La Paix dans l'âme*, which has little literary merit and production quality. Indeed, in his brief preface to Umutesi's narrative, Kwamé N'goran underscores the fact that Umutesi's narrative is 'écrit très simplement, (dans son vocabulaire et dans sa structure)'.<sup>50</sup> While N'goran's words attempt to present the simplicity of the narrative as a positive attribute, in reality the poor style and presentation of the text detract from the experience of reading the testimony and ultimately lessen the impact of its content.

It is important to note that three of the authors (Mukagasana, Mujawayo and Mukasonga) have written more than one testimony. Mukagasana and Mujawayo both expand upon – and directly repeat in Mukagasana's case – information given in their first testimonies, indicative of 'the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience' highlighted by Tal.<sup>51</sup> This need to (re)tell will be explored in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, first in terms of the notion of a sense of duty or 'devoir de mémoire' the survivor feels towards the dead (Chapter 1), and second in terms of validating the survivor's experiences and facilitating the process of working through the trauma (Chapter 2). Moreover, several of the women have gone on to write other kinds of texts. For example, Scholastique Mukasonga has begun to publish fictional

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<sup>50</sup> Umutesi, *La Paix dans l'âme*, p. 7. Kwamé N'Goran is an author and playwright from the Côte d'Ivoire, currently living in exile in Paris, who has published numerous titles with Klanba Editions. It is not specified whether he is the transcriber of Umutesi's testimony.

<sup>51</sup> Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, p. 21.

work,<sup>52</sup> while Berthe Kayitesi has published a number of academic papers, both individually and collaboratively, on resilience amongst youth and orphans in post-genocide Rwanda.<sup>53</sup> These women's ongoing roles as writers, academics and public figures will be examined in the final chapter.

Even from this brief overview, it would seem that writing and publishing is something that only a select few have been able to achieve in exile. Indeed, the majority of Rwandan women who have published testimonies are well educated; they hold university degrees and/or professional qualifications.<sup>54</sup> In Rwanda itself, although literacy levels are rising swiftly, access to the publishing industry remains limited.<sup>55</sup> While literacy levels are currently among the highest in Africa, the culture of reading is not necessarily part of the Rwandan culture, which boasts a strong oral tradition.<sup>56</sup> This is certainly true of the older generations, as Mukagasana emphasises at the start of her testimony: 'Je ne vis pas dans l'écrit. Je vis dans la parole' (LM 13). Nonetheless, there is evidence of a modernisation of the publishing industry within Rwanda and improving access to published material for the Rwandan public, with the first testimony to be published in French in Rwanda appearing

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<sup>52</sup> Mukasonga has published a collection of short stories, *L'Iguifou. Nouvelles rwandaises* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010) as well as a novel, *Notre-Dame du Nil* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), which won the Prix Renaudot 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Berthe Kayitesi, 'Revanche et attachement aux disparus comme facteurs de résilience scolaire chez les jeunes rescapés du génocide des Tutsi', in Catalina Sagarra Martin, ed., *Le Génocide des Tutsi. Rwanda, 1994: Lectures et Écritures* (Laval: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), pp. 217–29; Berthe Kayitesi, Rollande Deslandes and Christine Lebel, 'Facteurs de résilience chez des orphelins rescapés du génocide qui vivent seuls dans les ménages au Rwanda (Association Tubeho)', *Revue Canadienne de Santé Mentale Communautaire*, 28.1 (2009), 67–81.

<sup>54</sup> Pauline Kayitare took courses in economics and management before leaving Rwanda, and continued her studies in France. Annick Kayitesi has completed further education in France, and Berthe Kayitesi is currently studying for her doctorate in Canada. Esther Mujawayo studied in Belgium for several years before the genocide and has subsequently trained as a therapist and followed a course on 'Person Centered Therapy' in the UK. Yolande Mukagasana was trained as a nurse, and Marie-Aimable Umurerwa as a social worker.

<sup>55</sup> According to Unicef statistics, the literacy rate in 2010 was 71%, compared to 58% in 1991 and 38% in 1978. See [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rwanda\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rwanda_statistics.html).

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Alexis Kagame's study of oral history and traditions, *Introduction aux grands genres lyriques de l'ancien Rwanda* (Butare: Éditions universitaires du Rwanda, 1969).

in 2011: Laetitia Umuhoza Kameya, *Rwanda 1994: le génocide. Témoignages et réflexions*.

### *Literary Culture in Rwanda*

Literary culture in Rwanda has been changing rapidly since the genocide. In 2003, Coquio wrote that, in Rwanda, ‘la culture du livre n’existe pas’.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Rwanda has a small but steadily growing number of publishing houses, the first of which, Editions Bakame, was founded in 1995 and promotes literature for children and young adults.<sup>58</sup> Several international publishing companies have also established branches in Rwanda, such as Cambridge University Press and Macmillan, both based in Kigali and which primarily publish teaching materials. East African Publishers now have a branch, East African Publishers Rwanda Ltd., which also focuses on education.

In terms of the distribution of published material, there are still only a handful of bookshops in Kigali, some with very small collections. I visited a number of them in April 2012 in order to discover which kinds of texts about the genocide were available. There were numerous historical volumes available in most establishments, and the majority of the testimonies from my corpus could be found in at least one of the shops. While a large part of their clientele are Westerners, these shops also sell a number of texts pertaining to the genocide written in Kinyarwanda, which very few non-Rwandans would be able to read. At the time of my visit, the most extensive collection of testimonies and material about the genocide was housed in the international

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<sup>57</sup> Catherine Coquio, ‘L’émergence d’une “littérature” de non-écrivains: les témoignages de catastrophes historiques’, *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 103.2 (2003), 343–63 (p. 347).

<sup>58</sup> See [www.bakame.rw](http://www.bakame.rw). Some texts are published in French and some in English, but the majority of texts are in Kinyarwanda.

Ikirezi Bookshop, which is frequented mainly by foreign visitors.<sup>59</sup> The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre also houses a modest library/book shop, which is a useful resource for both local and foreign visitors alike. A much larger collection is available for consultation in the CNLG (Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre le Génocide) headquarters in Kigali. The first public library, also located in Kigali, opened in 2012. I was fortunate enough to be able to visit shortly before it opened and to see their genocide collection being catalogued and shelved.<sup>60</sup> It is hoped that these resources will radically change the way the testimonies and other literature are received and circulated in Rwanda. There is a visible effort to modernise and promote Rwandan reading culture in order to educate the public, although it is still difficult to gauge how many Rwandans are currently making use of these facilities.

### *The Question of Ethnicity*

Of the existing corpus of women's testimonial literature, the majority of the testimonies are by Tutsi survivors, with only three texts written by Hutu survivors (Madeleine Mukamuganga, Chantal Umutesi and Marie Béatrice Umutesi). The testimonies of Hutu women provide insight into the difficulties many Rwandan refugees suffered in former Zaire, but their perception of the genocide itself differs greatly, both from each other and from the Tutsi survivors. For instance, while Chantal Umutesi maintains an ambiguous discourse about the RPF and the events of the genocide, Madeleine

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<sup>59</sup> The mission statement on the Ikirezi Bookshop's website is to be 'the leading library in Rwanda': <http://www.ikirezi.biz/ikirezi.html>. This appears to be a mistranslation of the French 'librairie' as the Ikirezi bookshop does not operate a lending service.

<sup>60</sup> The library is currently reliant on donations so the number of books available is still quite restricted but will continue to expand.



Mukamuganga is clearly revisionist. For example, she blames the genocide on the RPF's invasion of Rwanda in 1990:

La misère des Rwandais est le fruit amer de l'intrusion dans leur pays, le 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 1990, d'une guerre dévastatrice qui a déchiré le Rwanda pendant quatre ans et dont on ne parle plus, période que le monde ignore et dont on omet les détails, alors que c'est elle qui fut génératrice de ce que l'on a appelé 'le génocide rwandais'.<sup>61</sup>

Mukamuganga is very critical of the RPF, which she describes as being 'constitué des nostalgiques du pouvoir de 1959',<sup>62</sup> echoing the genocidal rhetoric that the RPF wanted to seize power and enslave the Hutu population. She attributes the discontent in Rwanda in the early 1990s to 'l'arrogance des extrémistes tutsi qui attendaient la libération, car pour eux, ils étaient la race élue pour gouverner'.<sup>63</sup> Mukamuganga speaks of 'les guerres' but does not accept the term 'genocide'. Umutesi also prefers to speak of 'la guerre civile de 1994' rather than referring directly to the genocide.

As Lee Ann Fujii suggests, this aversion to admitting that the genocide took place is partly attributable to the fact that, in Rwanda, 'people experience, remember, and recount violence through the lens of their own victimization'.<sup>64</sup> This leads to an element of competing narratives, where admitting the suffering of one group would detract from the status of victimhood of the other.<sup>65</sup> For, as Susan Sontag observes in her study of visual representations of war victims, 'victims are interested in the representation of their own sufferings. But they want the suffering to be seen as unique. [...] It is intolerable to have one's own

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<sup>61</sup> Madeleine Mukamuganga, *Rwanda, du bonheur à l'horreur. J'y étais...* (Roissy-en-Brie: Éditions Cultures Croisées, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Mukamuganga, *Rwanda, du bonheur à l'horreur*, p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> Mukamuganga, *Rwanda, du bonheur à l'horreur*, p. 44.

<sup>64</sup> Lee Ann Fujii, 'Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, 47.2 (2010), 231–41 (p. 236).

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of the politicisation of victimhood in post-genocide Rwanda see Jennie E. Burnet, 'Whose Genocide? Whose Truth? Representations of Victim and Perpetrator in Rwanda', in Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O'Neill, eds, *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 80–110

sufferings twinned with anybody else's'.<sup>66</sup> During interviews conducted in 2009, Fujii observed that different groups of Rwandan survivors – such as those of genocide survivors and survivors returning from the DRC – were not willing to acknowledge the victimhood of other groups: 'It was as if acknowledging the violence perpetrated against other victims took away from their own status as victims'.<sup>67</sup> These strategies of evasion or denial are just some of the many forms of silencing that occur in post-genocide Rwanda.

The notion of competing victimhood is also suggested in certain narratives of Tutsi survivors in more nuanced ways. Several of the women express an indignation that, in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, international humanitarian aid was primarily focused on the refugee crisis in the former Zaire, while survivors in Rwanda were left to fend for themselves. Many women have had to fight to be recognised as survivors and to receive the same rights as other citizens in Rwanda, such as the new returnees. For example, Berthe Kayitesi describes how, as an orphan of the genocide and the eldest child in her family, she had to fight for years to obtain suitable housing and education for herself and her siblings. In a similar vein, Annick Kayitesi describes the abuse she suffered in a foster family in France who took advantage of her vulnerability. Indeed, the struggle to come to terms with what happened, continue their education, as well as contend with the indifference of those insensitive to their situation is a key theme in the testimonies of younger survivors, such as Annick Kayitesi, Berthe Kayitesi, and Pauline Kayitare. For the older women – Esther Mujawayo, Yolande Mukagasana – the difficulties involved in building a new life in exile after their

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<sup>66</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003), pp. 100–1.

<sup>67</sup> Fujii, 'Shades of Truth and Lies', p. 236.

families have been decimated by the genocide are brought to the fore. Telling their stories is a way of countering this indifference and working through their trauma on an individual level, and moving beyond the identity of 'victim' is shown to be essential for reconciliation at the collective level.

The next section of this introduction will provide a brief background to the development of trauma theory, underlining the crucial link between trauma and testimony that is central to my understanding of Rwandan women's testimonies. It will develop my methodology and bring out some of the salient features of the testimonies that will be discussed in depth in the following chapters. I will begin to explore the ways in which trauma theory can be useful as a tool in analysing testimonial narratives, and the potential pitfalls and limitations of this model. While trauma theory may help us to interpret the testimonies and better understand the effects of trauma on survivors, this thesis intends to foreground the specificities of Rwandan women's testimonies and the unique and complex struggles survivors face in the aftermath of the genocide.

### *Genealogy of Trauma*

As Cathy Caruth informs us, the Greek word *trauma*, meaning 'wound', originally referred to an injury to the body.<sup>68</sup> However, following important developments in the fields of medicine and psychiatry over the course of the twentieth century, trauma has come to be understood as 'a wound inflicted not on the body but upon the mind'.<sup>69</sup> The study of trauma therefore focuses on the psychological responses to a life-shattering traumatic or 'limit' event and its

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<sup>68</sup> See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 3.

aftermath. A 'limit event' is defined by Dominick LaCapra as a profoundly violent historical event which transgresses certain social and moral limits and falls outside the comprehension of ordinary experience.<sup>70</sup> This notion of an *extra-ordinary* experience is crucial in understanding the difficulties inherent in representing an extreme traumatic or 'limit' event and will be useful when I come to explore the reception of Rwandan women's testimony. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 1, not only is it difficult for the survivor to communicate the experience of trauma to an audience, but it is equally difficult for the audience to comprehend the extreme violence the survivor has lived through. I will argue that what has come to be known as the 'impossibility' of testimony, in other words the impossibility of putting the experience into words, derives as much from the audience's inability to *hear* the story as from the survivor's inability to express the trauma.

The study of trauma and its psychological consequences is a predominantly Anglo-American preoccupation. Trauma theory has been developed primarily in the United States, notably in the fields of medicine and psychoanalysis, and has subsequently been taken up by other disciplines, including literature and cultural studies. With its origins primarily in research on the Holocaust, Trauma Studies is now an academic discipline in its own right. Nevertheless, we must exercise caution when applying trauma theory to other cultures in order to avoid the risk of universalising the experience of suffering. This problem will be considered throughout the course of this thesis.

The prominence of trauma in contemporary Western culture is generally attributed to the phenomenon of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

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<sup>70</sup> See Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 91.

(PTSD). PTSD was officially recognised by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, and Roger Luckhurst defines sufferers as those ‘confronted with an experience involving “actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a physical threat to the physical integrity of the self” considered to be outside the range of normal experience’.<sup>71</sup> Initially PTSD was strongly linked to post-combat stress, particularly in the case of Vietnam war veterans. However, this diagnosis soon began to apply to a wide range of traumatic experiences. As Caruth explains,

this classification [of PTSD] and its attendant official acknowledgement of a pathology has provided a category of diagnosis so powerful that it has seemed to engulf everything around it: suddenly responses not only to combat and to natural catastrophes but also to rape, child abuse, and a number of other violent occurrences have been understood in terms of PTSD, and diagnoses of some dissociative disorders have also been switched to that of trauma.<sup>72</sup>

As such, trauma and its representation entered the public domain, focusing on the psychological repercussions of a range of traumatic events.

### *Trauma and Testimony*

In response to the traumatic historical events of the twentieth century, a culture of giving testimony has developed.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Shoshana Felman claims that ‘testimony has become a crucial mode of our relation to events of our times – our relation to the traumas of contemporary history’.<sup>74</sup> In the 1990s, scholars such as Caruth, Felman and Laub, and LaCapra, began to investigate the

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<sup>71</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 1: Luckhurst is citing the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association.

<sup>72</sup> Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> While there are, of course, many types of testimonial narrative, this thesis will only deal with testimony bearing witness to trauma.

<sup>74</sup> Shoshana Felman, ‘Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching’, in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–56 (p. 5).

relationship between historical trauma and its representation, including both oral testimony and literary texts. The model of trauma theory developed by these scholars draws heavily on a Freudian psychoanalytic framework, particularly in terms of the belated resurfacing of traumatic memories that inhabit the traumatised individual. Expanding on Freud's work, Caruth insists on the fact that a trauma can only be fully known after the event itself: 'the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event'.<sup>75</sup>

The act of testimony is necessarily a belated response to the traumatic event itself. Through his work with Holocaust survivors, Dori Laub observes that there is 'some degree of unconscious witnessing that could not find its voice or its expression during the event', but which comes to light during psychoanalytic therapy sessions.<sup>76</sup> While Laub addresses this as a specific quality of the experience of the Holocaust, Caruth sees this 'inability fully to witness the event as it occurs' as characteristic of all traumatic experiences.<sup>77</sup> Caruth writes: '[t]he story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life'.<sup>78</sup> This will be central to my understanding of Rwandan women's experiences of trauma: the continued impact of trauma on the lives of survivors is a crucial aspect of their testimonies. While the aim of this thesis is not to provide a

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<sup>75</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, pp. 4–5 (emphasis in original).

<sup>76</sup> Dori Laub, 'An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival', in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 75–92 (p. 83).

<sup>77</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 7.

psychoanalytic reading of the testimonies, the external signs of trauma exhibited by Rwandan women genocide survivors – both by the authors themselves and by the other survivors mentioned in their testimonies – are clearly similar to those described by trauma theorists, and help us to understand the ongoing impact of the trauma on Rwandan women's lives.

As trauma theory tells us, the traumatised individual is haunted by the event and often develops what have come to be known as 'traumatic neuroses',<sup>79</sup> which may take the form of flashbacks, nightmares, repetitive actions or even 'the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind'.<sup>80</sup> The Rwandan women portrayed in the testimonies – and often the authors themselves – exhibit various signs of traumatic neuroses. For example, several of the women are shown to have flashbacks that they experience as reliving the traumatic experience. As I will examine in Chapter 2, many of the women are haunted by particular 'key moments' of the genocide which constantly resurface in their present. Mukagasana has frequent flashbacks to the moment she saw her husband's hand being severed from his arm, and Kayitare has a recurring vision of a drowned man in the lake. In *Survivantes*, Mujawayo describes a litany of unexplained physical pains and unusual behavioural patterns that are also attributed to being traumatised. LaCapra's conceptions of 'acting-out' and 'working-through' trauma will be particularly useful in interpreting these manifestations of trauma. According to LaCapra, 'in acting-out one has a mimetic relation to the past which is

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<sup>79</sup> The term 'traumatic neurosis' was coined in the 1860s by Berlin neurologist Paul Oppenheim who ascribed the symptoms to 'undetectable organic changes in the brain'. The term subsequently acquired a more psychological meaning as it was employed by figures such as Freud and Breuer in their conceptualisation of the traumatised psyche. See Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 2.

regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription', whereas working-through 'involves an attempt to counteract the tendency to deny, repress, or blindly repeat' the traumatic memory.<sup>81</sup>

For victims of trauma, LaCapra argues that 'acting-out may be a necessary condition of working-through',<sup>82</sup> and this is certainly suggested in Rwandan women's narratives where there is a tension between reliving the past in the present and regaining a certain sense of control over the memories. Many of the women survivors presented in Mujawayo's testimony, for example, do not even seem to realise that they are traumatised and cannot explain their own actions. Understanding why their behaviour has changed and that their reaction is in fact 'normal' given what they have lived through is an important step towards working through their trauma and regaining a sense of agency over their lives. Moreover, in Rwandan women's testimonies, this distinction between acting-out and working-through is expressed in terms of a shift from 'surviving' to 'living', which involves not only a process of working through the trauma but also of regaining a sense of stability and security in their lives. This material aspect of coping with a traumatic experience is often overlooked in trauma theory, where the focus is on the emotional recovery of the individual, but is crucial for understanding the situation of Rwandan survivors. The difficult passage from surviving to living will constitute the focus of my concluding chapter, which will consider how, for Rwandan women, the act of reclaiming their voice and telling their experiences is central to this process.

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<sup>81</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 45; p. 54.

<sup>82</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, p. 45.



### *Testimony and Voice*

Several critics have highlighted a tendency within trauma studies to focus on the ‘universal’ human experience of trauma and suffering, a definition which relies on principles of universality that are in fact defined by the West.<sup>83</sup> This is particularly problematic when considering the specificity of women’s experiences of violence and suffering. In her study of women’s testimonial literature from around the globe, Anne Cubilié notes that existing scholarship has tended towards a ‘leveling of differences within testimony’ that does not account for the specificities of women’s experiences in particular.<sup>84</sup> In the case of Rwanda, scholars have underlined the unparalleled nature of the sexual crimes committed against women during the genocide.<sup>85</sup> The stigma attached to victims of rape means that they are often unable to speak out about their experiences.<sup>86</sup> As such, women are stereotypically portrayed as disempowered victims of conflict. In her preface to Madeleine Gagnon’s *Les Femmes et la guerre*, Benoîte Groult describes the typical situation of women as victims of violence: ‘Créatures de seconde zone, [...] elles étaient condamnées à faire partie du troupeau des victimes muettes de toutes les guerres. L’Histoire s’est faite sans elles’.<sup>87</sup> While this may be true of certain genocide survivors, many Rwandan women have refused to be passive victims and have played a unique

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<sup>83</sup> See for example Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> See Anne Cubilié, *Women Witnessing Terror: Testimony and the Cultural Politics of Human Rights* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> For a full report on sexual violence during the genocide see Binaifer Nowrojee, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwanda Genocide and its Aftermath*, (Human Rights Watch and FIDH, 1996). Christopher Taylor’s research also shows that Tutsi women were subjected to sexual harassment and rape by Hutu extremists before the genocide began: see Christopher C. Taylor, ‘A Gendered Genocide: Tutsi Women and Hutu Extremists in the 1994 Rwanda Genocide’, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 22.1 (1999), 42–54 (p. 44).

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the stigma of rape in post-genocide Rwanda see Catharine Newbury, and Hannah Baldwin, ‘Aftermath: Women in Postgenocide Rwanda’, Working Paper No. 303, *Center for Development Information and Evaluation* (Washington: U.S. Agency for International Development, July 2000), pp. 4–5.

<sup>87</sup> Madeleine Gagnon, *Les Femmes et la guerre* (Montreal: VLB Editeur, 2000), p. 9.

and central role in social reconstruction and peace-building in post-genocide Rwanda. Indeed, as Swanee Hunt underlines, ‘Rwandan women have made significant contributions to post-genocide recovery and reconciliation’ at both national and grassroots levels.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, they have encountered many difficulties, and giving testimony has emerged as a key tool to raising awareness and making women’s experiences known.

As a genre, testimony initially developed as a channel through which the victims of oppression and persecution could give voice to their suffering and make others aware of their plight. Indeed, for Gayatri Spivak, ‘[t]estimony is the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other’.<sup>89</sup> As such, testimony is a means of ensuring that the stories of the victims are known, thus subverting the official narratives put forward by those in power. As Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith observe:

Through acts of remembering, individuals and communities narrate alternative or counter-histories coming from the margins, voiced by other kinds of subjects – the tortured, the displaced and overlooked, the silenced and unacknowledged – among them. [...] Their stories enable new forms of subjectivity and radically altered futures.<sup>90</sup>

Marginalised women – such as Rwandan women genocide survivors – have thus come to use testimony as a means of reclaiming their place in History, of making their voices heard and to cease being the ‘mute victims’ of oppression.

Testimony remains one of the most accessible forms of narrative through which survivors can communicate their stories. This is due in part to the fact that, since testimony ‘coalesced as a new narrative genre’ in the

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<sup>88</sup> Swanee Hunt, ‘Moving Beyond Silence: Women Waging Peace’, in Helen Durham and Tracey Gurd, eds, *Listening to the Silences: Women and War* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005), pp. 251–71 (p. 257).

<sup>89</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Three Women’s Texts and Circumfession’, in Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe, eds., *Postcolonialism and Autobiography: Michelle Cliff, David Dabydeen, Opal Palmer Adisa* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 7–22 (p. 7).

<sup>90</sup> Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, ‘Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights’, *Biography*, 27.1 (2004), 1–24 (p. 4).

1960s,<sup>91</sup> it has undergone a process of democratisation. According to Marlene Kadar, testimony is a form of narrative used by ‘the socially insignificant and powerless’ or ‘ordinary people’ to communicate traumatic personal and historical events.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere, Annette Wieviorka observes that ‘l’extraordinaire engouement pour les “récits de vie” [...] est en quelque sorte une démocratisation des acteurs de l’histoire, qui veut que l’on donne désormais la voix aux exclus, aux sans-grade, aux sans-voix’.<sup>93</sup> This is particularly apparent within Latin American *testimonio* bearing witness to political violence and torture, which John Beverley describes as ‘a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative in the sense that it implies that any life so narrated can have a kind of representational value’.<sup>94</sup>

One of the key characteristics of *testimonio* is that the narrator belongs to an oppressed, excluded or marginal group and speaks as a ‘representative’ member of that group. As Beverley observes, unlike autobiography, ‘testimonio is concerned not so much with the life of a “problematic hero” [...] as with a problematic collective social situation in which the narrator lives’.<sup>95</sup> Joanna Bartow expands on this definition in her discussion of Latin American women’s *testimonio*, claiming that the narrators ‘rewrite or contribute to historical discourse about the particular nation involved, in order to question the status quo and attract national or international attention to the crisis at

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<sup>91</sup> See John Beverley, ‘The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)’, in John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 29–44 (p. 31).

<sup>92</sup> Marlene Kadar, ‘Wounding Events and the Limits of Autobiography’, in Vijay Agnew, ed., *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 81–109; p. 81.

<sup>93</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *L’Ère du témoin* (Saint-Amand-Montrond: Plon, 1998), p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> Beverley, ‘The Margin at the Center’, p. 96.

<sup>95</sup> Beverley, ‘The Margin at the Center’, p. 33.

hand'.<sup>96</sup> Bartow underscores *testimonio*'s 'political impetus', 'which seeks to break repressive silence'.<sup>97</sup> While Rwandan women may not share such explicitly political intentions, their desire to break the silence and draw international attention to the plight of genocide survivors echoes the aims of many *testimonio* narrators discussed by Bartow.

### *Potential Limitations of Trauma Theory*

This thesis aims to engage with trauma theory as a model for interpreting and understanding the testimonies of Rwandan women genocide survivors, whilst maintaining an awareness of the limitations of this model and the danger of imposing a particular reading on the texts. Trauma theory can help shed light on Rwandan women's testimonies particularly in terms of the difficulty of representation, the potential healing properties of storytelling, and the disjointed experiences of temporality during and after the traumatic event. These are all central aspects that Rwandan women explore through their narratives. Nevertheless, throughout this thesis, I will continue to raise questions regarding the potential pitfalls of trauma theory for a Rwandan corpus – and an African corpus more generally – and the extent to which Rwandan women are themselves challenging this model.

Firstly, trauma theory centres around the problematic notion of the 'unsayable' at the heart of the traumatic experience, or what Laub describes as the 'impossibility of telling'.<sup>98</sup> For many trauma theorists, the paradox at the heart of testimony resides in the witness's constant struggle with the

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<sup>96</sup> Joanna Bartow, *Subject to Change: The Lessons of Latin American Women's Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, and Theory* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>97</sup> Bartow, *Subject to Change*, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Laub, 'An Event Without a Witness', p. 79.

inadequacy of language to convey the traumatic experience. As Susannah Radstone acknowledges:

Theories of testimony's impossibility link it not to the impossibility of complete self-knowledge, but to the impossibility of communicating – even to the self, sometimes – an experience of an event. [...] the central question posed by testimony concerns whether any meaningful sense can be made and communicated of traumatic experience.<sup>99</sup>

In her examination of Nigerian trauma novels, Amy Novak is critical of trauma theory's insistence on the impossibility of the survivor to express the trauma. 'Unlike trauma theory's formulation, the position of impossibility is not the Other's. The difficulty of communicating lies in the addressee, who cannot hear'.<sup>100</sup> In their testimonies, Rwandan women put forward their own reflections on how to represent the 'unsayable' experience of the genocide. While many of the women do evoke the notion of the 'indicable', they appear more concerned with foregrounding the difficulty in making themselves heard. Indeed, Esther Mujawayo highlights the audience's inability to *hear* the testimony in *SurVivantes*: 'Quand un rescapé raconte le génocide, il sent bien qu'on a du mal à le croire. [...] Quand on te dit: "Stop, arrête" ou bien "Non, ce n'est pas possible, ce n'est sans doute pas vrai", c'est que l'autre touche la limite de l'inimaginable' (SV 88–90). Mujawayo suggests that, while many survivors want to speak out about their experiences, it is only possible to share their stories amongst themselves and they are unable to find a wider audience: 'les rescapés ont volontiers une parole. Plus réaliste, la vraie question est: à qui dire? On connaissait la réponse, on a osé la formuler: personne. Personne, sauf nous-mêmes' (SV 209).

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<sup>99</sup> Susannah Radstone, 'Cultures of Confession/Cultures of Testimony: Turning the Subject Inside Out', in Jo Gill, ed., *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 166–79 (p. 175).

<sup>100</sup> Amy Novak, 'Who Speaks? Who Listens?: The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Trauma Novels', *Studies in the Novel*, 40.1 (2008), 31–51 (p. 41).

This difficulty in finding an audience is linked to trauma theory's problematic conception of the universal notion of empathy. While trauma theorists underline the importance of an empathic listener, they often do not take into account the difficulty involved in communicating trauma across cultural boundaries. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag questions whether 'some people's sufferings have a lot more intrinsic interest to an audience (given that suffering must be acknowledged as having an audience) than the sufferings of others'.<sup>101</sup> It would appear that, in the West, very little value is placed on African suffering. As Vaheed Ramazani writes: 'a deeply embedded attitude common to most cultures seems to be that it is perfectly "natural" for empathy to travel only with great difficulty across national borders'.<sup>102</sup> I would argue that this is particularly true of the Western attitude towards African suffering. Even today, Africa is still perceived by many to be the 'dark continent' characterised by brutal tribal warfare. As Jean-Paul Gouteux observes, 'le mythe de l'Afrique des ténèbres, directement hérité de la colonisation, est toujours actuel. Il fait du continent noir un monde différent où ne s'appliquent pas les mêmes valeurs, la même échelle d'humanité'.<sup>103</sup> In the case of the genocide in Rwanda, this attitude is embodied in French President Mitterrand's alleged claim that, 'dans ces pays-là, un génocide c'est pas trop important'.<sup>104</sup> For, as one of the protagonists claims in Senegalese author Boubacar Boris Diop's genocide novel *Murambi*, 'quoi qu'il arrive au Rwanda,

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<sup>101</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 104.

<sup>102</sup> Vaheed Ramazani, *Writing in Pain: Literature, History, and the Culture of Denial* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> Jean-Paul Gouteux, 'De la chambre à gaz à la machette: comment des dirigeants français se sont-ils engagés dans le soutien à un génocide en Afrique? Analyse "d'un choix politique"', in Rangira Béatrice Gallimore and Chantal Kalisa, eds, *Dix ans après: réflexions sur le génocide rwandais* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), pp. 61–78 (p. 73).

<sup>104</sup> Mitterrand is reported to have said this to his 'proches' in the summer of 1994, while the genocide in Rwanda was still taking place. See Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, *Complices de l'Inavouable: La France au Rwanda* (Paris: Éditions des Arènes, 2009), p. 200.

ce serait toujours pour les gens la même vieille histoire de nègres en train de se taper dessus'.<sup>105</sup>

Writing on Nigerian trauma novels, Novak observes a sentiment similar to that expressed by many of the Rwandan texts, that 'the focus of trauma theory on confronting and working through the past is not necessarily first in the minds of trauma survivors preoccupied with the importance of feeding families, finding a home, and returning to work'.<sup>106</sup> The Western model of trauma and healing is somewhat idealised and does not take into account the socio-political context of individual survivors and traumatised communities.

As Stevan Weine notes:

Contemporary theory and practice in mental health and human rights often makes the assumption that after political violence, trauma-related disturbed cognitions in individuals pose obstacles to peace and reconciliation. Psychosocial interventions, according to this view, are needed to transform these disturbed cognitive mechanisms, including through survivors' telling their trauma stories. Giving testimony, then, will help people to transform the memories, thoughts, and emotions of trauma and to move on.<sup>107</sup>

Given the weight trauma theorists accord to the healing of the traumatised individuals and groups, narratives of trauma are often expected to fit this inherently Western model of recovery. As Schaffer and Smith note, '[t]he literature of "trauma" at once compels and sustains the contemporary practice of trauma therapy specific to the West'.<sup>108</sup> However, Weine is wary of the cognitive approach to testimony, which he sees as being 'at risk of paying insufficient attention to historical, legal, social, and cultural contexts'.<sup>109</sup> While Weine considers this approach in terms of creating cultures of peace and

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<sup>105</sup> Diop, *Murambi*, p. 19. Towards the end of the novel, another protagonist also quotes the Mitterrand line reported by de Saint-Exupéry: see p. 228.

<sup>106</sup> Novak, 'Who Speaks? Who Listens?', p. 49.

<sup>107</sup> Stevan Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe: Narrating the Traumas of Political Violence* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), p. 119.

<sup>108</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 'Conjunctions', p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 119.

reconciliation on a political level, this view is often imposed on the Rwandan genocide survivor who is expected to come to terms with the past and ‘move on’. It is therefore necessary to be attentive to the specificities of Rwandan women’s voices in order to avoid a reductive reading of the testimonies and to hear what they tell us about the ongoing process of surviving trauma.

### *The Holocaust Frame*

In contemporary Western culture, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors have come to be perceived as narratives of trauma *par excellence*. As Régine Waintrater underlines, although the twentieth century has witnessed a number of genocides (in Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia), ‘la Shoah demeure, dans ce siècle, le paradigme de la catastrophe sociale et psychique’.<sup>110</sup> While I will draw on scholarship relating to Holocaust testimonies when analysing the corpus of Rwandan women’s testimonies, it is also important to be aware of the risks inherent in adopting a comparative methodology. As Schaffer and Smith observe:

So important and influential have Holocaust stories become, and so ingrained in Western audiences invoking a pattern of response, that this signal event has become a template for all forms of traumatic telling, response, and responsibility within the contemporary field of human rights.<sup>111</sup>

Given its wide cultural resonance, the Holocaust is used by many scholars as a ‘template’ to approach the genocide in Rwanda, particularly as a means of introducing the Western reader to the Rwandan context.<sup>112</sup> Survivors themselves draw comparisons with the Holocaust in their own discourse about

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<sup>110</sup> Régine Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide: Témoignage et survivance* (Paris: Editions Payot et Rivages, 2011), p. 10.

<sup>111</sup> Schaffer and Smith, ‘Conjunctions’, p. 7.

<sup>112</sup> For example, the Introduction of Mamdani’s *When Victims Become Killers* establishes salient parallels between the genocide in Rwanda and the Holocaust.



the genocide. Indeed, the genocide in Rwanda is even referred to by some as ‘the Rwandan Holocaust’.<sup>113</sup> As Arlene Stein observes in her analysis of social movements that employ the Holocaust frame,

Holocaust memories are evoked by groups seeking to claim victim status and name their enemies as perpetrators of genocide. [...] The Holocaust frame is particularly well suited to such moral identity claims since it is a historical template in which the distinction between good and evil is unambiguous.<sup>114</sup>

In the case of Rwanda, the Holocaust frame can be used to assign guilt to former perpetrators and to reaffirm the victim status of survivors, particularly in terms of combating negationism.

Nevertheless, the comparative method should not lead to a sense of equivalence or hierarchy, for, as Jean-Pierre Karegeye reminds us: ‘Chaque événement est unique et incomparable’.<sup>115</sup> René Lemarchand warns that, while there are undeniable points of convergence between the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda,

to treat Rwanda as the carbon copy of the Holocaust is likely to obscure its historical specificity and regional context, and ultimately lead to a misunderstanding of the motivations behind the killings. Not only does it make short shrift of the very different logics at work in each case, one ideological, the other retributive; it also renders the prospects of national reconciliation in Rwanda even more remote.<sup>116</sup>

Claiming a certain equivalence with the Holocaust can lead to an oversimplification of what went on in Rwanda, supporting the current government’s rhetoric that the Tutsi are innocent victims while the Hutu are

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<sup>113</sup> This expression is used, for example, in the title of Immaculée Ilibagiza’s testimony, *Left to Tell: One Woman’s Story of Surviving the Rwandan Holocaust*.

<sup>114</sup> Arlene Stein, ‘Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood? Contests for the Holocaust Frame in Recent Social Movement Discourse’, *Sociological Perspectives*, 41.3 (1998), 519–40 (p. 522).

<sup>115</sup> Jean-Pierre Karegeye, ‘Parole morte et méthode du texte’, in Rangira Béatrice Gallimore and Chantal Kalisa, eds, *Dix ans après: réflexions sur le génocide rwandais* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), pp. 103–20 (p. 105).

<sup>116</sup> René Lemarchand, ‘Disconnecting the Threads: Rwanda and the Holocaust Reconsidered’, *Idea: A Journal of Social Issues*, 7.1 (2001), <http://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?sup=11>.

collectively guilty.<sup>117</sup> This polarising rhetoric does not take into account the Hutu victims of the genocide nor the victims of RPF reprisal killings, and is a cause of ongoing social tension.

A nuanced comparison with the Holocaust will nonetheless be useful to my analysis of Rwandan women's testimonies in order to better understand Rwandan women's experiences – both their lived experiences of genocide and their experiences as witnesses – and how their testimonies are marketed to a Western audience. I will draw primarily on the parallels between the experiences of Holocaust and genocide survivors. Holocaust survivors share many of the difficulties expressed by Rwandan survivors in trying to communicate their stories. For example, in her 'entretien croisé' with Esther Mujawayo at the end of *SurVivantes*, Holocaust survivor Simone Veil evokes this same refusal to listen encountered by Rwandan survivors: 'Je pense à ce refus de nous écouter parce qu'on ne nous croyait pas et parce que c'était insupportable pour les gens de penser à ce que des hommes sont capables de faire à d'autres hommes...' (SV 284). As I will discuss in Chapter 3, this 'endorsement' of Rwandan women's experiences by well-known Holocaust survivors, while highly problematic, may well be necessary in ensuring that the Rwandan women's testimonies do not go overlooked by a Western audience.

Despite the existence of what Paula Ballinger refers to as a 'culture of survivors',<sup>118</sup> in which the voice of the survivor is privileged, it is perhaps surprising to repeatedly encounter a refusal to listen to survivors' stories. Since the Holocaust, the survivor of trauma has emerged as a source of knowledge

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<sup>117</sup> In the chapter 'Debating Collective Guilt', Eltringham highlights how 'certain members of the current political class in Rwanda appear to globalise guilt according to ethnic identity'. See Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*, p. 69.

<sup>118</sup> Paula Ballinger, 'The Culture of Survivors: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Memory', *History and Memory*, 10.1 (1998), 99–132 (p. 99).

and truth about the event. James Berger describes the survivor as ‘a kind of living “black box”, a source of final knowledge and authority’.<sup>119</sup> However, the authority of the survivor is not uncontested. For example, as survivors of both the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda have found, their testimonies are often called into question by negationists and genocide deniers who try to undermine the credibility of the witness. Moreover, given the extreme nature of the traumatic experience, many survivors are plagued by the fear of not being believed, and thus of not having their experiences recognised. This underlines the importance for survivors of being given a safe space within which to give their testimony. In her work on representations of violence in Sri-Lanka, Patricia Lawrence underlines ‘the basic necessity for a safe space and a safe witness’ as primary conditions for the act of testimony,<sup>120</sup> a theme which will be considered throughout this thesis.

### *Synopsis*

The first chapter of this thesis will address the question of who has the right to speak about a traumatic historical event. It will focus on the figure of the witness, distinguishing between the direct witness (the survivor-witness), the indirect witness and the secondary witness (the listener- or reader-witness). Rwandan women predominantly position themselves as ‘survivor-witnesses’, although as this chapter will show there are also different levels of witnessing contained within the testimonies depending on the varying levels of exposure to the horror experienced by each individual. In order to demonstrate this, this

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<sup>119</sup> James Berger, ‘Trauma and Literary Theory’, *Contemporary Literature*, 38.3 (1997), 569–82 (p. 571).

<sup>120</sup> Patricia Lawrence, ‘Violence, Suffering, Amman: The Work of Oracles in Sri Lanka’s Eastern War Zone’, in Veena Das, *et al.*, eds, *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 171–204 (p. 175).

chapter will draw in particular on the testimonies of Scholastique Mukasonga, Esther Mujawayo and Yolande Mukagasana. While Mukasonga's testimony is representative of the indirect experience of Rwandans living in exile at the time of the genocide, Mujawayo's and Mukagasana's narratives make us aware of the different levels of exposure to trauma in Rwanda itself at the time of the genocide: on the one hand, Mujawayo claims that she was spared the full horror of the genocide as she spent much of the time in hiding; at the other extreme, Mukagasana was hunted for several weeks and witnessed numerous atrocities before she finally managed to flee the country. Nevertheless, all three women claim to be speaking from the position of authority of the survivor-witness.

Moreover, testimony requires the presence of an empathic listener. Testimony is not a monologue; it cannot take place alone. Without an audience to receive the testimony and to validate the survivor's experiences, the testimony is essentially annihilated. As Laub underlines, the rejection of the survivor's testimony can result in the retraumatisation of the survivor: 'if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma – a *re-experiencing of the event itself*'.<sup>121</sup> Just as the oral testimony must take place in a dialogic setting, so too the written testimony requires an engaged reader. The reader thus assumes a certain responsibility in the act of testimony, becoming a secondary witness to the trauma of the survivor. This first chapter will therefore also examine the writer-addressee relationship, questioning the responsibility of the reader confronted, through the testimonies, with the incomprehensible reality of the

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<sup>121</sup> Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57–74 (p. 67: emphasis in original).

genocide. It is all too easy to impose a particular reading on the texts, and the reader needs to avoid adopting a preconceived response and to listen openly and receptively to what Rwandan women's narratives are saying in order to fully assume her role as reader-witness.

As I will show in Chapter 2, one of the key features of Rwandan women's testimonies is the emphasis on the uniquely individual experience of genocide and its consequences. The testimonies of Rwandan women exhibit a range of complex responses to the genocide which depend on both individual and socio-political contexts.<sup>122</sup> Each testimony refers to key defining moments of the genocide that are specific to each individual. Yet the women's experiences are also closely linked to the social groups to which these women belong, for example, the group of AVEGA widows described in Mujawayo's *SurVivantes*. According to Mujawayo, it is through sharing stories with other survivors that Rwandan women begin to give some sort of meaning to their experiences, drawing strength from the collective experience of story-telling. Mujawayo's narrative thus emphasises the importance of the context within which the act of testimony takes place, the creation of a safe space from which to testify.

A key focus of Western scholarship on trauma narratives is the notion of healing through storytelling. For example, in her seminal work *Trauma and*

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<sup>122</sup> It is important to note that the genocide in Rwanda did not occur in the same manner across the country, with different regions participating to different degrees. For a discussion of the regional patterns of the killings see Chapter 2, 'Genocide at the National and Regional Levels', in Straus, *The Order of Genocide*. One example given of regional difference is that of Butare. In Butare the genocide did not start immediately due to the fact that the préfet, Jean-Baptiste Habyalimana, was the only Tutsi préfet in the country and managed to prevent full-scale killings breaking out until he was removed from duty on 17<sup>th</sup> April. For a full report on the situation in Butare see Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*. In other parts of the country, killings ceased relatively quickly as the RPF advanced, but continued with relative impunity until mid-July in the 'humanitarian zone' protected by the French Opération Turquoise. For an analysis of France's failure to intervene in the killings, see Chapter 9, 'What the French Could Have Done', in Kroslak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*.

*Recovery*, Judith Herman details the therapeutic properties of storytelling as part of the process of recovery from trauma.<sup>123</sup> While it may be useful to consider Rwandan women's testimonies from the perspective of healing, we must also question its relevance in the Rwandan context for, as anthropologist Antonius G. Robben writes: 'The idea that people and societies have to work through traumatic experiences through elaboration and narrative interpretation seems a distinctly Western, psychoanalytic notion'.<sup>124</sup> Chapter 2 will question the extent to which the therapeutic model has been imposed on Rwandan women survivors. Indeed, many of the women are critical of Western humanitarian intervention for ignoring the immediate needs of survivors in the aftermath of genocide. Their testimonies suggest that, in post-genocide Rwanda, individuals are not necessarily in a position to begin the therapeutic process as they are still struggling to satisfy their material needs (housing, employment, education, etc.), which are more pressing than emotional needs.

For the Rwandan women who have succeeded in publishing their testimonies, the narrative is often facilitated through a process of collaboration. Chapter 3 will discuss the implications of this collaboration for Rwandan women, highlighting the fact that, while collaboration is perhaps necessary in facilitating the telling of the trauma and gaining access to the Western publishing industry, it also means that the Rwandan women must give up a certain amount of authority over their narratives. As is the case with Latin American *testimonio*, several of the Rwandan women's testimonies were

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<sup>123</sup> See Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 2001 [1992]), p. 3: Herman sees the reconstruction of the trauma narrative as one of the fundamental stages of recovery.

<sup>124</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, 'The Imagination of Genocide', in Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O'Neill, eds, *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 317–31 (p. 326).

produced in an interview situation, which raises questions about the power dynamic between the (usually Western) collaborator and the survivor. This may also have implications for the authority of the survivor's voice. According to Bartow, *testimonio* is 'written by or narrated through privileged intellectual channels'.<sup>125</sup> This also applies to Rwandan women's testimony, particularly given that the women need the 'sponsorship' of Western authors and academics to access the publishing industry. This chapter will assess the potential benefits and risks of collaboration, on the one hand underlining what Bartow describes as '[m]ediation's possibilities to empower the marginalized',<sup>126</sup> and on the other pointing to the strong risk of appropriation and misuse of the survivor's voice.

Despite a certain reliance on the Western publishing industry to make their voices heard, Chapter 4 will examine the ways in which Rwandan women seek to break the silence surrounding the genocide and how they challenge the indifference of Western audiences. This chapter will also address the complex role of silence within the testimonies, both in terms of the physical markers of silence within the narratives and in terms of the silence imposed on survivors both internally and externally. Trauma theorists have highlighted the ethical choice survivors must grapple with in deciding whether to respond to the 'devoir de mémoire' and speak about the traumatic event or to respect the memory of the dead by remaining silent. For Laub, testifying means breaking the 'internal silence' that survivors often impose on themselves.<sup>127</sup> Yet Rwandan women must also contend with different forms of external silencing, both within Rwanda itself and throughout the diaspora. Silence is often

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<sup>125</sup> Bartow, *Subject to Change*, p. 13.

<sup>126</sup> Bartow, *subject to Change*, p. 13.

<sup>127</sup> Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', p. 67.

imposed on the survivor whose story is seen as disturbing the status quo. As Dauge-Roth summarises, survivors themselves ‘embody a disturbing memory, which revives a chapter of Rwanda’s history that most people would like to see closed, while its aftermath still constitutes an open wound for those who survived’.<sup>128</sup> In this respect, Rwandan women are breaking the ongoing silence surrounding the genocide and issuing a direct challenge to the Western audience to hear their testimonies and recognise their suffering.

In post-genocide Rwanda, women have emerged as key figures in peace-building and social reconstruction more generally. Yet, while women survivors continue to play an active role in reconstructing Rwanda, many survivors remain sceptical about the government’s official policy of national unity and reconciliation. The final chapter of my thesis will explore crucial questions about truth, justice and reconciliation that are raised in the Rwandan women’s testimonies of my corpus, as well as the obstacles they pose to survivors’ recovery, particularly in relation to survivors’ experiences of participating in the *gacaca* courts, the system of traditional local justice that was reinstated and modified to deal with the large caseload of genocide crimes. Following the devastation of familial and social networks wrought by the genocide, rebuilding society and dealing with the traumatic past is an imposing task. As Beatriz Manz notes in her study of Guatemalan survivors of trauma, for communities that have traversed the unimaginable, ‘[a] central challenge is the recovery of trust and, in particular, rebuilding it within the community. The absence of trust cripples the present and hobbles the future’.<sup>129</sup> This final

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<sup>128</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 8.

<sup>129</sup> Beatriz Manz, ‘Terror, Grief, and Recovery: Genocidal Trauma in a Mayan Village in Guatemala’, in Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 292–309 (p. 300).



chapter will examine Rwandan women's attempts to rebuild trust within the community, looking in particular at the role of survivor organisations such as AVEGA, *Tubeho* and the Association Duhozanye. These organisations permit survivors to share their stories and locate their individual experiences of trauma within a collective. My analysis of the testimonies will demonstrate the ways in which survivors draw strength and a renewed sense of belonging and self-worth from the creation of new social groups.

Moreover, the final chapter will situate testimony as part of a broader process of moving from *surviving* to *living*, as highlighted in Berthe Kayitesi's *Demain ma vie*. Based on Kayitesi's distinction, *surviving* is where the individual is simply acting out of necessity – doing what is necessary to survive – and does not have any choice over what happens to her, whereas *living*, whether actually achieved or simply aspired to, only becomes possible when the survivor has been able to regain a sense of control over her life. The act of testimony is shown to play a central role in this transition, although, given the restrictions placed on survivors by the policy of national reconciliation, the survivor is rarely permitted to talk about her experiences on her own terms. With this in mind, I will focus on the importance of community organisations, which provide survivors with a safe space from within which to testify as well as with the reciprocity and recognition they need to begin rebuilding social connections. I will show that it is precisely through sharing their story with others in this way that survivors can begin to rediscover a sense of self worth and give meaning to their own existence, both of which are essential for the survivor to be able to move towards *living*.

## Chapter 1: *The Figure of the Witness*

Survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda figure among the many individuals across the globe whose experiences of trauma and violence may exceed ordinary understanding and defy representation. This chapter seeks to address the fundamental questions of who has the right to speak about a traumatic historical event and who can be accorded the title of ‘witness’. According to James Dawes, the survivor of trauma is caught in a moral dilemma, framed by two opposing moral questions: ‘Do I have the right to talk about this? And, do I have the right *not* to talk about this?’<sup>1</sup> Having lived through the traumatic event gives the survivor the moral authority to become a witness and speak out about what happened, while at the same time the duty survivors feel towards those who died may mean they feel obliged to bear witness. For Dawes, then, the act of bearing witness is bounded by ‘the poles of entitlement (What gives me the moral authority to tell this story? How can I prove my authenticity to my readers?) and obligation (How much of myself am I required to give to this story? What is my duty, and when am I free of it?)’.<sup>2</sup> By examining the emergence of the figure of the witness in the public sphere and the notion of the ‘duty of memory’ that pushes survivors to testify, this chapter will explore how Rwandan women position themselves as witnesses to the genocide and the level of obligation they express towards the victims of the genocide. It will highlight the different categories of witness, in particular distinguishing between direct and indirect forms of testimony. In order to expose the complex nature of witness-positions in the Rwandan context, I will consider the levels

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<sup>1</sup> James Dawes, *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 24 (emphasis in original).

<sup>2</sup> Dawes, *That the World May Know*, pp. 24–25.

of witnessing that occur in Rwandan women's testimonies, focusing in particular on the case of Scholastique Mukasonga's *Inyenzi ou les cafards* in comparison to the testimonies of Pauline Kayitare, Berthe Kayitesi and Esther Mujawayo. Although these women experienced different levels of exposure to the horrors of the genocide, each explicitly positions herself as a 'witness' to the genocide.

Discussions of trauma tend to draw a clear distinction between the testimonies of primary eyewitnesses to an event and those of 'secondary witnesses', or outside observers. Yet, in the case of Rwanda, these categories of witness become a lot more complex than a simple binary. For the purposes of analysing Rwandan women's testimonies bearing witness to the genocide, I will focus on three categories of witness: the 'survivor-witness' or direct witness; the 'secondary' or indirect witness (outside observers); and the 'reader-witness' (the engaged receiver of the testimony). Even from within the Rwandan women's testimonies we see a range of witness figures emerging. An examination of the different levels of witnessing within the testimonies will show that we need to move away from the binary direct-indirect categories of witness towards a more nuanced understanding of the notion of the 'survivor-witness'. Without hierarchising the suffering of individual survivors, we can nevertheless imagine a spectrum of witness positions that range from those who were almost killed, such as survivors of rape and torture, to those, like Mukasonga, who were not present in Rwanda during the genocide but bear witness on behalf of those who died. I will argue that, although Mukasonga is not a direct witness to the genocide, her testimonial narrative nonetheless helps

us to reach a deeper understanding of the events of 1994 and demonstrates the wider repercussions of the genocide throughout the diaspora.

When considering the different types of witness, it is also important to distinguish between the principal types of testimony: namely, legal testimony and narrative testimony. As Cubilié has observed across a range of women's narratives bearing witness to trauma, 'testimonial literature draws attention to the inadequacy of two discourses – the purely literary and the purely legal – to address issues of violence and human rights abuse'.<sup>3</sup> According to Cubilié, testimonial literature blurs the borders between aesthetic form and personal history, with the author claiming the authoritative position of the witness. As Manina Jones has elsewhere observed in the context of Canadian Aboriginal testimony:

one of the problems of legal discourse's attempts to come to terms with violence in Aboriginal communities is its insistence on empirical facts, often reduced to depersonalized statistical claims, and its inability to sustain personal storytelling as credible, or even relevant, testimony.<sup>4</sup>

The legal context rarely provides survivors with the freedom for personal expression. Testimonial narrative thus emerges as a form through which survivors can tell their story on their own terms, combining knowledge about the event with personal story. This echoes the situation of Latin American *testimonio* where, according to Kalina Brabeck, 'testimonio produces knowledge, not as empirical facts, but as a strategy of cultural resistance and survival'.<sup>5</sup> It is this aspect of survival that is particularly salient in Rwandan

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<sup>3</sup> Cubilié, *Women Witnessing Terror*, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> Manina Jones, 'Stolen Life? Reading through Two I's in Postcolonial Collaborative Autobiography', in Laura Moss, ed., *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2003), pp. 207–22 (pp. 215–16).

<sup>5</sup> Kalina Brabeck, 'Testimonio: A Strategy for Collective Resistance, Cultural Survival and Building Solidarity', *Feminism and Psychology*, 13.2 (2003), 252–58 (p. 256).

women's narratives of trauma. Indeed, Robert Jay Lifton understands trauma precisely in terms of survival:

Focusing on survival, rather than on trauma, puts the death back into the traumatic experience, because survival suggests that there has been death, and the survivor therefore has had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience.<sup>6</sup>

Although the death encounter is central to the traumatic experience, it is the ongoing process of surviving and of coming to terms with trauma that is prevalent in Rwandan women's testimonial literature, and a significant part of my analysis will thus focus on this aspect of testimony. For survivors of the genocide in Rwanda, writing becomes a vehicle for voicing the senseless death of loved ones, and of attempting to make sense of one's own survival. According to Tal, such writing 'serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author'.<sup>7</sup>

As well as examining the range of witness positions in Rwandan women's testimonies, this chapter will also consider the position of the reader-witness, underlining the importance of an 'empathic' response on the part of the receiver of testimony. Reading the narratives bearing witness to extreme trauma requires a certain level of engagement on the part of the reader. In the case of extreme trauma, such as the genocide in Rwanda, the witness has lived through an experience which often goes beyond the understanding of an ordinary reader. There are those who have a tendency to dismiss the survivor's story as simply being 'too horrible'.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the difficulties inherent in expressing the experience of trauma, Rwandan women must also face obstacles

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<sup>6</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton', in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 128–47 (p. 128).

<sup>7</sup> Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> The dismissal of survivors' narratives will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 2.

in making that experience heard and understood. A number of the women in my corpus express a fear of not being believed, and their testimonies underline the need for an engaged reader who can serve as a witness to the survivor's story.

### *Emergence of the Figure of the Witness*

The Holocaust survivor has long been considered the witness to trauma *par excellence*. Wieviorka attributes the emergence of the Holocaust witness in the public sphere to Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1961, describing this event as 'un véritable tournant dans l'émergence de la mémoire du génocide'.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, however, this process took slightly longer: Henry Greenspan identifies 1978 as a key date in 'the emergence of Holocaust survivors in American public awareness'.<sup>10</sup> This awareness culminated in the foundation of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University in 1981, some forty years after the Holocaust itself.<sup>11</sup> As Luckhurst observes:

'Holocaust survivor' is a relatively late construction in the psychiatric discourse of trauma, emerging alongside, or even slightly later than the Vietnam veteran. [...] It is only after 1980, then, that these poles of survivorship properly enter the language of trauma studies and come to dominate the terrain. The spectrum of trauma is redrawn, with the Holocaust the worst imaginable collective trauma, sexual abuse the worst individual trauma.<sup>12</sup>

While the Holocaust survivor has emerged as a key witness figure in the latter half of the twentieth century, it is important not to overlook earlier examples of

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<sup>9</sup> Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Greenspan, 'Imagining Survivors: Testimony and the Rise of the Holocaust Consciousness', in Hilene Flanzbaum, ed., *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 46. Among other developments, 1978 saw the establishment of a presidential commission on the Holocaust and the airing of NBC's mini-series *Holocaust*, as well as a surge in academic study of the Holocaust.

<sup>11</sup> See Geoffrey Hartman, 'Learning From Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 9 (1995), 192–207.

<sup>12</sup> Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 65.

historical witnesses. A key example is provided by Jean Norton Cru who, writing on post-World War One in France, highlights the importance of soldier testimonies in gaining a deeper understanding of the war. Cru claims that military history has traditionally favoured accounts written by those who were not actually involved in direct combat (such as officers and strategists), long overlooking the experiences documented by the soldiers themselves. He views the soldiers as the real ‘témoins des faits’; their voices are ‘les seules autorisées à parler de la guerre’.<sup>13</sup>

Published in 1929, Cru’s sizeable volume *Témoins* considers several types of documents written by ‘témoins’, such as letters, journals and novels.<sup>14</sup> However, according to Charlotte Lacoste, these texts are not ‘témoignages’ in the strict sense of the term. Rather, the birth of the literary genre of ‘témoignage’ is attributed to Holocaust survivors, exemplified by texts such as Levi’s *If This is a Man*.<sup>15</sup> In the words of Elie Wiesel: ‘Si les Grecs ont inventé la tragédie, les Romains la correspondance et la Renaissance le sonnet, notre génération a inventé un nouveau genre littéraire, le témoignage’.<sup>16</sup> Lacoste defines this new genre as follows:

en tant que genre littéraire, le témoignage est un document comportant le récit véridique, en prose et à la première personne, des souffrances physiques et morales endurées par un survivant qui endosse le rôle de témoin et décrit, clairement et sobrement, ce qu’il a vu, entendu, senti ou pensé au contact de la mort et sous les tortures qui lui furent infligées par l’homme, afin que les générations à venir, mieux instruites, en soient épargnées.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Norton Cru, *Du témoignage* (Paris: Allia, 1989 [1930]), p. 37; p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins* (Paris: Les Éditions de la Pléiade, 1929): *Du témoignage* is an abridged version of this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Primo Levi, *If This is a Man/The Truce*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1987 [1947])

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Charlotte Lacoste, ‘L’invention du genre littéraire: *Témoins* de Jean Norton Cru’, *Textol!*, XII.3 (2007), 1–17 (p. 1).

<sup>17</sup> Lacoste, ‘L’invention d’un genre littéraire’, pp. 1–2.

While Holocaust testimonies remain exemplary in the Western culture of testimony, trauma has more recently become a paradigm for a range of oppressed or marginalised groups seeking to reclaim their voice. Luckhurst observes how, since the 1970s, trauma has become closely related to identity politics, with testimonial writing being used by various political movements such as gay liberation, feminism and Black Power.<sup>18</sup> Arthur Frank sees this proliferation of what he refers to as ‘self-stories’ as a condition of postmodernity more generally: ‘*Postmodern times are when the capacity for telling one’s own story is reclaimed*’.<sup>19</sup> While the majority of scholars locate this democratisation of testimony as occurring in the decades following the Second World War, Cru in fact sees this process as beginning much earlier, even before the First World War. He writes that history ‘*depuis une centaine d’années [...] s’est mise à rechercher tous les documents possibles, ceux qui concernent les détails de la vie provinciale, ceux qui viennent des témoins les plus humbles*’.<sup>20</sup> While it cannot be said that these humble witnesses are all suffering from trauma, what is valuable to retain from Cru’s argument is his insistence on the importance of listening to the voices of ordinary people, without which our understanding of history would be greatly limited. When examining the genocide in Rwanda, it is important to look therefore not only to the official narrative but also to the testimonies of people on the ground, whose experiences bring to light the lived reality of the genocide, which is precisely what is offered to us in the testimonies of Rwandan women survivors.

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<sup>18</sup> See Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 62. For a discussion of how the Holocaust frame has come to be used as ‘a universal symbol of injustice’ by social groups seeking to construct a sense of identity and agency (such as the lesbian/gay movement), see Stein, ‘Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood?’, p. 522.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 7 (emphasis in original).

<sup>20</sup> Cru, *Du témoignage*, p. 21.



### *Categories of Witness*

As Geoffrey Hartman reminds us, the term ‘witness’ is usually employed in reference to eyewitnesses.<sup>21</sup> Reminiscent of Beverley’s explanation of Latin American *testimonio*, testimony is ‘told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts’.<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricœur elaborates on this conception of testimony in his significant work, *La Mémoire, l’histoire et l’oubli*:

La spécificité du témoignage consiste en ceci que l’assertion de réalité est inséparable de son couplage avec l’autodésignation du sujet témoignant. [...] Ce qui est attesté est indivisément la réalité de la chose passée et la présence du narrateur sur les lieux de l’occurrence.<sup>23</sup>

Two key elements thus emerge as fundamental to the act of bearing witness: the witness’s presence at the event and the authenticity of their testimony. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the different types of witness that have emerged over the course of the twentieth century, particularly in relation to the Holocaust. For example, Hartman and others have used the term ‘second generation witness’ to refer to the sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors who become ‘witnesses’ after the trauma of their parents is transferred to them. This terminology has been expanded to that of ‘secondary witness’, which refers to all those to whom the trauma is transferred without a generational limit.<sup>24</sup> As Hartman explains, the term ‘secondary witness’ includes ‘all who could be called witnesses because they are still in touch with the first generation or who look at the Shoah not as something enclosed in the past but as a contemporary issue requiring an intensity of representation close

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<sup>21</sup> See Geoffrey Hartman, ‘Shoah and Intellectual Witness’, *Partisan Review*, 65.1 (1998), 37–48 (p. 37).

<sup>22</sup> Beverley, ‘The Margin at the Center’, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l’histoire et l’oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 204.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 195.

to eyewitness report'.<sup>25</sup> This would suggest that we can draw a clear distinction between the primary eyewitness and the secondary witness. Yet, in the case of bearing witness to extreme traumas such as the Holocaust or the genocide in Rwanda, these categories become a lot more complex than a simple binary.

Who, then, can be accorded the title of 'witness'? The figure of the witness has long been the subject of discussion by historians, scholars, and even survivors themselves. The question of who is a witness is closely linked to the question of who is entitled to become a witness. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Holocaust survivor Levi, who, as Régine Robin notes, is often considered to be a 'témoin par excellence',<sup>26</sup> begins to question who is a true witness:

we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. [...] We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the 'Muslims', the submerged, the complete witnesses [...]. We speak in their stead, by proxy.<sup>27</sup>

It is on the basis of these words that Giorgio Agamben proposes his 'phenomenology of testimony' in which he brings to the fore 'the impossible dialectic between the survivor and the *Muselmann*, the pseudo-witness and the "complete witness," the human and the inhuman'.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the 'complete witness', the only one who knows the whole truth of the horror, is the victim himself who is unable to speak about his experiences. The survivor

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<sup>25</sup> Hartman, 'Shoah and Intellectual Witness', p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Régine Robin, *La Mémoire saturée* (Paris: Stock, 2003), p. 249.

<sup>27</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal, (London: Abacus, 1989 [1986]), pp. 63–64.

<sup>28</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 120.

therefore becomes a sort of ‘pseudo-witness’ speaking ‘on behalf of’ the absent or silent victim.<sup>29</sup>

A number of scholars have challenged this view, which would appear to devalue survivors’ testimonies. According to Philippe Mesnard and Claudine Kahan, ‘Agamben manifeste un rejet arbitraire des témoins que sont les rescapés [...]. Ces témoins apparaissent privés de “toute autorité” devant ce qu’il nomme l’“intémoignable”’.<sup>30</sup> Marie Bornand also anticipates certain dangers in Agamben’s dialectic:

Selon Agamben, le vrai témoignage serait alors indicible. Le paradoxe est dangereux, il ouvre la voie au silence impuissant et au négationnisme. Par ailleurs, il n’est pas représentatif du besoin des survivants de raconter leur expérience, d’être écoutés, d’écrire.<sup>31</sup>

In Bornand’s view, survivors should not be denied the right to speak out about and transmit their own experiences; their urge to tell should not be repressed simply because they cannot know the whole truth of an event. This is certainly true of Rwandan women’s testimonies, where even those who were not direct witnesses to the genocide, such as Scholastique Mukasonga, can impart knowledge about what happened and counter negationism or denial.

What is important to retain from Agamben’s dialectic, however, is the fact that the survivor-witness often testifies ‘on behalf of’ the victims (or ‘complete witnesses’). As Philippe Forest explains: ‘les survivants, les rescapés, n’ont pu raconter Auschwitz qu’à la condition de parler en lieu et place des vraies victimes réduites par l’horreur au silence’.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Forest

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<sup>29</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> Philippe Mesnard and Claudine Kahan, *Giorgio Agamben à l’épreuve d’Auschwitz* (Paris, Editions Kimé, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Marie Bornand, *Témoignage et fiction: les récits de rescapés dans la littérature de langue française (1945–2000)* (Geneva: Droz, 2004), p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Philippe Forest, ‘Quelques notes à la suite de Giorgio Agamben sur la question du témoignage littéraire: Pacte autobiographique et pacte testimonial’, in Emmanuel Bouju, ed.,

argues that this speaking on behalf of the victims is not limited to Holocaust testimonies; he observes a similar phenomenon in *all* testimonial literature:

En réalité, c'est une structure très générale qui demande ici à être dégagée et en vertu de laquelle l'écrivain, toujours, se place en posture de parler au nom du silence d'autrui, d'un autrui soumis aux conditions extrêmes d'une déshumanisation dont le camp de déportation ou l'asile psychiatrique (mais aussi bien le cimetière) deviennent les lieux d'élection. Une telle mythologie commande très visiblement la poétique d'un certain romantisme mais on peut également la repérer à l'œuvre dans la littérature la plus actuelle où toujours c'est le silence d'un autre qui semble justifier la prise de parole de l'écrivain.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, it is the absence or silence of the 'complete witness' that creates the necessary conditions for writing: 'l'écrivain légitime son œuvre de témoin en prétendant parler au nom d'un peuple muet auquel il rend sa parole'.<sup>34</sup>

But what of those, such as Mukasonga, who bear witness to an event on behalf of another without having experienced the event themselves? Several scholars have tackled this difficult question. For example, Bornand distinguishes between direct witnesses (a first generation of survivors of trauma) and indirect witnesses (subsequent generations composed of descendants of survivors who want to transmit their ancestors' experiences).<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Robin suggests that there exists another type of witness, a sort of 'méta-témoin', which she defines as 'celui qui "n'y était pas" mais qui porte en lui ce savoir de l'indicible'.<sup>36</sup> Robin gives the example of children of concentration camp survivors (or victims) who did not share their parents' experience but came to share their trauma. In such situations, '[l]e témoin n'est pas tant celui qui voit [...] que celui qui "accueille une vision"'.<sup>37</sup> LaCapra

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*Littératures sous contrat* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), pp. 213–25 (p. 220).

<sup>33</sup> Forest, 'Quelques notes à la suite de Giorgio Agamben', p. 220.

<sup>34</sup> Forest, 'Quelques notes à la suite de Giorgio Agamben', p. 221.

<sup>35</sup> See Bornand, *Témoignage et fiction*, p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Robin, *La mémoire saturée*, p. 272.

<sup>37</sup> Robin, *La mémoire saturée*, p. 272.

pushes this distinction between direct and indirect witnesses even further; he uses the term ‘secondary witness’ to refer to indirect witnesses and extends this category – beyond those with a direct link to the survivors – to include interviewers, historians, and commentators (such as academics), as well as viewers/readers of testimony.<sup>38</sup> This broader interpretation of the notion of the secondary witness will be explored later in this chapter when I discuss the role of the reader-witness in relation to Rwandan women’s testimonies.

### *A Duty of Memory*

If we consider testimony as a response to a traumatic historical event, or ‘limit event’, the magnitude of the catastrophe the individual has survived means that she feels what Felman describes as ‘historically appointed’ to bear witness.<sup>39</sup> This view is supported by Tzvetan Todorov, who claims that every survivor has a right and a *duty* to speak out about what happened. Witnesses of trauma are thus responding to an historical imperative of memory: ‘Lorsque les événements vécus par l’individu ou par le groupe sont de nature exceptionnelle ou tragique, ce droit devient un devoir: celui de se souvenir, celui de témoigner’.<sup>40</sup> Coquio confirms this in relation to the experience of genocide in particular:

La radicalité génocidaire et sa visée raciale, en particulier, placent les témoins dans une situation singulière: les membres de la collectivité visée ont la certitude d’être *tous* destinés à mourir – ou de survivre par miracle – et de mourir *pour rien*. S’ils survivent, c’est alors pour écrire.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 98.

<sup>39</sup> Felman, ‘Education and Crisis’, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Coquio, ‘L’émergence d’une “littérature” de non-écrivains’, p. 343 (emphasis in original).

Yet, being a ‘survivor’ does not necessarily connote becoming a ‘witness’. As Frank clarifies: ‘Survival does not include any particular responsibility other than continuing to survive. Becoming a witness assumes a responsibility for telling what happened’.<sup>42</sup> While Dawes evokes the survivor’s obligation to bear witness, Frank suggests that authors of testimonial narratives have made an active choice to become a witness, assuming the moral responsibility to tell the truth of what happened and to leave a lasting account of their experience.

Felman speaks of this responsibility of memory in terms of ‘appointment’; according to Felman, the survivor of trauma carries a ‘solitary burden’, and yet, ‘the *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* other and *to* others’.<sup>43</sup> When the survivor accepts this appointment, her memory, as Frank suggests, ‘becomes witness and reaches beyond the individual into the consciousness of the community’.<sup>44</sup> Frank is touching here on one of the crucial distinctions between legal and moral testimony. Whereas legal testimony takes place within a judicial institution, moral testimony takes place in a public space before what Avishai Margalit describes as a ‘moral community’.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Rwanda, Coquio claims that ‘le génocide a fait naître ça et là un désir d’écrire, au-delà des témoignages suscités par les institutions judiciaires nationales et internationales’.<sup>46</sup> As will be examined in Chapter 5, many survivors testify in the legal context of the ICTR, national courts and local *gacaca* courts. Yet the published testimonies of Rwandan

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<sup>42</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 137.

<sup>43</sup> Felman, ‘Education and Crisis’, p. 3 (emphasis in original).

<sup>44</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 63–64.

<sup>45</sup> See Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> Coquio, ‘L’émergence d’une “littérature” de non-écrivains’, p. 347.

women go far beyond the scope of a legal testimony and show a desire to address a wider moral community. These Rwandan women are thus adopting the position of what Margalit describes as the ‘moral witness’.<sup>47</sup> As Margalit elaborates, ‘to become a moral witness, one has to witness the combination of evil and the suffering it produces’.<sup>48</sup> Rwandan women are not only testifying to the facts about what happened but are also bearing witness to the suffering that both they and other survivors continue to endure as a result of the genocide.

### *Levels of Witnessing in Rwandan Women’s Testimonies*

All of the women position themselves as survivor-witnesses, yet even within their testimonies different levels of witnessing begin to emerge. Mukasonga’s case is particularly interesting in this respect. Although she positions herself as a ‘witness’ and a ‘survivor’, it is important to note that she was not actually in Rwanda at the time of the genocide. She is in fact a ‘survivor’ of previous episodes of violence, which forced her into exile, and also in the sense that she ‘survived’ her numerous family members who were killed. Yet she bears witness to the genocide itself as an outside observer or secondary witness. Mukasonga’s position thus falls somewhere on the spectrum between that of the survivor-witness and the secondary witness. Nevertheless, Mukasonga is driven by the same ‘duty of memory’ that pushes the survivor-witness to testify.

In the case of Rwanda, several decades of violence and persecution forced many Tutsi into a life in exile, creating a wide-ranging diaspora. Their experience of the genocide is of course very different to that of the Tutsi in

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<sup>47</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 155.

<sup>48</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 148.

Rwanda. Trauma theorists have underlined the differences between the survivor of a traumatic historical event and the outside observer who did not directly experience it. Lawrence Langer describes this difference as an ‘impassable chasm’, which seems to exist even between members – traumatised and non-traumatised – of the same group.<sup>49</sup> In the case of the Rwanda genocide, survivors display a certain sense of resentment towards their fellow Tutsi who did not directly experience the genocide. For example, Innocent Rwililiza, interviewed by Hatzfeld, exclaims: ‘Quelqu’un d’extérieur, même s’il est rwandais, même s’il est tutsi et s’il a perdu sa famille dans les tueries, il ne peut pas comprendre tout à fait le génocide’.<sup>50</sup> However, as Langer argues in relation to the Holocaust, this type of attitude ‘underestimates the sympathetic power of the imagination’.<sup>51</sup> I would argue that, in the case of Mukasonga, it is precisely this ‘sympathetic power’ that pushes her to write. As a Tutsi living in exile and a relative of the victims, she has a deep emotional investment in the events of 1994. Having experienced many years of violence and persecution herself, she can better understand what happened during the genocide, and is affected by the events to a much greater degree than an outside observer.

*Inyenzi ou les Cafards* bears witness to several decades of violence, persecution and humiliation, all leading ultimately towards the genocide itself. Indeed, the whole narrative is shaped by the events to come. There is a strong sense of foreboding that is omnipresent throughout the text. For example, when Mukasonga tells how her brother’s friend risked his life by accompanying them to the border of Burundi to help them escape, she concludes by stating: ‘Ce

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<sup>49</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. xiv.

<sup>50</sup> Hatzfeld, *Dans le nu de la vie*, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. xv.



n'est pas ce matin-là qu'on l'a tué, c'est vingt ans plus tard' (IC 100). Similarly, when Mukasonga talks about her brother's family: 'Ils eurent neuf enfants, dont sept garçons au grand bonheur de ma mère. Elle pensait qu'au moins quelques-uns survivraient et perpétueraient la famille. Elle se trompait' (IC 108). Although Mukasonga does not define herself as a *rescapée* of the 1994 genocide, referring to the *rescapés* as 'ils' (IC 134), she explicitly positions herself as a 'survivor' of the 'folie ethnique' (IC 104) that has persisted for several decades in Rwanda.

Throughout her *récit*, Mukasonga adopts a variety of subject positions that allow her to identify with a range of social groups. For instance, she identifies with the persecuted Tutsi in the decades preceding the genocide, particularly in reference to the 'internal' refugees in the Bugesera region during the 1960s:

Il n'y avait guère de jours tranquilles à Nyamata. Les militaires du camp de Gako étaient là pour nous rappeler constamment qui nous étions: des serpents, des Inyenzi, ces cancrelats qui n'avaient rien d'humain avec lesquels il faudrait bien en finir un jour. (IC 63)<sup>52</sup>

The same sense of deep humiliation and dehumanisation is also expressed in her description of school life, and Mukasonga uses 'nous' to identify with the handful of Tutsi who were accepted to the local high school:

Au lycée, j'allais connaître la solitude de l'humiliation et du rejet. [...] Non seulement j'étais tutsi mais j'étais aussi une Inyenzi, un de ces cafards qu'on avait rejetés hors du Rwanda habitable, peut-être hors du genre humain. [...] Les quelques élèves tutsi savaient bien comme moi qu'il fallait être parmi les meilleures. Pour cela, elles travaillaient nuit et jour, surtout la nuit. [...] Nous attendions que toutes nos camarades soient profondément endormies, qu'il n'y ait plus personne pour se rendre aux toilettes, que les sœurs se soient définitivement éloignées. [...] Nous avions notre salle d'étude pour la nuit. Souvent, jusqu'au petit matin, nous y apprenions nos leçons, y faisons nos devoirs. Tout

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<sup>52</sup> *Inyenzi* (meaning cockroach), *cancrelats* and *serpents* were all terms regularly used to refer to the Tutsi population, serving to dehumanise them over the years leading up to the genocide.

ce que j'ai appris à Notre-Dame-de-Cîteaux, je l'ai appris dans les W.-C. (IC 77–80)

Here, Mukasonga shows how Tutsi girls had to face a constant and seemingly futile struggle to succeed, and were finally expelled from the school in 1973. This expulsion embodies a traumatic memory for Mukasonga, haunting her for years after the event: 'Sans réfléchir, nous nous sommes précipitées dans le couloir. Derrière nous, il y avait cette rumeur de foule lancée à notre poursuite [...] que j'entends encore aujourd'hui, qui me poursuit dans mes cauchemars' (IC 94). In this manner, Mukasonga's narrative clearly demonstrates how ethnic violence had become an integral part of everyday life in Rwanda in the decades leading up to the genocide.

It was during the persecution of Tutsi in 1973 that Mukasonga's parents sent her and her brother to live in exile in Burundi. She describes her parents' decision in the following manner:

Au Burundi, nous aurions sans doute une chance de continuer nos études, de trouver du travail. Et surtout, les parents ne savaient comment le dire, il fallait au moins que quelques-uns survivent, gardent la mémoire, que la famille, ailleurs, puisse continuer. Nous avons été choisis pour survivre. (IC 97)

By sending her into exile, her parents bestowed on her the *duty* to survive and to remember, to tell her story and that of her family. In fulfilling this obligation to her family, Mukasonga is driven by the same imperative of memory that drives any survivor-witness.

Interestingly, Mukasonga also uses 'nous' to identify with those who were massacred during the genocide: 'Oui, nous étions prêts à accepter la mort, mais pas celle qui nous a été donnée. Nous étions des Inyenzi, il n'y avait qu'à nous écraser comme des cafards, d'un coup. Mais on a pris plaisir à notre agonie' (IC 117). By identifying with those who died, Mukasonga appropriates

the pain suffered by her fellow Tutsi, thus underlining the collective nature of the traumatic experience of the genocide and demonstrating how the repercussions of the violence have been painfully experienced throughout the diaspora as well as in Rwanda itself. Pauline Kayitare's narrative also shows how, during the genocide, Rwandans in the diaspora could become traumatised by the events, particularly if they had close relations in Rwanda who were suffering. Kayitare gives the example of her friend, Bélize, who was living in exile at the time of the genocide:

Bélize n'a pas connu le génocide, elle vivait alors à Buja, mais son père lui parlait tous les jours du génocide. Au point que, à force de penser concrètement à ce que pouvaient endurer ses cousins du Rwanda, elle avait pratiquement vécu le génocide par procuration. Et à la manière dont elle m'en parlait, j'avais, par moments, l'impression que ces trois mois de massacres avaient été plus durs pour elle que pour moi. (TLD 113)

This appropriation of another's suffering can make it difficult for the reader to tell where the factual account ends and imagination begins. As Wieviorka explains in her discussion of Holocaust testimonies, it often become difficult for the witness, and thus for the audience, to “*distinguer ce qui leur était arrivé [...] de ce qu'ils avaient lu, entendu ou imaginé depuis*”.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, narratives from across the diaspora can tell us a great deal about the very real suffering of these secondary witnesses. In this manner, Mukasonga's *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* recalls what LaCapra has identified as 'post-traumatic writing', which he defines as 'a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some extent, working over and through trauma whether

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<sup>53</sup> Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*, p. 116 (emphasis in original). Wieviorka is citing Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann à Jérusalem* (1963).

personally experienced, transmitted from intimates, or sensed in one's larger social and cultural setting'.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, Mukasonga finds herself in what Coquio describes as the 'position singulière' of the Rwandans 'qui ont "vécu" le génocide depuis leur exil'.<sup>55</sup> As members of the group destined for extermination, the Tutsi of the diaspora possess what Bornand calls 'la conscience collective d'une mémoire à conserver'.<sup>56</sup> They are able to testify to the event from both the interior and exterior at the same time, thus becoming a sort of intermediary figure, or, to use Coquio's term, a 'passeur'.<sup>57</sup> This role of 'passeur' becomes extremely important when we consider the fact that many survivors within Rwanda, particularly women, are still unable to communicate their experiences. Thus, testimonies published outside Rwanda – whether by survivors or members of the diaspora – have become a crucial means of preserving the memory of what happened during the genocide, and of transmitting this memory to the outside world.

### *Survivor Guilt*

For Rwandan women, as expressed in Mukasonga's testimony, the duty of memory appears to be borne out of a debt survivors feel towards the victims, which is often experienced as a feeling of guilt at having survived in the place of someone else. Indeed, Berthe Kayitesi speaks of the 'dette morale' (DV 286) she feels towards the dead that pushes her to testify. It therefore becomes the survivor's duty to remember and bear witness for those who did not survive.

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<sup>54</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> Coquio, *Rwanda. Le réel et les récits*, p. 125.

<sup>56</sup> Bornand, *Témoignage et fiction*, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> Coquio, *Rwanda. Le réel et les récits*, p. 126.

According to Bornand, there exists a ‘pacte non dit qui lie les survivants aux morts [qui] pousse à la folie de la transmission’.<sup>58</sup> As such, the act of testimony constitutes a means of honouring the memory of the victims and may also be an attempt to assuage the guilt felt by survivors. In her detailed study of the notion of survivor guilt, Ruth Leys shows how this guilt develops into what is referred to as ‘survivor syndrome’ in which the survivor is constantly inhabited by ‘gnawing feelings of self-reproach because they survived while their loved ones did not’.<sup>59</sup> This sense of guilt is strikingly present in a number of the Rwandan women’s testimonies. For example, Mujawayo frequently demands why she survived in the place of others. In *SurVivantes*, the question is left incomplete: ‘Pourquoi eux, et pas...?’ (SV 27), but is completed in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*: ‘Pourquoi eux et pas moi?’ (FS 40). According to Greenspan, this type of ‘self-questioning, including torturous self-questioning, is virtually universal in the aftermath of violent loss – what one could have, might have, or should have done – whether those questions are logically “appropriate” or not’.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Kayitare evokes a similar sense of guilt and self-questioning in her testimony:

Je me demande comment, et pourquoi, de tous mes frères et sœurs, je suis la seule à avoir échappé aux massacres. C’est une monstrueuse injustice mais aussi un poids insupportable: survivante, c’est à moi de porter la tristesse et le souvenir. Et cela, pendant toute ma vie. (TLD 164)

While the burden of their death belongs to the survivor alone – a burden that is described here as a physical weight she must carry – the act of bearing witness becomes a means of honouring the memory of the victims, enabling the

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<sup>58</sup> Bornand, *Témoignage et fiction*, p. 108.

<sup>59</sup> Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 44.

<sup>60</sup> Henry Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony: On Listening to Holocaust Survivors* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2010 [1998]), p. 246.

survivor to fulfil her responsibility to the dead, a responsibility that Lifton elsewhere describes as the ‘survivor mission’.<sup>61</sup>

Kayitare’s sense of guilt is compounded by the fact that she had to lie, to deny who she really was, in order to survive not only in Rwanda during the genocide but also later in France. She expresses a deep sense of guilt after attempting to lead a group of refugees to safety in the stadium at Kibuye. The *Interahamwe* caught them, and Kayitare only managed to survive by telling the killers that she was Hutu. She then had to pretend to be a ‘Hutue exemplaire’ (TLD 58) to escape the killers. While she did what was necessary to survive, Kayitare questions her actions and whether she has betrayed her family by lying about her identity: ‘Est-ce une manière d’accomplir le vœu de ma mère ou une façon de me renier moi-même?’ (TLD 58) This sense of betrayal continues when she is forced to claim she is Hutu in order to obtain political asylum in France. She compares her situation to that of a Holocaust survivor: ‘Je me dis que me présenter comme Hutue devant les autorités françaises, c’est un peu comme si une Juive rescapée des camps d’extermination était venue se présenter comme nazie devant les autorités de Vichy’ (TLD 148).<sup>62</sup> Kayitare also feels guilty having to lie to her new friends in Paris about her true identity and experiences: ‘je suis triste d’avoir menti, mais les circonstances font que je ne peux pas faire marche arrière. Pour l’instant, c’est impossible, ma “stratégie” implique trop de gens. Mais un jour, bien sûr, je leur dirai tout. Je leur dois la vérité’ (TLD 157).

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<sup>61</sup> Caruth, ‘An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton’, p. 138.

<sup>62</sup> It is important to note the comparison with the Holocaust in this passage. As my discussion Chapter 3 will show, such comparisons can be used to establish a sense of familiarity for the Western reader.

For Mukasonga, her guilt is linked to being absent when her family died. She reproaches herself for having survived them, comparing her own suffering with that of the ‘complete witnesses’ who did not survive:

De la mort des miens, je n’ai que trous noirs et fragments d’horreur.  
[...] Ne me reste que le lancinant reproche d’être vivante au milieu de tous mes morts. Mais que vaut ma souffrance comparée à ce qu’ils ont souffert avant d’obtenir de leurs bourreaux cette mort qui était leur seule délivrance? (IC 119)

While Mukasonga questions her right to suffer, she does not question her right to bear witness to the genocide. In surviving her family, despite not actually having witnessed their death, Mukasonga is driven by this same sense of duty to recount what happened to them. Indeed, her writing would even suggest that she experiences the sense of duty all the more acutely because of the guilt she feels at being absent when her family died. As expressed in her second testimony, *La Femme aux pieds nus* (2008), Mukasonga is plagued with guilt at not being able to bury her mother with dignity: ‘Maman, je n’étais pas là pour recouvrir ton corps [...]. Et je suis seule avec mes pauvres mots et mes phrases, sur la page du cahier, tissent et retissent le linceul de ton corps absent’ (FPN 13). Writing their experiences therefore seems to be a way for Mukasonga to pay homage to her family and give her mother the burial she deserves. A similar sentiment is expressed in Mujawayo’s *La Fleur de Stéphanie* in which the author writes: ‘je t’offre ce livre comme sépulture, Stéphanie, j’ai convié plein de gens, tous les lecteurs seront présents à ton enterrement’ (FS 228).

### *A Hierarchy of Suffering?*

The sense of guilt experienced by survivors is linked not only to the dead but also to the plight of other survivors who were more exposed to the atrocities of

the genocide. Talking of other women who were injured during the genocide, Annick Kayitesi writes: ‘Moi, je n’ai rien connu de tout ça. Un énorme sentiment de culpabilité me hante. Je m’en suis sortie indemne, sans même un seul coup. Pourquoi? Question sans réponse’ (NE 130–31). Survivors appear to feel guilty, then, not only for having survived the genocide, but also for having survived unscathed. Their sense of duty thus extends to other women who are in a worse condition than themselves. This is echoed in Mujawayo’s emphatic description of herself in terms of what she has *not* experienced: ‘Moi, Esther Mujawayo, je n’ai pas reçu un seul coup de machette sur le visage ni ai été coupée, je n’ai pas été violée ni contaminée par le sida, je n’ai pas eu faim ni été dans la pauvreté et surtout, surtout, je n’ai perdu aucune de mes trois filles...’ (SV 246–47). Rwandan women are thus testifying not only on behalf of the dead, but also on behalf of the survivors who are not in a position to testify, on behalf of those women who have been raped, wounded, scarred, and who have lost their children and entire families.

Even among the survivor-witnesses – or direct witnesses – the exposure to the genocide and levels of suffering varied from person to person, based on the individual experience. For example, Mujawayo claims that, because she spent most of the genocide in hiding, she was spared much of the horror: ‘D’une certaine façon, je peux dire que j’ai été épargnée pendant le génocide parce que, réfugiée dans ce dortoir, je n’ai pas assisté à des scènes de barbarie, pas vu les cadavres dans la rue; la mort ne m’a pas narguée de façon aussi violente que d’autres’ (SV 152). When she is asked to talk about what she has seen, she claims to have seen nothing:

on me demande: ‘Qu’est-ce que tu as vu?’ Je n’ai rien vu. Je n’étais pas là physiquement quand on a assassiné mon mari, mes parents, ses



parents, ma sœur, son mari, mes neveux, mes nièces, ma grand-tante, mes cousines, mes cousins. Alors, comment témoigner? Mais tous ont bel et bien été tués, non? Et tous jetés dans une fosse commune. (SV 84)

In this case, Mujawayo does not position herself as an eyewitness *per se*, but there can be no ambiguity about her position as a survivor-witness. Similarly in Kayitare's case, when a friend in Paris asks her what she saw, she replies: 'Rien' (TLD 131). 'Je ne mens pas. Je considère qu'il ne s'est rien passé pour moi pendant ce génocide. Il s'est produit tant d'horreurs pendant ces trois mois, que ce que j'ai personnellement vécu équivaut à "rien"' (TLD 131). This is an unusual response in Kayitare's case for, unlike Mujawayo, she has witnessed murder on a massive scale. Kayitare was leading a group of survivors to seek refuge in Kibuye stadium when they were attacked by the *Interahamwe*; 150 Tutsi were killed in front of Kayitare's eyes:

Commence alors pour moi le moment le plus épouvantable de ma vie. Je vais assister, 'en tant que Hutue', au massacre des miens [...]. Des tueurs attrapent un vieil homme. Ils lui coupent la main. Le sang gicle. Puis un coup de gourdin sur la tête. Ensuite, c'est le tour d'un autre homme. Puis d'un troisième. Et puis d'autres. L'horreur des massacres. La soif de tuer avec ce besoin de souiller les victimes. (TLD 55)

The sheer horror of what she has witnessed is in stark contrast with her later claim to have experienced 'nothing'. Yet, even during the event itself she describes feeling distant, as if she were not really there: 'L'abomination continue. Mais tout cela est cotonneux. C'est comme si ce n'était pas moi qui assistais au massacre' (TLD 56). This suggests that Kayitare has only been able to recount this episode much later. Indeed, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, it was only through the collaboration with a third party many years after the genocide that Kayitare was finally able to tell her story and was thus 'délivrée' (TLD 11) from the weight of those unspoken memories.

Both Mujawayo's and Kayitare's narratives seem to imply that there is a sort of implicit hierarchy of suffering among survivors, depending on the individual level of exposure to the horrors of the genocide. One of the women described by Mujawayo in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, Joséphine, is presented as 'une survivante au sens strict du mot: laissée pour morte parmi les morts, elle a survécu au milieu d'eux' (FS 149). Joséphine lost her six children during the genocide, and she reminds Mujawayo that she is lucky to have her children: 'Tous ceux que le mal de génocide n'a pas eus par la machette, il veut les avoir en les dévorant de l'intérieur, et ceux-là vont devenir comme des morts-vivants. Tu as de la chance d'avoir survécu avec tes trois enfants, Esther, mais tu n'y penses pas assez' (FS 152). Indeed, for Mujawayo, the fact that her daughters survived is one of the reasons she is able to continue surviving: 'En tout cas, cette pensée – mes filles sont *vivantes* – m'a aidée, parce que si je pensais à ce que j'avais perdu, ça allait trop m'écraser' (SV 27).

Yet even Joséphine herself claims she is not amongst those who suffer the most: 'Mais je suis en bon état maintenant et par rapport à d'autres plus démunies, comme les veuves d'Avega qui ont été violées, ou coupées pour toujours, je dirai que je vais bien' (FS 159). It would appear, then, that among survivors the women who were raped or severely injured have to bear the greatest amount of suffering, and contact with these women compounds the sense of guilt felt by survivors who were spared this extreme suffering. This is evident in Mukagasana's reaction, in *N'aie pas peur de savoir*, when she is treating a patient who has been raped: 'Une femme violée qui fait une infection utérine à la suite d'une fausse couche m'émeut par son courage et sa résistance à la douleur, tandis que je lui cure le placenta d'une main nue. Elle sait souffrir.

Moi pas. J'en conçois comme de la honte' (NP 87). Mukagasana herself lost her husband and her three children during the genocide, and yet feels ashamed of her own suffering when compared with other wounded survivors. This could also be read as a sense of shame of the way in which she suffers, of her perceived lack of courage in her own suffering. Her recognition of the suffering of others leads her to express an acute sense of duty towards all those who suffered and died:

Sur les trois cents ou trois cent cinquante Tutsi de ma colline, il n'y en a plus un seul. Tous sont morts. Je suis sans doute la seule rescapée. Où êtes-vous, enfants de Cyivugiza, beaux enfants de Cyivugiza, au regard sans méfiance et au sourire si tendre? Est-il vrai que vous ne courez plus sur notre colline? Où êtes-vous, jolies filles de Cyivugize? Est-il vrai que vous avez été violées puis assassinées? Et arriverai-je jamais à remplir le devoir de mémoire qui je vous dois au nom de ma survie? (NP 199–200)

This returns us to Dawes' earlier question about the survivor's obligation to testify – 'How much of myself am I required to give to this story? What is my duty, and when am I free of it?'<sup>63</sup> – and goes some way to explaining why Mukagasana continues in her role as a public witness. As Mukagasana confirms at the end of her testimony: 'Oui, c'est devenu cela, ma vie. Me battre pour la mémoire de mon peuple' (NP 295).

### *Gathering Others' Stories*

Part of the sense of duty Rwandan survivors feel towards the dead translates into a need to gather information about how they died. This is particularly true for Mukasonga who is only able to piece together what happened to her family based on the accounts of others who were present in the genocide. As one of the only surviving members of her family, Mukasonga evokes her sense of

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<sup>63</sup> Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 25.

responsibility in recording what happened to them and preserving their memory. Part of Mukasonga's quest to find out what happened to her family involves collecting testimonies from surviving family members or friends, testimonies that would not otherwise be made public. For example, she records the testimony of her brother-in-law who recounts the death of her sister, Jeanne:

Emmanuel, son mari, m'a fait le récit de sa mort. Il m'a dit qu'il me le devait. C'était la première fois qu'il en parlait à quelqu'un. J'ai enregistré. Ce qu'il voulait me dire, il est probable qu'il ne le répéterait plus jamais. Cela ne s'est pas passé sans souffrance des deux côtés. J'ai pensé l'interrompre pour mettre un terme à tant de douleurs que ce récit réveillait. Il a voulu aller jusqu'au bout. (IC 123)

Here, Mukasonga assumes the role of the interviewer, this time taking a stance as a 'secondary witness' in LaCapra's understanding of the term. Her description of their encounter underlines the painful process of testimony, both for the witness and the receiver. In this passage, it is not clear whether Mukasonga is reproachful of or grateful to Emmanuel for sparing her all the details of her sister's death. However, she does receive the details from her niece in the form of a letter: 'une étrange lettre [...] pour me faire connaître ce que je n'aurais jamais dû connaître' (IC 124). Her response to this letter, to discovering the truth, suggests a tension between her desire to know and the unbearable weight of this painful knowledge.

A similar tension between knowing and not knowing is expressed in Mujawayo's *SurVivantes*:

On ne peut pas faire notre deuil non plus puisqu'on ne sait pas quels ont été les derniers moments de nos familles. Que s'est-il passé? Comment a-t-il été tué? A-t-il beaucoup souffert? On glane sans cesse des bribes d'informations pour reconstituer la fin, pour savoir. Mais pourquoi savoir? Parfois, on souffre encore plus du fait de savoir. Mais on souffre autant du fait de ne pas savoir... (SV 76)

As Priscilla Hayner argues in her study of witnesses in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), knowledge about what happened can often be harmful to survivors and can impede their recovery: ‘The assumption that knowing the facts about what happened will always contribute to healing is too simplistic, and is sometimes just not true [...]. In fact, the burden of knowing can be great’.<sup>64</sup> This seems to be implied in Mujawayo’s description of the torturous nature of the dilemma:

À nouveau, comme chaque fois que tu penses aux tiens dans leurs derniers instants, c’est toujours le même dilemme qui te torture: tu veux savoir, et tu ne veux pas savoir. Savoir, c’est la voir, elle, son visage, ses expressions défigurées par la souffrance. C’est visualiser son vi..., mais c’est impossible, impossible, tu comprends, impossible de visualiser ça... (Long silence.) Ce qui est terrible c’est se repasser, comme un film pourtant jamais vu, les toutes dernières images, le dernier chemin, la violence, les coups. (FS 105)

Yet, in the case of Rwanda, this painful – if not unbearable – knowledge is in fact an integral part of understanding what happened during the genocide. As Rwandan historian José Kagabo explains, ‘une bonne partie de la compréhension de ce génocide passe aussi par la description de l’horreur. Il faut savoir comment on a tué. Si on ne vise pas cette description, on s’interdira de comprendre’.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, for Berthe Kayitesi, not knowing what happened to her loved ones exacerbates her suffering: ‘mon malheur reste de ne pas savoir les circonstances de leur mort, leurs derniers moments, leur agonie [...]. Aujourd’hui, ne pas savoir rend pénible mon deuil [...]. Et maintenant seule la torture des images qui me sont restées du génocide vient répondre à leur absence’ (DV 74–75).

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<sup>64</sup> Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 142.

<sup>65</sup> José Kagabo, ‘Après le génocide. Notes de voyage’, *Les Temps Modernes*, 583 (1995), 102–25 (p. 122).

Imagining what happened to their loved ones can often be worse for survivors than knowing the truth, and this desire to know the truth pushed Mujawayo to search for her sister's body for over twelve years without success.<sup>66</sup> Her second testimony, *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, thus becomes what Mujawayo describes as her 'sépulture symbolique'<sup>67</sup>:

Ce livre va entretenir la mémoire de Stéphanie. Il va peut-être m'aider à l'enterrer, Stéphanie, ma sœur, ma moitié avec qui on riait si bien. Tuée avec ses trois enfants et deux voisines. Stéphanie n'est pas morte comme je l'imaginais. Je t'ai dit déjà combien il est essentiel de pouvoir visualiser les derniers instants de nos êtres chers. C'est essentiel et insupportable à la fois. On veut savoir, et on ne veut pas. Aujourd'hui je me retrouve avec plusieurs versions et je ne sais pas laquelle adapter à la mort de Stéphanie. (FS 14)

For Mujawayo, writing her testimony becomes a way of honouring her sister's memory, yet without knowledge of how she died, it is impossible for Mujawayo to record what happened to her. She again underlines the urgency of her need to know: 'Il nous est en effet capital de savoir comment sont morts les nôtres, et surtout où sont leurs corps, où, où, où...' (FS 59).<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Mukasonga returns to Rwanda ten years after the genocide to find out what happened to her loved ones, claiming that: 'j'étais revenue à leur appel pour recevoir en dépôt la mémoire de leurs souffrances et de leurs morts' (IC 158). Writing her testimony is the only means Mukasonga has of honouring the memory of her relatives and fulfilling her duty to bear witness to what they endured. By assuming the responsibility of seeking and documenting the information about those who died, Rwandan women survivors – whether

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<sup>66</sup> In her postface to Dauge-Roth's article, 'Testimonial Encounter', Mujawayo explains that she discovered the location of her sister's body shortly after publishing *La Fleur de Stéphanie*. See Alexandre Dauge-Roth, 'Testimonial Encounter: Esther Mujawayo's Dialogic Art of Witnessing', *French Cultural Studies*, 20.2 (2009), 165–80 (p. 178).

<sup>67</sup> Dauge-Roth, 'Testimonial Encounter', p. 178.

<sup>68</sup> The need for survivors to find the bodies of their loved ones as an essential part of the process of mourning will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

direct or indirect witnesses – are all engaged in a process of secondary witnessing, speaking on behalf of and in memory of the victims.

For Berthe Kayitesi, gathering information from others about her family members goes some way towards re-establishing a sense of familial identity after the genocide, of re-forging bonds with the dead. In one instance, she draws strength from the words of Oscar, a family friend she meets in Canada:

Dans ces discussions avec ceux qui ont côtoyé les miens, j'ai l'impression de renaître. [...] C'est comme s'il [Oscar] les ressuscitait tous l'espace d'une seconde. Cela me permet également de connaître mieux mes origines, de les estimer, et de cette façon, de construire une source familiale pour ceux qui restent. (DMV 93)

This is suggestive of the wider function of written testimony as a means of documenting the past and functioning as a permanent repository for the memory of the dead. For the dehumanised victims of genocide, the testimonies of the living become a way of reconstructing their humanity. Yet, the testimony itself cannot exist without an audience for, in the words of Karegeye, '[l]e texte existe par la lecture'.<sup>69</sup> The final section of this chapter will therefore examine the role of the reader who must also assume a certain responsibility as witness.

### *The Role of the Reader-Witness*

Testimonial narrative is an address directed towards an 'other', seeking recognition not only of the individual's experiences but also the suffering of a whole social group. According to Waintrater:

Plus que tout autre texte autobiographique, le témoignage du traumatisme extrême, dont le génocide constitue la figure absolue, est une adresse à l'autre, représentant de la communauté humaine dont le témoin a été exclu par l'événement dont il témoigne. Avec lui, c'est un groupe entier qui est banni, et c'est au nom de ce groupe que le témoin parle, groupe constitué de toutes les victimes de la persécution, les

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<sup>69</sup> Karegeye, 'Parole morte et méthode du texte', p. 104.

morts de sa famille, mais aussi de ses pairs, compagnons de souffrances qui n'ont pas survécu.<sup>70</sup>

The reader of narratives bearing witness to trauma must therefore enter into a pact with the survivor-witness, a pact that Philippe Lejeune elsewhere describes in terms of a 'contrat de lecture'.<sup>71</sup> Without this engagement on the part of the reader, there is a danger that the reader may distance herself from the narrative, which ultimately results in, at the very least, a refusal to really hear the voice of the witness, or even a full rejection of the witness's story. For the witness, then, the act of testimony entails an element of risk. Bearing witness to trauma, as Gilmore observes, requires the subject 'to make public and shareable a private and intolerable pain'.<sup>72</sup> For the witness of trauma, this passage from private to public, as Ricœur notes, entails a painful process of 'accréditation', a validation both of the content of the testimony and of the speaking subject herself.<sup>73</sup> As Jean-Marie Vianney Rurangwa writes in the preface to *Le Génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger*, 'témoigner n'est pas toujours facile. Témoigner est synonyme de s'exposer ou d'exposer les siens'.<sup>74</sup> The survivor-witness risks exposing both herself and her community to the scrutiny of public opinion. Moreover, for the witness of a historical catastrophe, there is a strong probability that the audience will not believe the witness who is testifying to a 'limit event' that escapes ordinary understanding. Many of the Rwandan women genocide survivors are plagued by the fear of

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<sup>70</sup> Régine Waintrater, 'Le pacte testimonial', in Jean-François Chiantaretto, et al., *Témoignage et trauma: implications psychanalytiques* (Paris: Dunod, 2004), pp. 65–97 (p. 67).

<sup>71</sup> Philippe Lejeune, 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas', in Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre: L'autobiographie, de la littérature aux médias* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 229–316 (p. 243).

<sup>72</sup> Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> See Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire et l'oubli*, p. 205. Ricœur explains that, by sharing a painful, personal experience with an audience the witness will be judged by that audience not only on the value of their testimony but on a personal level: 'l'accréditation vaut authentification du témoin à titre personnel'.

<sup>74</sup> Rurangwa, *Le Génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger*, p. 12.



not being believed. This dilemma is evoked in Berthe Kayitesi's testimony when she writes: 'Car moi-même, il m'arrive de ne pas croire à ce que j'ai vécu, traversé, surmonté. Que toute cette trajectoire est mienne. Or elle est bien mienne. Y croira-t-on?' (DV 59) The horrors of genocide are 'unimaginable' to such an extent that sometimes even survivors themselves can scarcely believe what happened. This is reflected in Mujawayo's *SurVivantes* when she writes: 'Parfois, tu te demandes pourquoi ça s'est passé, tu te demandes comment c'est possible que ça se soit passé, comme ça, de façon aussi folle, parfois, tu te demandes même si ça s'est *vraiment* passé, tellement ça te dépasse... Et tu ne trouves jamais de réponse' (SV 21: emphasis in original). The difficulty for Rwandan women survivors, then, resides not only in the impossibility of saying their experience, but also in the impossibility of making that experience heard.

This echoes the position of Holocaust survivor-witnesses described by Langer: '[f]rom the point of view of the witness, the urge to tell meets resistance from the certainty that one's audience will not understand. [...] "You won't understand" and "you must understand" are regular contenders in the multiple voices of these testimonies'.<sup>75</sup> Mujawayo shows that the survivors of the Rwanda genocide have to face this same dilemma: 'Quand un rescapé raconte le génocide, il sent bien qu'on a du mal à le croire. [...] Si le rescapé a régulièrement l'impression de ne pas être cru, c'est que les gens en face de lui ont souvent envie de se convaincre que ce n'était pas si horrible comme situation' (SV 88). She adds, 'Quand on te dit: "Stop, arrête" ou bien "Non, ce n'est pas possible, ce n'est sans doute pas vrai", c'est que l'autre touche la limite de l'inimaginable' (SV 90). Tal claims that, in the case of outside

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<sup>75</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, pp. xiii–xiv.

observers, this refusal to accept the survivor's story is due in part to the fact that 'the survivor who bears witness serves as an embarrassment to those whose lives have been untouched by atrocity'.<sup>76</sup> This echoes an earlier observation made by Terrence Des Pres who, in his 1976 work *The Survivor*, claims that the survivor-witness is often seen as a 'disturber of the peace', especially given that his task is to awaken the conscience of the listener/audience.<sup>77</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 4, it is often easier for the reader to simply dismiss the testimony rather than confront an account of such unimaginable horror, thus becoming complicit in the silencing of survivors.

Given the unimaginable nature of what they have lived through, Rwandan women genocide survivors consequently figure among those Ricœur describes as the "témoins historiques" dont l'expérience extraordinaire prend en défaut la capacité de compréhension moyenne, ordinaire'.<sup>78</sup> For the witness of a traumatic historical event, this incomprehension leads to a sense of estrangement and solitude, a 'souffrance due au sentiment d'être à jamais isolés du monde et des leurs par une expérience extrême'.<sup>79</sup> It would seem that, for Mujawayo, testimonial writing can help combat this isolation, allowing the survivor to put her inexpressible suffering into words. Mujawayo suggests this when she explains that writing was the only way she could tell her daughters how their father died: 'l'écriture m'avait permis de révéler ce que j'étais incapable de leur dire' (FS 37). However, as discussed in the Introduction, while the act of writing can help the survivor to begin working through her trauma, not being heard can result in a retraumatisation of the survivor. As

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<sup>76</sup> Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, p. 208.

<sup>79</sup> Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*, p. 144.

Laub observes: 'The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story'.<sup>80</sup> This underlines the need for an engaged reader who is prepared to be 'disturbed' by the narrative of the survivor-witness. Wiesel also calls for an engaged response to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors in his essay 'Contre l'indifférence', stating that: 'L'indifférence à l'angoisse d'autrui est criminelle car elle ne fait qu'accroître cette angoisse'.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, LaCapra insists on 'the need for what he terms 'empathic unsettlement' as a necessary 'affective response' to the trauma of the survivor'.<sup>82</sup>

We are reminded here of Ross Chambers' description of testimonial narrative as an attempt 'to bring onto the "scene" of attention what a culture bans as ob-scene, not part of its scenic view'.<sup>83</sup> Expanding on Chambers' work, Dauge-Roth argues that narratives bearing witness to the genocide in Rwanda highlight 'the gap between the discourses defining our cultural "scene" and the "ob-scene" experience they are trying to comprehend and render'.<sup>84</sup> Dauge-Roth highlights how survivors, through their testimonies, attempt to pass on their 'ob-scene' knowledge to their audience in an endeavour 'to forge social recognition for the personal and collective trauma that continues to haunt the victims of this genocide, so that their loss and suffering can no longer be

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<sup>80</sup> Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', p. 68 (emphasis in original).

<sup>81</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Silences et mémoire d'hommes: Essais, histoires, dialogues* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 173.

<sup>82</sup> See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. xi.

<sup>83</sup> Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 55.

ignored'.<sup>85</sup> Despite the obstacles, it is vital for the authors to attempt to put the unsayable into words and facilitate understanding. For Annick Kayitesi,

La difficulté est d'arriver à dire que le pire a existé, que c'est vrai. Admettre soi-même qu'on a vécu cela et que l'on continue malgré tout à être debout représente une étape capitale. En parlant des autres, on exprime un peu de soi. Si l'on met l'infamie en mots, elle devrait se dissoudre un tout petit peu. (NE 239–40)

Nevertheless, Rwandan women survivors appear to be all too aware of the challenge they face in engaging a Western audience. Indeed, Dauge-Roth interprets the title of Mukagasana's second testimony, *N'aie pas peur de savoir*, as anticipating 'our belief in the duty to remember but yet, at a safe distance – more inclined to confront the genocidal aftermath through the petrified monologues of official memorials than through the cultural dialogues and social spaces of encounter testimonies seek to provoke'.<sup>86</sup> The strategies Rwandan women adopt to communicate their pain and suffering will be examined in the next chapter, particularly in terms of how their experiences of trauma can be 'translated' for a Western audience.

According to Natasha Dagenais: 'In expressing collective or individual trauma, autobiographical subjects bear witness to buried truths which readers in turn witness through the reading process'.<sup>87</sup> Mieke Bal has elsewhere underlined 'the need for a second person to act as confirming witness to a painfully elusive past'.<sup>88</sup> According to Bal, 'this "second-personhood" of witnessing and facilitating memory is an active choice, just as much as the act

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<sup>85</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 26.

<sup>86</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, pp. 46–47.

<sup>87</sup> Natasha Dagenais, 'Trauma, Healing, and Collaborative Writing: Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*', in Roxanne Rimstead, Michelle Ariss, Simon Gilbert, and Suzanne O'Connor, eds, *Beyond Comparison/Au-delà des comparaisons: Actes du 5ième colloque en littérature canadienne comparée, Université de Sherbrooke (2004)* (Baldwin Mills, QC: Topeda Hill, 2005), pp. 13–21 (p. 13).

<sup>88</sup> Mieke Bal, 'Introduction', in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer, eds, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. vii–xvii (p. x).

of memorizing that it facilitates. The acts of memory thus become an exchange between first and second person that sets in motion the emergence of narrative'.<sup>89</sup> I would argue that, rather than speak of choice, the reader of testimony bearing witness to extreme trauma, such as the genocide in Rwanda, in fact has a *duty* to listen to and validate the survivor's story, just as the survivor of trauma has a duty to tell the story. As Mujawayo claims in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, 'écouter et comprendre est un devoir' (FS 170). Indeed, Dagenais sees the need for both representation and recognition in order to authorise individual and collective trauma, which can be attained in part through 'the textual encounter between survivor and reader who perform the act of witnessing'.<sup>90</sup>

Testimony, then, necessarily requires an element of dialogue and reciprocity. In her recent study of Algerian women's autobiographical texts, Alison Rice argues that testimony is 'by definition, other-oriented' insofar as it is inclined towards its reader, and proposes an adapted reading position in which the reader of testimony takes part in an active process of shared witnessing.<sup>91</sup> This notion of shared witnessing, which takes place within a dialogic setting, will be addressed in Chapter 3, specifically in terms of the collaboration between the survivor-witness and a third party during the process of writing testimony. Elsewhere, Bornand expresses this in terms of a *parole partagée* between the survivor-witness (direct witness) and the reader-witness (indirect witness):

L'expérience vécue représentera toujours un espace de séparation entre la génération des témoins directs, des survivants, et celle des témoins

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<sup>89</sup> Bal, 'Introduction', p. x.

<sup>90</sup> Dagenais, 'Trauma, Healing, and Collaborative Writing', p. 19.

<sup>91</sup> See Alison Rice, *Polygraphies: Francophone Women Writing Algeria* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 9.

indirects, mais un espace de parole est partagé, la parole du témoin n'est plus l'exclusivité du rescapé, elle est soutenue par des témoins indirects.<sup>92</sup>

It is through this act of shared witnessing, this *parole partagée*, that survivors can begin to reforge social connections, thus attributing testimony with a wider social function that will be explored further in Chapter 5. As Waintrater confirms: 'Le témoignage cherche ainsi à refaire du lien là où il y a eu rupture: car c'est la négation du pacte social qui constitue, pour les victimes de violences extrêmes, la catastrophe psychique dont ils continuent à souffrir'.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, the reader can never fully identify with the survivor-witness. According to Brabeck, in Latin American *testimonio*, '[t]he reader is called to identify – to the extent possible – with a distant reality. The reader may be *with* the speaker, but cannot *be* her. [...] This new complicity between the narrator and reader engages a unique ethics and experience that demand both justice and caring'.<sup>94</sup> This echoes Margalit's somewhat unhelpful call for the reader to become part of a moral community, prepared to listen to and validate the testimony of the solitary moral witness:

The hope with which I credit moral witnesses is a rather sober hope: that in another place or another time there exists, or will exist, a moral community that will listen to their testimony. What is so heroic in this hope is the fact that people who are subjected to evil regimes intent on destroying the fabric of their moral community easily come to see the regime as invincible and indestructible and stop believing in the very possibility of a moral community. [...] The belief, under such conditions, in the possibility of a moral community calls for a veritable leap of faith.<sup>95</sup>

I would argue that, by writing and publishing their testimonies, Rwandan women survivors are making this leap of faith, and it is our duty as readers to

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<sup>92</sup> Bornand, *Témoignage et fiction*, p. 52.

<sup>93</sup> Waintrater, 'Le pacte testimonial', p. 67.

<sup>94</sup> Brabeck, 'Testimonio', p. 255 (emphasis in original).

<sup>95</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 155.

engage with and respond to them. The next chapter will explore how Rwandan women attempt to communicate their experiences to the Western reader, looking in particular at the narrative strategies they employ to 'translate' their suffering. It will also highlight the complex range of individual responses to trauma, which challenge preconceived notions of a universal experience of trauma and recovery.

## Chapter 2: Giving Voice to Trauma

While Chapter 1 focused on the figure of the witness and different levels of witnessing from the site of the traumatic experience, this chapter seeks to explore how Rwandan women respond to trauma and how their suffering is given voice. The central question driving this chapter, and indeed this thesis, echoes that posed by oral historians such as Greenspan: how do survivors speak or write about their memories and what is the influence of listeners and readers on what survivors tell and retell.<sup>1</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, the paradox of the unrepresentability of trauma is centred around the unshareable nature of pain and suffering.<sup>2</sup> For the witness, her pain is incommunicable; for the receiver of her testimony, the pain of the other is unknowable. Within this essentially Western trauma framework, two key assumptions are being made: firstly that language is inadequate to convey the traumatic experience and second that the unassimilable nature of trauma is universal. Yet, the very existence of the narrative, the very attempt to reconstruct the trauma in words, suggests the possibility of communication. In this chapter, I intend to explore the ways in which Rwandan women's testimonial literature successfully communicates the suffering of survivors and resists the notion of a universal experience of trauma.

In order to achieve this, it is useful to engage not only with key trauma theorists and Holocaust scholars such as Caruth, LaCapra, Laub, and Langer, but also with scholars who have theorised physical and psychological pain such as Elaine Scarry and Herman whose work, Jennifer Griffiths notes, 'make[s]

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<sup>1</sup> See Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See, E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 56.



connections to other sites of extreme suffering and who explore the relational nature of recovery'.<sup>3</sup> While the relational nature of recovery will be a key focus of the final chapter of this thesis, this chapter will primarily address Rwandan women's individual experiences of trauma and suffering. In her seminal work *The Body in Pain*, Scarry insists that physical pain is unshareable 'through its resistance to language',<sup>4</sup> a claim which has been challenged more recently by scholars such as Norridge and Madeleine Hron. In her examination of African literature, Norridge demonstrates writers' 'capacity for the linguistic exploration of suffering',<sup>5</sup> while Hron's examination of immigrant suffering highlights the ways in which pain can be 'translated' into language through a variety of narrative strategies.<sup>6</sup> I position myself alongside these scholars in countering the longstanding claim that pain is inexpressible by examining the complexities of both personal and collective pain expressed in Rwandan women's testimonies. The kind of suffering the Rwandan women describe in their testimonies is primarily the acute psychological pain of loss rather than pain resulting from physical wounds.<sup>7</sup> This chapter aims to explore the singularity of the experience of genocide as portrayed by Rwandan women, focusing in particular on the range of textual strategies employed to express pain and suffering to the reader.

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Memory in African American Women's Writing and Performance* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 3. Scarry's analysis focuses primarily on survivors of torture while Herman discusses survivors of sexual abuse.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Madeleine Hron, *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that other types of testimonial texts bear witness to the physical pain endured by survivors both during and after the genocide, such as the testimonies of rape survivors included in De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu's edited volume, *The Men Who Killed Me*.

As shown in the previous chapter, the act of testimony involves a transition from the personal to the public sphere. Similarly, Norridge is concerned with the ways in which pain moves from the personal into the social realm, a movement that is also central to Rwandan women's writing.<sup>8</sup> While the experience of genocide is shown to be deeply personal, there is an important shift within many of the women's narratives towards a collective notion of suffering. In their testimonies, many of the women first describe their individual experiences of genocide, but then move on to relate their suffering to that of other survivors. Given that their own pain is so difficult to express, telling stories of other women's suffering in their own narratives becomes a way of expressing and understanding their own pain. Indeed, as I will elaborate in the final chapter, the testimonies of my corpus highlight a culturally specific model of dealing with trauma within which Rwandan women locate their individual experiences within a community of survivors.

As critics such as Schaffer and Smith have shown, trauma theory may be insufficient when dealing with localised traumas that do not fit into the Western model. Schaffer and Smith explain that, 'the psychoanalytic model [favoured by trauma theorists] privileges stories suffused with traumatic remembering and suffering, and silences other kinds of stories that may not unfold through the Western trope of trauma'.<sup>9</sup> Through their testimonies, Rwandan women seem to challenge this model by bringing to the fore individual expressions of suffering, demonstrating that the experience of genocide is particular to individuals and the community to which they belong. I will argue that, while the traumatic experience is in itself 'sayable', it may not

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<sup>8</sup> See Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 'Conjunctions', p. 10.

necessarily be ‘shareable’ beyond the immediate community of survivors. As my discussion of the reader-witness in the previous chapter has shown, the experience of genocide is not an experience shared by the majority of Western readers; this experience remains opaque to them, often resulting in a refusal on the part of the reader to really hear the story. The narrative of trauma is therefore not simply concerned with what is tellable but also with what is *hearable*. As Langer observes in the testimonies of Holocaust survivors: ‘The issue is not merely the unshareability of the experience but also the witness’s exasperated sense (not uniformly borne out, as we have seen, by the effects of his or her testimony) of a failure of communication’.<sup>10</sup> For Rwandan women genocide survivors who have published testimonies, the difficulty in communicating their experiences has been further compounded by a life in exile and the challenge of finding an audience in their host country. As Véronique Bonnet notes: ‘[L]a prise d’écriture fut inévitablement douloureuse. Il fallut un temps pour que les survivants, après avoir échappé aux massacres et quitté le Rwanda, parviennent à écrire, à trouver un éditeur et à rendre lisible leur vécu’.<sup>11</sup> It seems that, through their varied textual strategies, Rwandan women are working to create a narrative that is ‘hearable’ or ‘readable’. This chapter will therefore also consider the narrative techniques Rwandan women use to make their experiences more accessible to a Western audience – primarily through techniques of familiarising and comparison – while simultaneously emphasising the individuality of their experience of trauma and resisting the homogenising category of ‘victim’.

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<sup>10</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Véronique Bonnet, ‘La “prise d’écriture” de Rwandaises rescapées du génocide’, *Notre Librairie*, 157 (2005), 76–81 (pp. 76–77). Questions relating to editorial issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

*Traumatic Memory: An Unrepresentable Excess?*

Psychoanalysts Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart have distinguished between ‘narrative memory’ and ‘traumatic memory’: on the one hand, ‘[n]arrative memory consists of mental constructs, which people use to make sense out of experience’.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, ‘[t]raumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language’.<sup>13</sup> As shown in my discussion of the relationship between the survivor-witness and the reader-witness in the previous chapter, narrative memory has a specific social function. According to Bal, narrative memory ‘comes about in a cultural context whose frame evokes and enables the memory. It is a context in which, precisely, the past makes sense in the present, to others who can understand it [...]: narrative memory offers some form of feedback that ratifies the memory’.<sup>14</sup> Traumatic memory, however, has no social component, leaving the subject isolated without narrative mastery over her narrative.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, many scholars have been preoccupied with the difficulty of integrating traumatic memory into narrative.<sup>16</sup> For example, Felman describes testimony bearing witness to trauma as being ‘composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that

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<sup>12</sup> Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart, ‘The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma’, in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 158–182 (p. 160).

<sup>13</sup> Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, ‘The Intrusive Past’, p. 176.

<sup>14</sup> Bal, ‘Introduction’, p. x.

<sup>15</sup> See Bal, ‘Introduction’, p. x.

<sup>16</sup> As well as key studies by Caruth and LaCapra, see also Martina Kopf, ‘Trauma, Narrative and the Art of Witnessing’, in Birgit Haehnel and Melanie Ulz, eds, *Slavery in Art and Literature: Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2010), pp. 41–58.

have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference'.<sup>17</sup> This echoes LaCapra's notion of an 'unrepresentable excess' seemingly inherent in traumatic limit events.<sup>18</sup> Given the difficulty of assimilating traumatic memory into narrative memory, many theorists have also questioned whether there exists an adequate form of narrative to convey the traumatic experience. Tal notes for instance that, as a form of representation, 'testimony is never adequate, that it can never bridge the gap between language and experience'.<sup>19</sup> The paradox at the heart of testimony therefore resides in the witness's constant struggle against the inadequacy of language to convey the traumatic experience, against the 'unrepresentable excess' of the memory of trauma. In her analysis of the testimonial literature of Holocaust survivors, Wieviorka evokes 'l'impossibilité du langage à rendre compte du génocide: ces événements seraient innommables, irreprésentables, indicibles'.<sup>20</sup> A written account of the event can only ever be '*un faible écho de ce qui s'était réellement passé*'.<sup>21</sup> Frank also underlines the centrality of this 'unsayable' knowledge in his analysis of illness narratives: 'The more that is told, the more we are made conscious of remaining on the edge of a silence. How much remains that can never be told is unknown'.<sup>22</sup> While the silence within Rwandan women's testimonies will be examined in Chapter 4, it is important here to address the ways in which survivors do attempt to communicate their unsayable experience.

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<sup>17</sup> Felman, 'Education and Crisis', p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 91: LaCapra distinguishes the problem of 'the unrepresentable excess of extreme events that call for discursive and affective responses that are never adequate to them'.

<sup>19</sup> Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*, p. 95 (emphasis in original).

<sup>22</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 138.

Central to Rwandan women's testimonial literature is the question of how to represent pain and suffering, both of the individual witness and of other survivors. Thinking about physical pain can be useful here as physical pain is in itself experienced as a kind of trauma. In the late twentieth century, Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) and trauma theory developed by scholars such as Caruth, Felman and Laub, and LaCapra in the 1990s have become central to the way we conceive of and respond to the pain of others. However, Norridge argues that these theorists have developed a potentially constrictive framework of pain which does not allow for cultural differences, and warns that applying this framework to narratives of pain produced outside the West risks homogenising all forms of suffering into the same.<sup>23</sup> Norridge urges us to be attentive to 'pain's particularity' within literary descriptions of pain and suffering.<sup>24</sup> As well as reflecting the suffering inflicted on an entire population, the Rwandan women's texts I discuss in this thesis provide what Norridge identifies as 'intense descriptions of complex personal pain'.<sup>25</sup> Their narratives offer insights into the individual experiences of pain as well as the continuing struggle of living with loss and suffering, which is at once a personal and a communal/collective experience. Rwandan women's testimonies thus highlight not only the personal experience of suffering, but also what Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock have termed 'social suffering', which encompasses forms of suffering societies endure as a result of war, torture, political repression, etc., as well as human responses to this suffering.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> See Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock, eds., *Social Suffering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. ix.

While it is important to maintain a nuanced approach when discussing different types of pain, approaches to physical pain can nevertheless help us to understand the experiences of other types of suffering. Just as survivors experience trauma as, in LaCapra's words, a 'shattering of the self',<sup>27</sup> Scarry explains that the exceptional nature of pain entails a 'shattering of language', leaving the individual trapped within the body and unable to move into the external sharable world.<sup>28</sup> Although the type of extreme physical pain examined by Scarry is not the primary focus of my own analysis, the psychological pain of trauma shares several characteristics with physical pain. It is often assumed that the nature of violence in general destroys language and thus falls outside representation.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, just as physical pain is invisible, psychological pain is difficult for the outside observer to perceive. As Mujawayo observes in *SurVivantes*, survivors' suffering is primarily invisible: 'Ce sont des blessures intérieures et souvent invisibles que celles des rescapés' (SV 54). Similarly, as a character in Diop's *Murambi* acknowledges: 'Il est arrivé ce que tu sais et nous souffrons beaucoup, même si cela ne se voit pas'.<sup>30</sup>

Because we cannot see or *feel* another person's pain, Scarry explains that hearing about their pain can seem remote to us, thus underlining 'the absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons'.<sup>31</sup> In essence, according to Scarry, to be in pain is to 'have certainty', whereas hearing about pain is to 'have doubt'.<sup>32</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, the situation of a survivor suffering from the psychological

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<sup>27</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> See James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Diop, *Murambi*, p. 183.

<sup>31</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 4.

pain of trauma is not unlike that of an individual experiencing physical pain insofar as she must face a reaction of doubt – or even denial – when she tries to communicate her pain to an audience, when her ‘ob-scene’ experience intrudes on the scene of her audience. This ultimately heightens the suffering felt by the survivor for, as Scarry argues, ‘[t]he doubt of other persons [...] amplifies the suffering of those already in pain’.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, in her analysis of South African novels, Norridge observes a conflation of the fields of pain (physical) and suffering (emotional response), the two becoming inextricably intertwined in literary expressions of pain. This is particularly pertinent when considering Rwandan women’s testimonies as many of the women’s descriptions of pain show how the psychological pain of trauma in fact manifests itself through physical symptoms. The emotional and physical thus become inseparable; emotional pain is experienced *as* physical. The Western model of trauma and recovery posits that telling the story is essential to the survivor’s healing process, relieving both physical symptoms and emotional anguish. Herman views the creation of narrative as the second of three fundamental stages of recovery, which she identifies as ‘establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community’.<sup>34</sup> This is particularly significant in Rwandan women’s testimonies where the very act of bearing witness is shown to be a step towards forging new links and, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, creating new social bonds within a community of survivors. The reconstruction of her story – putting the unspeakable into words – is therefore key for the survivor to work through her trauma and give meaning to her experiences.

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<sup>33</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 3.



### *Traumatic Symptoms*

The testimonies of Rwandan women survivors are laden with references to the unbearable and inexpressible nature of pain, the acute sense of solitude and the heavy burden of loss. The women bear witness to the ‘souffrance de la perte’ (DMV 165), not just of loved ones but of a whole social network that has been completely eradicated. For example, Berthe Kayitesi writes about the close family relations in her community and the way they supported each other before the genocide: ‘C’était cela le sens de la famille, c’est cela qu’on a perdu, c’est cela qu’on nous a volé, c’est ce Rwanda-là qu’on a détruit’ (DMV 103). Similarly, Mujawayo insists on the ‘indicible douleur’ (FS 180) that the survivor carries within herself in the wake of this catastrophic loss. But by writing this loss in their testimonies, these women are concerned precisely with the notion of ‘speaking’ this unspeakable pain, and their testimonies reveal both ‘the power of speaking the unspeakable’, to use Herman’s words, and ‘the creative energy that is released when the barriers of denial and repression are lifted’.<sup>35</sup>

For reasons that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, many women in post-genocide Rwanda and across the diaspora have not been able to reconstruct their experiences in either oral or written narratives. Silence may be imposed through both internal and external factors (shame, self-preservation, the threat of repercussions, etc.). Many women are simply preoccupied with the daily task of survival: their own physical needs and those of their remaining families must be met before they can engage in creative expression. This echoes Herman’s conception of ‘establishing safety’ as the first stage of recovery, which must be achieved before the survivor can begin to tell her

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<sup>35</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 2.

story and work through her traumatic memories. For survivors, repressing their trauma often results in the development of numerous physical ailments which hinder women in their everyday lives. Mujawayo explains in *SurVivantes* that numerous women receiving help through AVEGA were experiencing physical symptoms of trauma that they did not understand:

À toutes ces femmes qui se croyaient folles à cause de la perte de leur mémoire, à cause de leur angoisse incessante, de leurs hallucinations, de leurs insomnies ou de leurs cauchemars, et sans jamais oser se dire que le génocide qu'elles avaient traversé était en soi une perte de raison, nous avons longuement expliqué que leurs symptômes apparemment anormaux étaient, en fait, des plus normaux et que la vraie anormalité, elle, résidait dans ce qu'elles avaient subi d'inouï. (SV 207)

Many of the women were not aware that these physical symptoms were a direct result of their trauma and could not be treated or cured in the traditional manner. Mujawayo draws up a 'tableau des traumatismes' exhibited by the women survivors: 'Au palmarès: la fatigue, une immense fatigue. Et puis maux de dos, essentiellement, et maux de tête' (SV 203). One of Mujawayo's important tasks as a therapist was to encourage these women to talk about their experiences and help them to see that what they were experiencing was in fact a 'normal' response to what they had lived through. Mujawayo claims that, for these women, '[u]ne fois partagé, leur fardeau paraît un peu moins pesant' (SV 202). This points to how the physical burden of the women's suffering and loss can be lessened to some extent through the act of storytelling.

In *Nous existons encore*, Annick Kayitesi describes suffering from similar symptoms – insomnia, intense fatigue, headaches – caused by the ongoing effects of trauma: 'Il fallait gérer le quotidien, le stress, le souvenir. Depuis le génocide je dormais mal, mais plus cela allait, plus cela empirait. J'avais beau prétendre avoir tiré un trait sur le Rwanda, mon subconscient, lui,

ne l'avait pas oublié' (NE 209). These symptoms appear to be alleviated to a certain extent after sharing her story, and she is once again able to look towards the future, without forgetting what she has lived through. She concludes her testimony on an optimistic note:

Depuis, l'existence continue. Les projets perdurent, en priorité celui de fonder une famille. La culpabilité d'avoir survécu s'atténue. Désormais d'autres sentiments, d'autres espoirs m'animent. Je n'ai pas oublié le passé, et je ferai en sorte qu'on ne l'oublie pas. Non pour perpétuer la haine mais pour faire mesurer les limites de l'horreur. Pour que de la répulsion qu'inspire la barbarie resurgissent les valeurs de ce qu'on appelle l'humanité. Notre condition d'êtres humains. Notre dignité. À tous. (NE 249)

Here, Kayitesi again evokes the notion of survivor guilt addressed in Chapter 1, which can also be attenuated to some degree through narrative expression. Nevertheless, despite storytelling's therapeutic properties, it is never easy for the survivor to share her story. Like many other survivors, Kayitesi struggles to 'mettre des mots sur le vent de folie qui fit basculer dans le chaos mon pays' (NE 19), and must resort to a number of narrative strategies in order to communicate or, in Hron's terms, 'translate' her pain.

### *Cultural Translation*

Hron's conception of the 'translation' of pain is particularly useful when thinking about Rwandan women's testimonies, especially in relation to how we conceive the pain and suffering of other cultures. Hron examines, across a range of 'migrant' narratives, the damage incurred from the process of immigration, including culture shock, the difficulties of acculturation, as well as social violence such as poverty, crime or racism.<sup>36</sup> She argues that this pain

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<sup>36</sup> See Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 36. While Hron has published several articles pertaining to Rwanda, this particular volume examines 'migrant' literary narratives from Algeria, Haiti and Czechoslovakia.

– both physiological and emotional – is communicable through a process of translation and likens the act of writing trauma to the act of translation:

Like translators, writers are faced with the difficulties of finding linguistic equivalencies for their pain – be it to describe their pain, convey its intensity, explain its cause, or specify its location. The scarcity of a direct language of pain does not mean that there is no viable mode of expression for their pain; rather, like translators, writers must engage in a variety of representational tactics to render their suffering understandable to readers.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the literal translation of pain from sensation into words, Hron argues that, in the case of immigrants, writers must also engage in a form of ‘cultural translation’.<sup>38</sup> I would posit that this is also the case for Rwandan women genocide survivors living and writing in exile as not only do they have to find words to express their pain, but they must also find a way to communicate this pain to another culture. As Hron explains,

cultural translation focuses on a target culture; its aim is to offer target recipients with as transparent a text as possible. In so doing, there is some attempt to educate target readers about elements from the source culture; however, there is also an emphasis on adjusting those cultural elements so that they are not too foreign or obscure for the receiving culture to understand.<sup>39</sup>

This is most evident, perhaps, in Mukagasana’s testimonies in which she claims she wants to ‘inform’ the French readers about the truth of what happened in Rwanda: ‘Je cherche seulement à vous informer’ (NP 13). The use of footnotes and ‘annexes’ in several of the testimonies also provide readers with a sociohistorical background of Rwanda and definitions of any unfamiliar terms which may be used within the narrative (such as *Interahamwe*<sup>40</sup>). This type of paratextual framing plays a crucial role in determining how the

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<sup>37</sup> Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 41.

<sup>38</sup> Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Annick Kayitesi, *Nous existons encore*, p. 93; Pauline Kayitare, *Tu leur diras que tu es hutue*, p. 20; Chantal Umuraza, *Une jeunesse rwandaise*, section ‘lexique’, pp. 141–42.

testimony will be received and helps to familiarise the Western reader with the Rwandan context. These paratextual elements will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, but it is important here to concentrate on the numerous strategies used in the testimonies themselves to 'translate' Rwandan women's suffering.

Several of the women raise the question of cultural translation within their testimonies. For example, Mujawayo theorises her position in the following manner:

Les mots pour le dire. Voici, normalement, le principe d'une thérapie: trouver les mots pour dire sa souffrance, sa folie, l'horreur intériorisée. C'est bien sûr une question de capacité mentale, mais c'est aussi une question de vocabulaire. Or en kinyarwanda, il n'existe pas le mot de génocide ni le mot de viol, ni celui de traumatisme. On a dû les inventer depuis. Depuis le génocide de 1994. (SV 195)

According to Mujawayo's description, the vocabulary of trauma is in itself a Western imposition onto Rwandan culture, but a vocabulary that survivors must use if they are to communicate their suffering, both to the international community and perhaps even, as Mujawayo implies here, to other Rwandans. It could be argued, then, that the notion of genocide itself, based on the definition provided by the UN genocide convention following the Holocaust, is in fact a Western concept; the genocide in Rwanda has thus engendered the creation of new words and meanings that Rwandans first have to integrate into their own way of thinking. This highlights a sense of dual translation between cultures, underlining the reciprocal nature of testimony more generally.

Mukagasana also addresses the question of translation within her testimony, for example when she speaks of the difficulty of finding the French equivalent for a specific Kinyarwanda expression, an expression which again takes on particular significance in the aftermath of genocide:

Il faudrait inventer un mot pour désigner les femmes qui ont perdu leurs enfants. Ce mot, je ne le connais pas. Il n'existe pas dans la langue française. Chez nous, on dit 'une femme aux seins coupés'. Ce n'est pas très poétique, mais cela a la franchise de l'image crue. (NP 197)

It is interesting to note here that Mukagasana does not actually include the Kinyarwanda expression in her text, which may suggest that Mukagasana's testimony has undergone a process of what is known in translation studies as 'domestication', where the elements that distinguish a text as culturally 'other' are erased in the process of translation.<sup>41</sup> However, while Mukagasana claims to be unable to find an equivalent translation, by explaining the concept literally she is able to convey its raw meaning to the French audience and preserve the 'foreign' nature of the expression. As we will see later in this chapter, this kind of raw imagery is a defining feature of Rwandan survivor testimony and is key to understanding the complex responses of survivors to the horror of genocide.

Proverbs – and explanations of their meaning – emerge as an important strategy through which Rwandan women attempt to familiarise Western readers with Rwandan culture. Mukagasana opens her first testimony with a proverb which will be well known to the Rwandan and initiated Western reader but unfamiliar to most other readers: 'Même s'il passe ses journées ailleurs, Dieu revient chaque nuit au Rwanda' (LM 15). She then explains this proverb to the reader and the new connotations it has taken on in the wake of the genocide:

C'est dans mon pays un proverbe plus ancien que l'invasion des missionnaires. Oui, Imana [Dieu] venait tous les soirs dormir au Rwanda, disait-on. [...] Imana vient-il encore dormir tous les soirs dans

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<sup>41</sup> The notions of 'domesticating' and 'foreignizing' translation were formulated by Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995). Venuti shows 'domestication', which involves rewriting the foreign text according to English-language values, to be an 'Anglo-American tradition': see p. 6; p. 23.

mon pays? Et était-il chez nous le soir du 6 avril 1994? Ne nous a-t-il pas abandonnés dans la gueule du diable? Peut-être ce jour-là, n'a-t-il pas eu le temps de revenir au Rwanda, tant la nuit est tombée vite. (LM 15)

This proverb highlights part of Rwandan history and the way Rwandans perceive their country, as well as their incomprehension that such horror could take place there. In communicating and contextualising this expression, Mukagasana is immediately creating a link with her audience, exposing them to a different world of experience and raising questions about the diabolic and inhuman nature of genocide. Again, unlike the testimonies of other survivors such as Esther Mujawayo and Chantal Umuraza who do include proverbs in their Kinyarwanda form, Mukagasana's text does not to provide the original Kinyarwanda version of this well-used proverb. Even the Kinyarwanda word for God, 'Imana', has been replaced with the French 'Dieu', again showing the possible domestication of Mukagasana's text for a French audience. Whether this was Mukagasana's choice or that of her collaborator, Patrick May, is unclear, and questions surrounding control over the narrative and the power dynamics within their collaborative relationship will be examined in the following chapter.

A key part of the Rwandan imaginary, proverbs not only allow Rwandan survivors to express their feelings in terms they feel comfortable with, but they also offer a form of access for the reader to specifically Rwandan cultural elements. In his article 'Mourning and Recovery From Trauma: In Rwanda, Tears Flow Within', Déogratia Bagilishya<sup>42</sup> demonstrates

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<sup>42</sup> Déogratias Bagilishya is a Hutu who was living in Canada at the time of the genocide and whose son was killed by the RPF in 1994. As both Burnet and Vidal have noted, Hutu who lost family during the genocide are not considered to be 'victims' or 'survivors' in contemporary Rwandan discourse, and their suffering is consequently denied. Nevertheless, they too need to share their pain and have their experiences recognised. See discussion in Claudine Vidal, 'La

how Rwandan proverbs can help ‘resituat[e] ideas about grief and trauma in a framework that is coherent with Rwandan culture’.<sup>43</sup> He explains that:

In Rwandan tradition, the proverb is a mode of communication often used to express what a person has seen, heard and experienced at the level of emotions, feelings and states of mind, as well as to indicate to someone that they have been understood. [...] The proverb creates a bridge between emotions, feelings or states of mind suffered at difficult moments, and the appropriate attitude prescribed by Rwandan tradition, to surmount the difficulties caused by this trying situation.<sup>44</sup>

For example, Bagilishya recalls a conversation with a young man who had witnessed his son’s murder. Bagilishya concludes the meeting by citing the following Rwandan proverb:

*Akamarantimba kava mu muntu*, which means ‘the greatest sorrow comes from within’ to signify that our ability to survive unusually difficult situations is determined by our inner strength. Without a moment’s hesitation, he responded with another Rwandan proverb, *Agahinda kinkono kamenywa n’uwayiharuye*, which can be translated to mean ‘the sorrow of a cooking pot is understood by he who has scraped its bottom,’ signifying that one can only help someone else by genuinely listening to his suffering.<sup>45</sup>

According to Bagilishya, proverbs are an effective way for Rwandans to communicate suffering in a manner that is comprehensible to their interlocutor.

Similar proverbs feature in a number of the women’s testimonies. For example, Mujawayo uses a proverb to demonstrate that Rwandans, both before and after the genocide, are not typically prone to public displays of emotion: ‘Au Rwanda, un proverbe dicte à l’homme d’avaler ses larmes: *amalira y’umugabo atemba ajya munda*’ (FS 133). Berthe Kayitesi uses a similar proverb to evoke the internalising of suffering when she describes her father:

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commémoration du génocide au Rwanda: Violence symbolique, mémorisation forcée et histoire officielle’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 175 (2004), 575–92, and Chapter 2, ‘Remembering Genocide: Lived Memory and National Mourning’, in Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Déogratias Bagilishya, ‘Mourning and Recovery From Trauma: In Rwanda, Tears Flow Within’, *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37.3 (2000), 337–53 (p. 337).

<sup>44</sup> Bagilishya, ‘Mourning and Recovery From Trauma’, p. 342.

<sup>45</sup> Bagilishya, ‘Mourning and Recovery From Trauma’, p. 341.



‘Comme on dit en Kinyarwanda, les pleurs de l’homme coulent vers le ventre: jamais il n’extériorisait ses peines et même ce passé qui l’avait bouleversé n’a été raconté qu’une seule fois’ (DMV 105). As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Rwanda had long been characterised as what Brent Blair and Angus Fletcher describe as a ‘culture of silence’.<sup>46</sup> To support their argument, Blair and Fletcher provide examples of ‘common Kinyarwandan sayings such as “*amarira y’umugabo atemba agana munda*” (“keep it all inside”) and “*turaririra munda*” (“we cry on the inside”)<sup>47</sup> This is further underlined in Marie-Odile Godard’s observation that ‘les Rwandais sont élevés dans l’idée que toute personne doit garder pour elle sa douleur: ni parole ni pleurs’.<sup>48</sup> In Rwandan culture, then, it would seem that proverbs become a way of communicating pain without talking about the pain itself. However, this creates a space of double distance for the individual who wishes to communicate her pain to a non-Rwandan audience; she must find a way to first talk about and then translate her suffering.

### *Sensory Responses to Trauma*

The use of imagery in Rwandan women’s testimonies is another central strategy in translating their experiences to a Western readership. According to Herman, this is a necessary characteristic of narratives of trauma more generally, for ‘[a] narrative that does not include the traumatic imagery and bodily sensations is barren and incomplete’.<sup>49</sup> Powerful, often contradictory

<sup>46</sup> Brent Blair and Angus Fletcher, “‘We Cry On the Inside’: Image Theatre and Rwanda’s Culture of Silence’, *Theatre Topics* 20.1 (2010), 23–31 (p. 23).

<sup>47</sup> Blair and Fletcher “‘We Cry On the Inside’”, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Marie-Odile Godard, *Rêves et Traumatismes ou la longue nuit des rescapés* (Ramonville Saint-Agen: Éditions érès, 2003), p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 177.

images, predominantly grounded in the realm of the senses, are abundant across the testimonies. When comparing Rwandan survivors' narratives to the works of other African novelists, Norridge claims that,

Even if these writers do not always engage directly with the depths of the suffering they point towards, they do employ narrative strategies to foreground the presence of pain. For example, writers stress the sensory, including sound and smell, in order to ground their experiences of pain within a concrete reality. They also describe surprising and morally ambiguous reactions to pain that add a certain level of realism to the writing and re-emphasise the individuality of experience.<sup>50</sup>

This is certainly true of a number of the women writers in my corpus. For example, Annick Kayitesi's description of cleaning up her mother's blood in the office where she had just been killed is filled with strong sensory imagery:

Je pénètre, hagarde, dans l'ancre de la mort. Sur le sol s'étale une immense mare de sang. Des rigoles rouges et noires ruissellent sur les murs. Partout du sang. Il me faut marcher dans les flaques visqueuses, ça glisse et ça colle aux pieds. À genoux, je dois éponger, gratter, laver. Pas le droit de faire autrement. M'évanouir? De longues heures, j'ai lutté contre la nausée, dans cette drôle d'odeur moite et poisseuse. L'odeur de la mort... Difficile de respirer, impossible de s'habituer, mais, survie oblige, j'ai fini par m'y faire. Sauf que ce sang qui macule tout, ce sang que j'essuie, que j'efface, c'est celui de ma mère. C'est du meurtre de ma mère qu'il s'agit. (NE 111–12)

The physical sensations of Kayitesi's experience – the sight, smell and feel of the blood – are foregrounded in this passage, while the reader can only imagine the depth of emotion she is feeling, which is evoked through repeated reminders that it is her mother's blood. A series of short sentences describing Kayitesi's repression of her emotions further serve to underline the overwhelming horror of the experience: 'J'ai ravalé ma peine. Pleurer ne servait à rien. Seuls les êtres humains le font, je n'en étais plus un. Ma famille s'était éteinte. J'étais seule au monde. J'avais quatorze ans. Les genoux et les mains dans le sang de ma mère' (NE 113). Her description also underlines the

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<sup>50</sup> Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 23.

utter dehumanisation and inhumane treatment of those targeted by the genocidal ideology, leaving the reader to imagine the unbearable nature of what she has been forced to go through.

Similarly, Mukagasana's writing is loaded with references to physical sensations. One of the strongest recurring sensory images that haunts the narrative (and the reader) is the 'odeur particulière' (NP 110) of decomposing corpses. Once Mukagasana has been evacuated into the zone held by the RPF, she is free to 'respirer l'air de mon pays'<sup>51</sup>: 'cet air empesté de la délicieuse odeur de putréfaction. Cela, personne ne pourra jamais le comprendre, que j'aime l'odeur des cadavres. C'est un secret entre les cadavres et moi' (NP 124). The beauty of the country is juxtaposed with the pervasive smell of rotting corpses, which, surprisingly, becomes a comfort to Mukagasana in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, a sort of proof that her people have not been completely destroyed: 'Je respire à pleins poumons l'odeur âcre des cadavres tout alentour. Non, les Tutsi ne sont pas encore tout à fait morts. La preuve, c'est qu'ils puent encore' (NP 123). Sharing this 'secret' deliberately creates a sense of intimacy with the reader and gives an insight into the complex emotions Mukagasana is experiencing. While she claims that the secret is incomprehensible, the reader can in fact begin to understand the ambiguity of her reactions in the wake of such brutality. Mukagasana's intimacy with the bodies intensifies when she tells of actually touching one of the decomposing corpses, having found a massacred family inside a house:

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<sup>51</sup> The image of being able to 'breathe freely' in their country is also a recurring image in both survivor and perpetrator testimonies. As Burnet observes, many Rwandans who had been in refugee camps in Zaire contrasted the 'bad', 'unclean' air of Zaire with the 'clean', 'sweet' air of Rwanda. Rather than a reflection of the air quality in the two countries, Burnet came to understand that these statements were 'an embodiment of refugees' exile. Their bodies rejected their exile status and yearned for the sweet, fresh air of home'. See *Genocide Lives in Us*, p. 57.

Les corps ont commencé à se décomposer. Encore un effet de leur stratégie, à ces morts. C'est une décomposition muette, invisible, que je ne découvre qu'en prenant le bras de la femme. La peau s'est crevée sous la pression de mes ongles, un liquide noirâtre coule tout le long jusqu'au coude, où il s'égoutte patiemment. (NP 113)

Mukagasana makes no reference to the emotion she may have felt at this point, except simply to say 'Je suis découragée, je laisse tomber ce bras' (NP 113), but this sensory experience creates a powerful image for the reader, forcing them to visualise the full extent of the horror. The reader is thus transformed into a sort of visual spectator of the survivor's memories.

While highlighting sensory responses over emotional ones may be an important way for Rwandan women to express their trauma in the aftermath of the genocide, I would argue that, through the use of such graphic imagery, Mukagasana is in fact appealing to the Western fascination with viewing images of other people's suffering, a phenomenon that is described by Patricia Yaeger as the 'consumption' of trauma.<sup>52</sup> Given that the Western reader is the primary addressee of Rwandan women's testimonies published in Europe and North America, Rwandan women must, to a certain extent, employ strategies that make their accounts accessible to the Western audience. As Cubilié notes, for women survivors of trauma and violence across a range of contexts, speaking or writing trauma is 'a necessarily aestheticized project to make themselves understood by whatever audience is witnessing their testimony'.<sup>53</sup> Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw argue that Western society has become accustomed – if not addicted – to representations of extreme pain and suffering and that, 'as readers (or viewers), we follow, fascinated (though as many

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<sup>52</sup> See Patricia Yaeger, 'Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating', in Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, eds, *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 25–51.

<sup>53</sup> Cubilié, *Women Witnessing Terror*, p. 9.

profess disgust), the vogue of violent emotion and shocking events'.<sup>54</sup> The grotesque visual imagery presented in the passage quoted above is akin to depictions of suffering in what Sontag describes as 'shock pictures', which present images of atrocity in aesthetic form.<sup>55</sup> This is highlighted in journalist Philip Gourevitch's portrayal of his encounter with the bodies at the Nyarubuye massacre site during his journey to Rwanda a year after the genocide:

The dead at Nyarubuye were, I'm afraid, beautiful. There was no getting round it. [...] The randomness of the fallen forms, the strange tranquility of their rude exposure, the skull here, the arm bent in some uninterpretable gesture there – these things were beautiful, and their beauty only added to the affront of the place.<sup>56</sup>

Gourevitch's description effectively juxtaposes the aesthetic beauty of the dead with the atrocity of what happened to them. While admitting to finding the bodies 'beautiful', Gourevitch is still exhibiting the engaged response of the secondary witness evoked in Chapter 1. However, given that Western culture has become, in Sontag's words, 'hyper-saturated' with images of atrocity and suffering, there is a strong risk that the Western viewers/readers will become desensitised to such suffering, enabling them to detach themselves from any moral responsibility and leading to a dismissal of the survivors' experiences.<sup>57</sup> This type of dismissal has harmful consequences for the survivor on an individual level but also has implications on a much larger scale, often resulting in the silencing or manipulation of the memory of the genocide.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Miller and Tougaw, eds, *Extremities*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (Chatham: Picador, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 94.

<sup>58</sup> These implications will be addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

### *Addressing the International Community*

The extreme consequences of such a dismissal of another's suffering translate into a feeling of abandonment in survivors' narratives, particularly in terms of the lack of intervention on the part of the international community. While the silence of the international community will be explored in Chapter 4, survivors' reactions to this abandonment are to challenge the Western community and provoke a sense of guilt. For example, Berthe Kayitesi speaks of this injustice at several points in her narrative, particularly in relation to the international humanitarian intervention in refugee camps in Zaire, where many of the perpetrators of the genocide had fled: 'Non seulement la communauté internationale nous avait abandonnés, mais là elle s'occupait de nos tueurs, comme si l'humanité s'adressait aux uns et pas aux autres' (DMV 142). In his analysis of France's involvement in the genocide, Patrick de Saint-Exupéry emphasises how the attention of the international community focused on the refugee situation in Zaire, ignoring the fate of survivors in Rwanda: 'Les fosses communes de Goma furent assimilées à celles du génocide. On ne voyait qu'elles. Les assassins furent métamorphosés en victimes. On ne voyait qu'eux'.<sup>59</sup> It would seem that, in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, the international community had already forgotten the survivors in Rwanda and were focusing their attention on the latest 'vogue', the plight of the refugees. The pain of this dismissal of survivors who were ultimately abandoned to their suffering is a theme that resurfaces numerous times across the testimonies. Indeed, expressing this through their writing is one of the key ways in which survivors create what Hron elsewhere describes as a 'rhetorics of pain'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> De Saint-Exupéry, *Complices de l'inavouable*, pp. 166–167.

<sup>60</sup> See Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 47.

In her study of the works of immigrant writers, Hron highlights a number of rhetorical strategies used to communicate pain, including the use of *epiPLEXis*, ‘posing questions to incite reproach rather than to elicit answers’, and *epimone*, ‘the frequent repetition of a phrase or question for emphasis’.<sup>61</sup> These rhetorical strategies are central to the ways in which Rwandan women address and challenge the international community. A key example of *epiPLEXis* occurs in Mukagasana’s *N’aie pas peur de savoir* in a long passage addressing the mothers of France:

Savez-vous, mères de France que vous êtes trompées, que ceux qui vous disent déplorer notre génocide sont ceux-là même qui l’ont permis? Savez-vous, mères de France, que votre président Mitterrand a soutenu notre président Habyarimana, celui qui a préparé le génocide des Tutsi? Savez-vous, mères de France que vos maris et vos enfants soldats sont venus entraîner les soldats rwandais qui ont perpétré le génocide? [...] Savez-vous, mères de France, que des soldats français commandaient l’armée rwandaise, celle qui préparait le génocide? (NP 119)

Here, Mukagasana’s litany of accusations against the French government and army’s involvement in the preparation of the genocide takes the form of a repeated, ‘savez-vous’, directly addressed to a particular group of French readers. Mukagasana is directly interrogating the French readership about their awareness of the situation and reproaching them for their lack of interest in their government’s involvement in the events of 1994. Moreover, by appealing directly to the ‘mères de France’ from her own position as a mother who has lost her children, Mukagasana is simultaneously calling for empathy on the part of the French reader by forcing them to consider how they would respond in a similar situation, and provoking in them a keen sense of guilt for their inaction.

Annick Kayitesi also uses *epiPLEXis* to draw attention to the ongoing ignorance of the international community: ‘Quand le monde prendra-t-il

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<sup>61</sup> Hron, *Translating Pain*, pp. 48–49.

conscience de ce que mon peuple a enduré?’ (NE 25) Similarly, in *SurVivantes*, Mujawayo uses *epiPLEXis* to reproach the international community for refusing to listen: ‘Tu commences à raconter, raconter, et ils n’acceptent pas d’écouter, c’est terrible. Ils disent: “C’est trop horrible.” Ils disent: “C’est trop, c’est trop...” C’est trop pour qui? C’est trop pour moi ou pour toi qui écoutes?’ (SV 20) She draws attention to the habitual disbelief of the Western audience: ‘dans leur for intérieur, ils se disaient: “Couper en morceaux! Mais tu exagères, ce n’est pas possible...” [...] Tu crois que ce sont des expressions qu’un rescapé peut inventer?’ (SV 90) This type of questioning in fact forces the reader to listen and give credence to the survivor’s narrative, thus combatting the anticipated dismissal of her story.

Mujawayo also questions the nature of the humanitarian intervention in Rwanda, where international aid workers were oblivious to the immediate needs of survivors: ‘Comment ils n’ont pas pu comprendre que la première chose que nous voulions faire, c’était de chercher qui avait survécu?’ (SV 51) She reproaches the fact that even today, international aid is still not doing enough to help Rwandan women survivors: ‘On a sans aucun doute pensé nous aider, et bien faire... Mais, aujourd’hui, par exemple, quels efforts sont réellement faits pour ces femmes rwandaises qui, après le viol, la contamination par le sida, veulent quand même se reconstruire?’ (SV 56) This could be seen as an attempt to raise awareness and urge the reader to take action. As Dauge-Roth notes in his afterword to Berthe Kayitesi’s *Demain ma vie*, his encounter with her testimony and those of other survivors compelled him to become involved with the orphans’ organisation ‘Friends of *Tubeho*’. It



could be argued that, by engaging rhetorical strategies such as *epiplexis*, Rwandan women intend to provoke a similar response in their readers.

Coquio also mentions the work of the association *Tubeho* in her preface to Kayitesi's narrative, underlining the hardships faced by the 'orphelins chefs de ménage' in Rwanda (see DMV 13–15). This echoes the notion of an 'activist framework' described by Schaffer and Smith, which is typical of human rights discourse more generally.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Dauge-Roth's commentary at the end of the testimony, in which he describes the work of Friends of *Tubeho*, reads almost like promotional material for the organisation, even providing the website of the organisation. Short of asking for donations, Dauge-Roth is exhorting the reader to take action and help survivors:

Pour moi, interlocuteur de quelques survivants et lecteur de leurs témoignages, assurer l'accès aux études à ces orphelins est ma réponse, ma façon de m'engager et de réfléchir au rôle que chacun peut jouer dans leur reconstruction. Si cette réponse est aussi susceptible de devenir la vôtre, vous pouvez en savoir plus en visitant le site web de 'Friends of *Tubeho*'. (DMV 297–298)

The numerous problematic issues surrounding the paratextual framing of Rwandan women's testimonies will be examined in depth in the following chapter, but this particular framing of Kayitesi's testimony could be seen here as an appropriation or recontextualisation of her narrative. As Schaffer and Smith observe, 'activist framing may enfold the narrative within the individualist, humanist, and secular frameworks of Western rights, overwriting the customs and beliefs of the victims'.<sup>63</sup> However, this may help the reader to overcome some of their fears when faced with such an extreme story of otherness, of 'ob-scene' experience: 'Some readers may respond to insecurities by enacting empathetic identification that recuperates stories of radical

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<sup>62</sup> See Schaffer and Smith, 'Conjunctions', p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 'Conjunctions', p. 5.

differences into their more familiar frameworks of meaning'.<sup>64</sup> The activist framing of the narrative thus situates the testimony within a more comfortable frame of reference for the target audience, employing a humanitarian discourse that the Western reader would feel more familiar with.

Furthermore, questions are often repeated in the testimonies to create a particular rhetorical effect (*epimone*). Several of the women repeatedly raise the question 'pourquoi?' in an impossible attempt to understand the motivation behind the brutal actions of the *génocidaires*, and why they themselves had been selected for extermination: 'Pourquoi, mais pourquoi avoir voulu nous exterminer ainsi? (SV 215) As demonstrated in Chapter 1, this question is also used repeatedly to highlight their feelings of guilt at having survived their loved ones and the arbitrary selection of who lived and who died: 'Pourquoi moi? Pourquoi est-ce que moi, je ne suis pas morte?' (NE 130); 'Pourquoi eux et pas moi?' (FS 40).

In Mukagasana's *N'aie pas peur de savoir*, there is a clear example of *epimone* when, over the course of several pages, Mukagasana ends each paragraph with the phrase 'Où sont mes enfants?' (NP 64–66) The repetition of this phrase emphasises the extent of her distress and physical anguish at not knowing what has happened to her children. Interestingly, this passage is itself an exact repetition of a passage in *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*. After having demanded to know 'Où sont mes enfants?' (LM 119) when talking with Emmanuelle (the woman who hid her), Mukagasana repeats the question to herself while counting each day she spent in hiding:

Le premier, j'apprends que ma sœur Hilde a été exécutée à la barrière. Elle souriait sous le coup de machette. [...] Je sens une petite bosse sur mon ventre, comme une hernie. [...] Où sont mes enfants?

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<sup>64</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 'Conjunctions', p. 12.

Le deuxième, j'apprends que ma cousine du Kibungu a été exécutée à la barrière. [...] Quelque chose me pique le sein gauche. [...] Où sont mes enfants?

Le troisième, j'apprends que mon frère Népo a été exécutée à la barrière [...]. La nuit, je parviens à uriner quelques gouttes. Où sont mes enfants? (LM 126)

This description covers a period of nine days in total, all recounted in the same manner, giving a summary of the day's deaths, an observation about her deteriorating physical condition, and the constant anxiety of not knowing what has happened to her children. The executions, pain and uncertainty punctuate – and give a certain rhythm to – her experience of the genocide, which the reader in turn feels through her writing. Moreover, the use of the present tense in this passage makes us aware of the disjointed experience of time at the heart of the traumatic experience. By recounting this episode in the present tense, it is as though Mukagasana is reliving the moment when she did not know what had happened to her children. However, at the time of writing her testimony she is acutely aware of the fact that they are dead. And yet the question she poses is still valid in the present, questioning not only what happened to them, the senselessness of their death, but also the physical reality of not knowing where their bodies are. Indeed, Mukagasana repeats this question in the final pages of her second testimony when she describes Emmanuelle's arrival at the airport in Belgium: 'Où sont mes enfants? Pourquoi n'es-tu pas venue avec eux?' (NP 292) Five years after the genocide she still feels their loss acutely, and the sight of Emmanuelle brings those feelings of distress and incomprehension to the surface. This highlights what Waintrater describes as a 'simultanéité des expériences' between the past and present, which 'ajoute encore à la confusion

psychique et au sentiment d'horreur'.<sup>65</sup> Mukagasana's testimony clearly shows us how the survivor of trauma can inhabit both past and present simultaneously.

The passage between past and present is also a common feature in Mujawayo's writing. In her prologue to *SurVivantes*, Souâd Belhaddad describes Mujawayo's 'glissement du temps de l'imparfait à celui du présent, bousculant toute convention des concordances de temps' (SV 11). Belhaddad defines this phenomenon as 'le temps du traumatisme' (SV 11–12), where the survivor's memories of the past are relived in the present:

Presque chaque fois que la période du génocide est évoquée, Esther passe inconsciemment de l'imparfait en début de phrase puis, sous la force du souvenir et surtout celle du traumatisme, au présent. Comme si cette période de l'horreur était, pour tout rescapé, un temps suspendu. (SV 12)

This demonstrates how the experience of trauma continually haunts the present. As Caruth observes: 'The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life'.<sup>66</sup> This continued impact of trauma in the present is crucial to understanding how survivors' perception of time has been radically altered by the traumatic event.

### *Individual Perception of Temporality*

One of the particularities of the traumatic experience is the way in which time is perceived by the individual. Trauma theorists posit that trauma is experienced as a temporal rupture, or what LaCapra describes as 'a shattering

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<sup>65</sup> Régine Waintrater, 'Le temps de l'extrême', *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah*, 190 (2009), 407–26 (p. 409).

<sup>66</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 7.

break or cesura in experience',<sup>67</sup> which often leads to a dissociation from the present. For the survivor, the experience of trauma becomes, in Leys' words, 'fixed or frozen in time' and 'refuses to be represented *as* past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present'.<sup>68</sup> In this manner, the memory of the trauma becomes what Waintrater calls 'un traumatisme infini'.<sup>69</sup> For survivors of the Rwanda genocide, this sensation of infinite trauma is heightened due to the ongoing impact of the genocide on their lives in the present: the end of the massacres does not signify the end of the trauma. As Mujawayo notes in *Survivantes*:

La puissance d'un génocide, c'est exactement cela: une horreur pendant, mais encore une horreur après. Ce n'est pas la fin d'un génocide qui achève un génocide, parce qu'intérieurement, il n'y a jamais de fin à un génocide. Il y a juste arrêt des tueries, des massacres, des poursuites – ce qui évidemment est essentiel – mais il n'y a pas de fin à la destruction. (SV 197)

This echoes the claim made by Laub, writing with Marjorie Allard, that the traumatic experience affects not only the perception of the event itself, but also the past, present, and future. They write:

The event, therefore, not only retroactively affects the past, but it proactively contaminates all previous and subsequent events, compromising the healing ability of post-traumatic experience. The imagery of genocide remains indelible, unassimilated, and paralyzing; it continuously intrudes upon the survivor's thoughts.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, the experience of trauma leads to a sensation of dual temporality, a division between the before and after of the event. As such, Gilmore observes that trauma experienced in the form of mass violence 'can be thought of as injury to the person and to the person's sense of time because it splits time into

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<sup>67</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 186.

<sup>68</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Waintrater, 'Le temps de l'extrême', p. 412.

<sup>70</sup> Dori Laub with Marjorie Allard, 'History, Memory, and Truth: Defining the Place of the Survivor', in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck, eds, *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 799–812 (p. 801).

before and after'.<sup>71</sup> This splitting of time is present in almost all the testimonies in my corpus. For example, Kayitare explicitly refers to the period before the genocide as the 'temps naguère', which she takes pains to explain to the reader: 'Naguère, c'est-à-dire avant le génocide' (TLD 95). Similarly, Berthe Kayitesi speaks frequently of 'l'avant' and 'l'après' (DMV 108).

For the Rwandan women survivors, time is often constructed around an individual personal loss. In *SurVivantes* Mujawayo explains that her sense of time is now based on one crucial event: 'avant ou après la mort d'Innocent' (FS 35). It seems this date, the date of his death, will forever be engrained in her memory: 'Tu es parti trop tôt, Innocent. Parti est cet euphémisme que nous utilisons pour ne pas dire mort. Mais tu es bel et bien mort. Ce samedi 30 avril 1994' (SV 34). Similarly Berthe Kayitesi remembers the date of the death of Félicité Niyitegeka,<sup>72</sup> 21 April 1994, as 'la journée la plus sombre de mon existence' (DMV 114). These acute experiences of personal loss become the defining moments of the genocide. Several of the women speak of the inconsistencies of memory, yet these defining moments remain etched in their memories and shape their stories. For Mukagasana, while other events lose their clarity, the dates of her husband's death and her children's disappearance are engraved in her memory: 'j'ai beau fouiller ma mémoire, je mélange toutes les dates de mon calvaire. Seules sont correctes celles de la mort de mon mari et de mes enfants, 14 et 15 avril 1994' (NP 264). Indeed, for Mukagasana, keeping a record of these life-shattering dates is what initially pushes her to

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<sup>71</sup> Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 92.

<sup>72</sup> Félicité Niyitegeka was a Hutu nun who worked at the Centre Saint-Pierre in Gisenyi and helped persecuted Tutsi to escape across the border into Zaire. She refused to leave those who had sought refuge at the Centre and was killed with them. Berthe Kayitesi had become close to her when she ran away from her family. Kayitesi speaks of her as a friend and role model, her 'braise pour la vie' (DMV 61), and her testimony is dedicated 'À la mémoire de Félicité Niyitegeka' among others. The bravery and death of Niyitegeka is also recounted in Diop's *Murambi* (see pp. 142–44).

write. While she is in hiding under the sink at Emmauelle's house, she finds an empty cigarette packet that she notes the key dates on:

6 avril: assassinat du président de la R.  
13 avril: Joseph est mitraillé à la barrière.  
14 avril: Joseph est achevé. Mes enfants sont torturés.  
15 avril: Mes enfants disparaissent.  
16 avril: Hilde [ma sœur] est assassinée. (LM 126–27)

This allows Mukagasana to construct her own individual chronology of the genocide, unique to her personal experiences. It is interesting to note that, at the beginning of *N'aie pas peur de savoir*, there are two maps, one of Rwanda and one of Kigali. The map of Kigali marks the location of Mukagasana's house, the *paroisse* of Nyamirambo, the house of Colonel Rucibigango, the Hôtel des Mille Collines and the *paroisse* Saint-Paul.<sup>73</sup> In this manner, the key physical sites of 'her' genocide are also traced for the reader.

This emphasis on personal history is also reflected in the ways in which survivors commemorate the genocide. As a representative from AVEGA, Odette Kiyirere, explained to me during an interview in April 2012, each individual has specific dates when they mourn their dead.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, AVEGA helps to organise commemoration ceremonies at the local level on different dates across Rwanda to correspond with the dates of site-specific massacres. According to Kiyirere, while many survivors continue to participate in national commemoration ceremonies, they place more value on the practice of individual and community-level mourning. While the 'forced' nature of

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<sup>73</sup> These locations indicate the principal sites of Mukagasana's personal trajectory during the genocide, including her home neighbourhood (Nyamirambo), the house of her captor (Colonel Rucibigango) and the place she managed to flee to (Hôtel des Mille Collines in the *paroisse* Saint-Paul). Mukagasana was among those who were transported out of the Mille Collines into the zone held by the RPF as part of an exchange of Hutu and Tutsi refugees negotiated by the UN. The UN force commander, Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire, gives an account of these transfers in his book, *Shake Hands with the Devil. The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), pp. 350–51.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Odette Kiyirere, Kigali, 19 April 2012.

national commemoration will be discussed in Chapter 5, it is vital here to examine the personal experiences that structure the survivors' memories of the genocide and their process of mourning. Indeed, like Mukagasana, every survivor has a similar personal chronology of those unforgettable days of horror, and the individual experiences become defining moments in the survivor's reconstruction of her own narrative.

### *Reconstructing the Narrative through Individual Moments*

According to Langer, the traumatic period of a survivor's life is remembered as undigested fragments, composed of 'frozen moments of anguish'.<sup>75</sup> Waintrater elsewhere describes these fragments as 'moments clés' that are fixed in time: 'un instant peut être vécu comme l'éternité, surtout quand cet instant contient en lui le sort d'une personne et de ses proches'.<sup>76</sup> For Herman, it is the reconstruction of these fragments into a whole account that facilitates the process of recovery for the survivor: 'Out of the fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation, patient and therapist slowly reassemble an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical context'.<sup>77</sup> Herman's work as a therapist working with survivors of sexual abuse leads her to conclude that '[t]his work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story'.<sup>78</sup> However, contrary to Herman's model of recovery, Waintrater claims that, for Rwandan survivors, '[c]es moments ne parviennent pas à s'intégrer au continuum de la vie, et demeurent enkystés dans le psychisme du survivant comme autant

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<sup>75</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Waintrater, 'Le temps de l'extrême', p. 408.

<sup>77</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 177.

<sup>78</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 175.



d'îlots d'irréductible étrangeté'.<sup>79</sup> We must therefore examine the extent to which these key moments either remain in the realm of 'traumatic memory' or are integrated into Rwandan women's individual life narratives.

The experience of 'frozen time' manifests itself in several of the Rwandan women's testimonies, where certain memories from the genocide appear like snapshots in the narration, images that have been seared into the memory of the survivors. For example, at the height of the genocide, Kayitare wades into Lake Kivu with the intention of drowning herself and finds a body under the water:

C'est un jeune homme. Il est vêtu de blanc. Mais surtout, il est debout! Debout, sous l'eau, au milieu du lac, et les bras en croix. Il est obsédant de blancheur. Avec son vêtement flottant, il a l'air d'un fantôme. Un fantôme avec des yeux ouverts et qui me fixent. J'émerge, épouvantée. [...] Voilà ce qui m'attend. [...] C'est ma propre mort qu'il vient de m'être donné de voir. (TLD 69)

In describing the encounter with the dead man in this manner, it becomes clear that this is one of the key moments of the genocide for Kayitare, one of the defining moments both in terms of visions of horror and also the confrontation with her own death. The phantom-like figure repeatedly comes back to haunt her as a traumatic symptom: 'Je n'ai qu'un seul trauma, le souvenir récurrent du visage du noyé les yeux grands ouverts, du lac Kivu: il m'apparaît presque chaque soir, au moment de m'endormir' (TLD 101). Moreover, the fact that she recounts this episode in the present tense is significant in underlining the continuing impact of this memory in the present. This is in-keeping with LaCapra's description of the repetitive nature of traumatic memory:

In traumatic memory the event somehow registers and may actually be relived in the present, at times in a compulsively repetitive manner. It may not be subject to controlled, conscious recall. [...] But when the past is uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no difference

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<sup>79</sup> Waintrater, 'Le temps de l'extrême', p. 420.

between it and the present. Whether or not the past is reenacted or repeated in its precise literality, one feels as if one were back there reliving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses.<sup>80</sup>

For Kayitare, the recurring image of the ‘noyé’ demonstrates the uncontrolled recall of the traumatic moment, signifying that the experience has not yet been fully integrated into the psyche.

For Berthe Kayitesi, it is the image of a man who had tried to escape from the cemetery being killed by machetes which is most clearly engrained in her memory:

Je ne m’attendais pas à voir ce que j’ai vu ce jour-là. Il marchait, entre deux tueurs. Ces deux sauvages portant des machettes bien aiguisées, le tenaient. Tout en marchant, ils le frappaient sur toutes les parties du corps, à volonté. Il fut le seul à être tué à la machette. Vivre avec cette image est l’un des plus lourds fardeaux que m’a imposés le génocide. Il ne s’agit pas d’un cauchemar, c’est un souvenir que je vis consciemment sans avoir besoin d’aller fouiller dans ma mémoire. (DMV 120)

The recalling of these key moments is another symptom of trauma exhibited by the individual. Herman divides the numerous posttraumatic symptoms into three broad categories: “hyperarousal,” “intrusion,” and “constriction.” Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender’.<sup>81</sup> The image of the dying man which haunts Kayitesi’s consciousness is typical of the type of intrusion described by Herman. For the traumatised individual, ‘the trauma repeatedly interrupts’: ‘It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during

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<sup>80</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 89.

<sup>81</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 35.

sleep'.<sup>82</sup> While Kayitesi's vision occurs when she is awake, other survivors exhibit different symptoms of intrusion, such as Mukasonga's recurring nightmare described in the opening passage of *Inyenzi ou les Cafards*:

Toutes les nuits, mon sommeil est traversé du même cauchemar. On me poursuit, j'entends comme un vrombissement qui monte vers moi, une rumeur de plus en plus menaçante. Je ne me retourne pas. Ce n'est pas la peine. Je sais qui me poursuit... Je sais qu'ils ont des machettes. [...] Parfois aussi, il y a mes camarades de classe. J'entends leurs cris quand elles tombent. Quand elles... (IC 9)

It is interesting to note that Mukasonga's recurring nightmare of being hunted by the *génocidaires* is not something she actually experienced, as she was not present in Rwanda during the genocide.<sup>83</sup> This serves to underline the possibility for the secondary witness to appropriate another's pain and suffer from a similar level of traumatising, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Unlike the other women, Berthe Kayitesi recounts her defining event in the past tense, which perhaps suggests that she has managed to find a certain amount of critical distance from the event itself. Leys has elsewhere observed that the traumatic event is 'an experience that immersed the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it precluded the kind of specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what had happened'.<sup>84</sup> While it is difficult to gauge the extent to which the traumatic experience has been integrated into the continuum of the individual's life story, we can speculate that Kayitesi has perhaps been more successful in integrating the experience and working through her trauma than the other survivors. Kayitesi's narration

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<sup>82</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> Mukasonga later explains that this dream is also tied to the memory of being chased from school in 1973. See discussion in the previous chapter regarding the levels of witnessing in Mukasonga's testimony.

<sup>84</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, p. 9.

of the genocide contrasts with that of other survivors such as Mukagasana and Kayitare who recount the majority of their narratives in the present tense.

Recounting the past in the present tense lends a sense of immediacy to the story, bringing it into the reader's present as well as the survivor's. Again, in Mukagasana's testimonies, certain 'moments clés' recounted in the present tense stand out from the narration and leave a lasting impression with the reader, in particular the death of Mukagasana's husband:

Deux des hommes sont armés de machette, le troisième d'un gourdin à clous. Ils frappent mon mari, qui s'effondre à nouveau. À nouveau, ils le redressent, l'obligent à marcher. Tout à coup, je vois la main de Joseph tomber sur la piste, coupée net par une machette. Un voile rouge glisse devant mes yeux, je me sens étouffer, je m'évanouis. (LM 85)

This paragraph is repeated almost word for word in *N'aie pas peur de savoir*. Indeed, there are many passages in Mukagasana's second testimony that echo passages from her first testimony as she recounts various aspects of her experience of and her life before the genocide.<sup>85</sup> This undoubtedly reflects the repetitive nature of her memory of the events. Oral historians have observed that telling the story of trauma over and over leads to set rhythms and patterns in the survivor's discourse. This is symptomatic of what LaCapra describes as 'post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes'.<sup>86</sup> Acting out thus involves 'a mimetic relation to the past which is regenerated or relived as if it were fully present',<sup>87</sup> and engenders a collapse of the distinction

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<sup>85</sup> For example, Mukagasana's description of her family before the genocide is identical in both testimonies, but situated at slightly different points in the narrative. Much of the same information is also repeated in Mukagasana's testimony which forms the opening 'prélude' to the Groupov play *Rwanda 94*, albeit in an abridged form, thus confirming the mimetic structure of Mukagasana's telling of her story. See Groupov, *Rwanda 94. Une tentative de réparation symbolique envers les morts, à l'usage des vivants* (Paris: Éditions Théâtrales, 2002), pp. 15–25.

<sup>86</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 45.

between past and present: 'In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene'.<sup>88</sup> For Greenspan, while insistently repeating the story can show that the survivor still has not fully grasped the traumatic memory, repeated telling of the story can also be indicative of the survivor's 'mastery over the memories to be recounted'.<sup>89</sup> It could be argued, then, that in Mukagasana's case, the repetitive nature of her telling is in fact a way of regaining a sense of mastery over her memories and exercising control over her narrative. The vital importance for survivors to regain control over their stories will be highlighted in Chapter 5. Indeed, for Herman, the repeated telling of the story is a necessary part of the process of recovery for the survivor. While Herman's focus is on oral testimonies, we see a similar phenomenon occurring in written testimony which Suzette Henke identifies as 'scriptotherapy': 'the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment'.<sup>90</sup>

Greenspan argues that repeatedly retelling the story is part of the 'processual' nature of the act of testimony which is never 'finished' but always points beyond itself; the very use of the word *testimony* 'suggests a formal, finished quality that almost never characterizes survivors' remembrance'.<sup>91</sup> In his repeated interviews with Holocaust survivors, Greenspan observes that every time a survivor recounts his or her story, this story does not become fixed but changes and grows with each retelling.<sup>92</sup> This can clearly be seen across Mukagasana's two testimonies. The first half of *N'aie pas peur de*

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<sup>88</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 181.

<sup>90</sup> Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. xii.

<sup>91</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> Rather than interview a large number of survivors once, Greenspan's preferred method is to interview a small number of survivors multiple times throughout their lives.

*savoir* closely follows the structure and wording of *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*; the second half goes beyond the timeframe of the first testimony and so is made up of new material. According to Greenspan, these changes can be due to factors such as the different context of the telling (place, audience, etc.), the stage in their life at which the survivor is telling, or the intentions of the survivor. These factors are applicable when considering Mukagasana's and other Rwandan women's written testimonies, where the context of the telling (in a foreign country, several years after the genocide itself), the type of audience (a Western readership) and the intentions of the survivor have altered (not just to recount what happened but also to raise awareness for the ongoing plight of survivors in Rwanda).

With this in mind, a reader of the testimonies may question whether Mukagasana is indeed caught in this 'repetition compulsion'<sup>93</sup> or whether the repetition is a deliberate strategy – either through her own initiative or that of her collaborator – to repeat information almost word for word. As will become clear in the following chapter, the testimonies are not as transparent as they first appear, and there are many deliberate strategies at play in the writing, framing and presentation of the texts. As such, it would seem that the primary intention of Mukagasana's first testimony is simply to bear witness to the genocide itself, while her second testimony deliberately repeats and expands upon this narrative, locating it in a broader context. However, this direct repetition from book to book occurs only in Mukagasana's narratives. One simple explanation for this may be the assumption that the audience is not familiar with *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* and so it is necessary to repeat the information. Most of the other survivors have only written one book (such as

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<sup>93</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 22.

Kayitare, Kayitesi, Umurerwa), while others treat different subject matter in their second book (Mujawayo, Mukasonga). We must thus question the significance of Mukagasana's repetitive structure, whether it is simply for the benefit of the uninitiated reader, or whether it is a deliberate strategy to develop an internal sense of structure in her own narration of trauma. Indeed, as E. Ann Kaplan argues, survivors 'require structures within which often silently endured traumatic experiences can be "spoken" or imaged'.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Greenspan has underlined the individual nature of each survivor's narrative: the way in which each survivor tells and retells their story establishes a distinctive 'voice'. Greenspan argues that, in the repeated telling of their stories,

survivors retell much more than specific incidents they witnessed and endured. They also convey what it is to *be* a survivor – to be a person who has such memories to retell – which includes what it is to be the particular survivor they each, individually, are. In the course of recounting, such self-presentations emerge in various ways: in survivors' direct reflections about who they are and what they have become; in the narrative identity each assumes while retelling; and, most implicitly, in the tones and cadences of their speech itself. Whether directly or indirectly, all these levels convey *who* is speaking when each speaks as a survivor – a dimension of recounting I refer to as each survivor's 'voice'.<sup>95</sup>

Attentiveness to the individual voices in Rwandan women survivors' narratives further highlights the fact that the experience of genocide itself, despite being experienced by a collective group, is in fact deeply personal. The remaining part of this chapter will therefore examine the Rwandan women's individual modes of self expression, their conception – and often rejection – of their identity as survivors, and the ways in which they ground their understanding of their individual experiences within those of the group.

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<sup>94</sup> Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, p. 135.

<sup>95</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, pp. 24–25 (emphasis in original).

*Situating the Individual within the Collective?*

There has been a reductive tendency in Western scholarship to view survivors as the embodiment of the traumatic experience they have lived through. As Des Pres writes of Holocaust survivors:

Their immediate past is collective rather than personal, a past identical for everyone who came through the common catastrophe. Memory and selfhood are rooted, often traumatically, in events which define the individual not as an individual but as a participant in, and the embodiment of, decisive historical experience.<sup>96</sup>

Greenspan shows this to be only a partial understanding of Holocaust survivors' identity; for survivors, 'memory and selfhood *are* rooted in the Holocaust. But they are also rooted elsewhere: in pasts as personal as any of our own'.<sup>97</sup> In order to avoid such a reductive interpretation of Rwandan women survivor narratives, we should consider survivors not so much as emblematic witnesses to the genocide, but as particular individuals whose experiences of trauma are part of a larger, ongoing life story. Indeed, in his study of post-genocide Rwanda, Johan Pottier argues that the complex lives of Rwandan survivors 'cannot be reduced to the fact of their survival'.<sup>98</sup> While the individual experiences can help us to piece together the bigger picture, to better understand the event as a whole, we must nevertheless remain attentive to the personal voices of survivors. As Greenspan notes in his detailed study of Holocaust survivor testimony: 'the most important thing to emphasize is that it *is* individual voices to which we attend. The participants in this gathering speak

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<sup>96</sup> Des Pres, *The Survivor*, p. 217.

<sup>97</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 77 (emphasis in original).

<sup>98</sup> Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 202–3.



not as emblematic witnesses but as particular people, each with his or her distinctive style and tone'.<sup>99</sup>

In the case of testimony bearing witness to the genocide in Rwanda, Norridge notes that survivor narratives are replete with 'individuating gestures' as survivors strive to resist not only 'the homogenizing practices of Hutu propaganda', but also 'the reductive assumptions about African creativity, culture and agency'.<sup>100</sup> Despite the temporal rupture caused by the genocide, Norridge sees these narratives as being 'grounded in a sense of previous continuity and routine'.<sup>101</sup> She gives the example of Mukagasana's *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*, which begins with the customary closing of her dispensary at the end of the day. Thus, while the time frame of Mukagasana's first testimony may appear to be limited to the period of the genocide, her narrative is rooted simultaneously in the experience of the genocide itself but also in her individual life history.

Indeed, the majority of the testimonies by Rwandan women situate their experiences of the genocide as part of a much longer narrative; in other words their accounts are 'life-stories' rather than factual testimonial documents. Berthe Kayitesi, Annick Kayitesi, Esther Mujawayo, Chantal Umuraza, and Marie-Aimable Umurerwa all devote large parts of their narrative to their lives before and after the genocide. For example, the first section of Berthe Kayitesi's *Demain ma vie* is entitled 'Ce qu'était la vie', while Annick Kayitesi describes the 'années bonheur' of her childhood. Like Mukagasana's testimonies, Pauline Kayitare's narrative begins on the first day of the

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<sup>99</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 77 (emphasis in original).

<sup>100</sup> Zoe Norridge, 'Writing against Genocide: Genres of Opposition in Narratives from and about Rwanda', in Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddleston, eds, *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 240–61 (p. 251).

<sup>101</sup> Norridge, 'Writing against Genocide', p. 254.

genocide, but details about her childhood permeate her narrative, and at least a third of her book focuses on her post-genocide life. This type of narrative structuring reflects Greenspan's insistence that 'recounting is always rooted in *two* sets of memories: in meanings and identifications salvaged from recounters' wider life-histories and in the reduction and, finally, dissolution of those meanings within the destruction itself'.<sup>102</sup>

Rwandan women often express the sentiment of being trapped in their identity as survivors. For example, Berthe Kayitesi is conscious that she cannot escape from her 'identité de rescapée': 'Rescapée, je le serai toujours, je ne pourrai m'en défaire c'est sûr' (DV 254). She nonetheless expresses a strong desire for people to see her as a whole person rather than just a 'survivor' of genocide. When she gives testimony in the university where she studies in Canada, she is troubled by how she should present herself to her audience:

il fallait bien choisir ceci ou cela pour me vendre aux étudiants, mais insister sur le fait que je sois rescapée c'était me réduire à un seul état, celui de survivante ou victime. À d'autres moments on me disait qu'on m'aimait pour la personne que j'étais, non à cause de ce que j'avais vécu. (DV 278)

Kayitesi's choice of vocabulary here suggests that, while she does not want to be identified as belonging to the homogenising category of 'victim', she is nevertheless aware of the need to market herself ('me vendre') to a Western audience in order to have her story heard, which echoes the discussion earlier in this chapter about survivors of trauma as products of Western consumption. As suggested in Chapter 1, extremity and survival have become what Luckhurst identifies as 'privileged markers of identity'<sup>103</sup> in Western culture. The label 'trauma' thus gives a political edge to whoever has been through it,

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<sup>102</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 209.

<sup>103</sup> See Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 2.

and can therefore become a rhetorical tool used to find an audience that would not be found otherwise. For Kayitesi, then, it is precisely her identity as a survivor of trauma that gives her the authority to speak and bear witness to the genocide.

Drawing on the work of political scientist Wendy Brown,<sup>104</sup> Hron explores how minorities often establish their subject positions based on their ‘woundedness’; ‘progressively, only those who have suffered have the legitimate right to speak on behalf of the group’.<sup>105</sup> On the one hand, the experience of trauma and suffering gives the individual a certain level of authority to speak. On the other hand, Hron warns that, ‘in this discourse of victimization, experiences of pain become the impetus for creating a subject position, leading to the danger that pain becomes so overinscribed that subject positions are always already determined by it’.<sup>106</sup> This echoes the notion of ‘founding traumas’ evoked elsewhere by LaCapra, which he defines as ‘traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group’.<sup>107</sup>

Given that the dehumanising genocidal ideology ‘aim[ed] to suppress the human and conscious existence of the individual’,<sup>108</sup> insisting on the uniqueness of one’s pain can function as a form of resistance. For example, in Berthe Kayitesi’s *Demain ma vie*, the author is aware that other survivors want to preserve their status as ‘victim’, a position she cannot relate to. She writes that, after the genocide,

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<sup>104</sup> Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

<sup>105</sup> Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 58.

<sup>106</sup> Hron, *Translating Pain*, p. 58.

<sup>107</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 23.

<sup>108</sup> Norridge, *Perceiving Pain*, p. 2.

Beaucoup ont voulu être des vulnérables absolues, pour ne pas dire des victimes, car les victimes nous savons où elles sont. Comme si cette vulnérabilité était une bonne identité, à s'approprier par tous les moyens. [...] C'était le monde à l'envers. J'ai accepté d'être vulnérable, parce qu'il en était ainsi, mais l'être éternellement n'a jamais été dans mes intentions et ne le sera jamais. (DV 253–54)

This self-victimisation highlights one of the many complex responses to trauma prevalent in Rwandan women's testimonies. In this case, Kayitesi cannot comprehend how the vulnerability of the survivor can be a desirable position and so refuses to allow this to become a defining aspect of her own identity, insisting on her own uniqueness and individuality. She also commends other survivors for resisting being subsumed into the status of victimhood, a form of resistance she elsewhere describes in terms of 'resilience' (DV 223).<sup>109</sup> Annick Kayitesi is also acutely aware of the risk of being imprisoned in the identity of victim, and she counters this early in her testimony by stating: 'Si je témoigne, ce n'est pas pour me confiner dans un rôle de victime mais pour briser le pacte d'indifférence et de silence érigé autour de ce génocide' (NE 20). In this manner, Rwandan women are not only writing against the dehumanising discourse of genocide ideology but they are also resisting the constrictive identity of 'survivor' or 'victim' by emphasising the individual.

Mukagasana's position is particularly interesting in this respect. Immediately after the genocide, she admits to believing during the genocide that her suffering was unique, but upon coming into contact with many other survivors in the immediate aftermath, she begins to relate her suffering to that of other individuals: 'C'est bête. Je me prends pour la seule rescapée du monde. Mais je ne suis pas la seule rescapée. Je n'en suis qu'une parmi

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<sup>109</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, Kayitesi has also published academic articles on the different forms of resilience exhibited by survivors. See Kayitesi, 'Revanche et attachement aux disparus comme facteurs de résilience scolaire'; Kayitesi, Deslandes and Lebel, 'Facteurs de résilience chez des orphelins rescapés du génocide'.

d'autres. Et sans doute, une des plus chanceuses. D'autres parmi ces femmes ont dû vivre des heures encore bien plus atroces que moi' (NP 105–6). The comparison of her suffering to others recalls the hierarchisation of suffering discussed in the previous chapter. The fact that a survivor can consider herself to be 'chanceuse' is another of the many complex and unexpected responses to the genocide.

Mujawayo expresses similar sentiments in *La Fleur de Stéphanie* when she writes: 'je suis une rescapée mieux portante que tant d'autres, mais le fond d'horreur de ce génocide que je porte en moi [...] nous est unanimement commun. Aucun d'entre nous n'y échappe' (FS 48). Here, Mujawayo begins to locate her suffering in the collective, a shift which is also emphasised in *SurVivantes* as the widows of AVEGA begin to share their stories and realise they are suffering from the same 'traumatismes': 'aucune d'entre nous ne faisait jamais plus son lit le matin, et chacune pensait que cette incapacité lui était singulière' (SV 203). Indeed the very title of *SurVivantes*, written in the plural form, suggests that Mujawayo is positioning herself within a community of survivors and not simply telling the story of her own individual experiences. This movement from the singular 'je' to the collective 'nous' in Mujawayo's narratives echoes Miller and Tougaw's observation that, '[i]n complex and often unexpected ways, the singular "me" evolves into a plural "us" and writing that bears witness to the extreme experiences of solitary individuals can sometimes begin to repair the tears in the collective social fabric'.<sup>110</sup>

The movement from individual to collective is thus essential for survivors to recreate social bonds and to move forward with their lives, reminiscent of Herman's third and final stage of recovery, 'restoring the

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<sup>110</sup> Miller and Tougaw, eds, *Extremities*, pp. 2–3.

connection between survivors and their community’.<sup>111</sup> As I will show in my final chapter, this movement is the foundation that survivors require to make the transition from *surviving* to *living*. As Mujawayo observes of the community of widows, sharing their experiences becomes a crucial step towards rebuilding their sense of self and developing a feeling of belonging:

Ensemble, nous avons tenté de nous reconstruire, et nous nous sommes reconstruites. Parce que, par hasard, par chance ou par mystère, nous avons échappé à l’innommable, de survivantes, nous avons décidé de devenir vivantes tout court. Cette solidarité féminine nous a été salvatrice. (FS 39)

According to Ricœur, the ‘échange des confiances spécifie le lien entre des êtres semblables’.<sup>112</sup> Without the support of the collective, the lived experiences of survivors would find no meaning. In her analysis of Charlotte Delbo’s play *Who Will Carry the Word?*, Cubilié notes a similar phenomenon emerging through the female characters:

The model of trauma, as Delbo’s characters formulate it, moves from the individual out to the community as each individual recognizes the necessity of speaking and of ties to those around her, both to maintain their connection to history and to the dead and to make the future possible.<sup>113</sup>

This recalls Ricœur’s notion of *mémoire partagée*, which operates between ‘les proches’ – those with familial or close social connections with the individual.<sup>114</sup> For Rwandan women survivors, it is ‘les proches’ in the community to which they belong – such as the group of widows described by Mujawayo – who affirm the survivor’s individual experiences and enable her to share her story; the ‘proches’ thus function as the ‘confirming witnesses’ discussed in the previous chapter. While the role of the ‘proches’ in facilitating

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<sup>111</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, p. 207.

<sup>113</sup> Cubilié, *Women Witnessing Terror*, p. 100.

<sup>114</sup> Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, p. 161.

the telling of the story will be explored in depth in Chapter 5, the next chapter will examine the role of the intermediary figure (in the form of a collaborator) as the enabler of testimony, fulfilling the role of empathic listener the survivor so urgently requires.

After the genocide, many women survivors felt that they did not even have the right to exist. Indeed, the opening sentences of Marie-Aimable Umurerwa's *Comme la langue entre les dents*, are comprised of a series of rhetorical questions which powerfully demonstrate the effacement of her sense of self: 'Suis-je une femmes rwandaise? Suis-je une femme? Suis-je, seulement?' (CL 17) Mukagasana expresses a similar loss of identity in the immediate aftermath of the genocide: 'je ne suis plus une femme rwandaise. Je ne suis même plus une femme' (NP 140). Belonging to a group thus allows survivors to reclaim their existence and have their humanity recognised. As Todorov explains in *Les Abus de la mémoire*, 'la plupart des êtres humains ont besoin de ressentir leur appartenance à un groupe: c'est qu'ils trouvent là le moyen le plus immédiat d'obtenir la reconnaissance de leur existence, indispensable à tout un chacun'.<sup>115</sup> One of the central functions of storytelling, of bearing witness, is therefore not only to rebuild the relationship with the past but also to recreate this lost sense of belonging and looking towards the future.<sup>116</sup> For, as Schaffer and Smith acknowledge, 'storytelling functions as a crucial element in establishing new identities of longing (directed toward the past) and belonging (directed toward the future)'.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Todorov, *Les Abus de la mémoire*, p. 52–53.

<sup>116</sup> These are central elements of Rwandan women's testimonies that will be examined in Chapter 5.

<sup>117</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 'Conjunctions', p. 6.

This chapter has considered how Rwandan women give voice to their experiences, but this question cannot be answered in depth without taking into consideration the conditions under which the act of testimony takes place. As this chapter has shown, the shift from the individual to the collective suggests the need for a dialogic space within which survivors' stories can be shared. Indeed, this dialogic setting is a central focus of my analysis throughout this thesis, and I identify three main forms this dialogic encounter can take: the indirect dialogue between the survivor-witness and the reader, evoked in Chapter 1; the collective storytelling within a group of survivors, which will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5; and the telling that takes place within a process of collaboration. There is a vast difference for individual survivors between sharing their stories with a group of 'proches' and with a Western collaborator, particularly in terms of the conditions of the telling and the type of narrative that emerges. The next chapter will address the difficulties surrounding cross-cultural collaboration, focusing on the complex role of the collaborator. Through an examination of the relationships between Rwandan women survivors and their collaborators, I will demonstrate how such collaboration can facilitate the telling of the story but can also lead to struggles for control over the narrative.



### Chapter 3: Collaborating with the Witness

*Ma parole a été faite livre et le livre parle en mon nom.*  
(Yolanda Mukagasana, *N'aie pas peur de savoir*)

While the first two chapters focused on the figure of the witness and the individual expression of trauma, this chapter will turn its attention to the role of the receiver of testimony in the form of a collaborator. I have already underlined the importance of the engaged reader who acts as witness to the survivor's story. However, it is important to bear in mind that the majority of Rwandan women's testimonies were written in collaboration with another person. A third party is thus added to the writer-reader relationship who mediates the narration as it passes from the former to the latter. In her work on trauma literatures, Tal has put the emphasis on the importance of the act of *writing* for the survivor of trauma.<sup>1</sup> What then of the collaborative testimonies in which the survivor is not necessarily doing the writing, is not in full control of the narrative? Too often in the aftermath of atrocity, survivors are unable to find an audience for their story, resulting in what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun describes as 'a missed encounter between witnesses and those who might have heard'.<sup>2</sup> This 'missed encounter' means the survivor's experiences are not validated, exacerbating the pain and isolation felt by the survivor. In order to overcome the difficulties inherent in communicating the traumatic experience, many Rwandan women survivors have recourse to a co-author or collaborator

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<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction to Tal's *Worlds of Hurt*.

<sup>2</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'Unbearable Witness: Toward a Politics of Listening', in Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, eds, *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 143–65 (p. 144).

to help convey their stories in writing.<sup>3</sup> As Dagenais observes in her discussion of Native American collaborative writing, '[c]ollaboration thus plays a significant role in the writing process of testimonial literature: more precisely, a third party mediates the lived experiences of the autobiographical subject'.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will examine the mediation that occurs in Rwandan women's collaborative testimony, in terms of both the ethical and practical implications.

In essence, collaboration – both literary and nonliterary – 'refers to acts of writing in which two or more individuals consciously work together to produce a common text'.<sup>5</sup> As Linda Karell highlights, the collaborative relationship can take many forms, such as co-authors, writer/editor, and spouse or other companionate relationships. In the case of collaborative testimony, it is the relationship between the survivor-witness and the collaborator or co-author which is paramount. Throughout this chapter I will use the terms 'witness' or 'survivor' and 'collaborator' rather than referring to collaborative 'authors' in relation to my corpus as it is not always clear who is doing the actual *writing*. The position of the collaborator is complex, often fulfilling several roles simultaneously; that of listener, secondary witness, writer and mediator. While very little scholarship to date examines Rwandan collaborative testimony,<sup>6</sup> there is a useful corpus of critical work that focuses on women's collaborative writing, notably Native American and Australian Aboriginal collaborative autobiography (and to a lesser extent, Afro-American autobiography and Latin

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<sup>3</sup> Six of the authors in my corpus have written their testimonies in collaboration with a third party: Pauline Kayitare, Annick Kayitesi, Esther Mujawayo, Yolande Mukagasana, Chantal Umuraza and Marie-Aimable Umurerwa.

<sup>4</sup> Dagenais, 'Trauma, Healing, and Collaborative Writing', p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Linda K. Karell, *Writing Together, Writing Apart: Collaboration in Western American Literature* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. xix.

<sup>6</sup> One example that does is Dauge-Roth's article, 'Testimonial Encounter', which examines Esther Mujawayo and Souâd Belhaddad's collaborative writing.

American *testimonio*), which will help address the collaborative dynamic and its inherent issues of ownership and control.

In his chapter 'Monologue and Dialogue in Native American Autobiography', Arnold Krupat distinguishes between individually written autobiographies and collaboratively produced forms, which he labels 'autobiographies by Indians' and 'Indian autobiography' respectively.<sup>7</sup> We can make a similar distinction in Rwandan women's testimonial literature, with a few of the existing texts being individually written while the majority are the result of some form of collaboration. Drawing on the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, Krupat underlines the importance of collaboration in writing the autobiographies of marginalised individuals in order to 'find ways to let the Other speak for him- or herself, to open one's text to difference, to defer to the authority of alterity, at least to the fullest extent that this is possible'.<sup>8</sup> More recently, scholars such as Dauge-Roth and Weine have applied and developed this dialogic framework in relation to testimonies bearing witness to trauma.<sup>9</sup> This model proposes an open and receptive space in which survivors can tell their stories on their own terms, without the imposition of a legal or medical framework.

Thinking of testimony as dialogue often assumes an encounter between the speaker and listener (such as an interview situation), or between the writer and reader of a written narrative. In this chapter, I will examine the dialogic model as it pertains to collaborative testimonies, in which the dialogic

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<sup>7</sup> See Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1989), p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin*, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> See Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, and Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*: Dauge-Roth examines testimonies bearing witness to the genocide in Rwanda, while Weine examines the testimonies of survivors of political violence, including Holocaust testimonies, testimonies from wartime Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovar testimonies.

encounter occurs between the survivor and the collaborator, and only later between the text and the reader. The dialogic model has implications for both collaborating parties. I intend to show that, for a witness to trauma, collaborative testimony can often facilitate the telling of the traumatic experience where otherwise this telling may not have been possible. Indeed, for the survivor of trauma, the process of collaboration may mitigate the risk of having his or her story rejected, of not finding the audience they require. Moreover, in sharing in the writing of the testimony, the collaborator becomes a ‘secondary witness’ – a notion outlined in Chapter 1 – to the trauma and thus gains a certain sense of shared responsibility or even ownership of the testimony. While this notion of shared ownership can be problematic in terms of who has control over the narrative, I will argue that, with the memory of the genocide still so fresh, many survivors require a collaborator to act as an empathic listener when writing their stories.

An examination of the dates of publication of Rwandan women’s testimonies shows that all the earliest publications were the result of collaborative projects.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, of the testimonies published by Tutsi survivors who were in Rwanda at the time of the genocide, the earliest single-authored testimony did not appear until 2009: Berthe Kayitesi’s *Demain ma vie*.<sup>11</sup> Contrastingly, the three testimonies written by Hutu women give no indication that they were written collaboratively.<sup>12</sup> I do not mean to imply that the testimonies of Tutsi survivors have more value, or that their suffering should

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<sup>10</sup> The earliest being Yolande Mukagasana’s *La mort ne veut pas de moi*, published just three years after the genocide in 1997. See Table 1: List of Publications in the Introduction of this thesis (pp. 13–14).

<sup>11</sup> Scholastique Mukasonga’s *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* appeared in 2006, but for the purposes of the discussion in this chapter I am only looking at direct witnesses of the genocide.

<sup>12</sup> Madeleine Mukamuganga’s *Rwanda, du bonheur à l’horreur. J’y étais...* (2005), Chantal Umuraza’s *La Paix dans l’âme* (2004), and Marie Béatrice Umutesi’s *Fuir ou mourir au Zaïre* (2000).

be of greater concern, but as the direct targets of the genocidal ideology, the trauma they have suffered can perhaps only be expressed belatedly in some form of dialogic encounter. This encounter does not occur in the same manner simply through the act of writing; there is no direct engagement between the witness and the reader if the witness writes the story alone.

According to Dagenais, in collaborative testimony there is first ‘the dialogic encounter between survivor and interviewer/listener (collaborator)’ and second ‘the textual encounter between survivor and reader who perform the act of witnessing’.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, just as we have primary and secondary witnesses, so too can we speak of primary and secondary receivers of testimony. In the case of Rwandan women’s collaborative testimony, the collaborator, who has direct access to the survivor as she tells her story, is the primary receiver of testimony, while the reader of the finished narrative becomes a secondary receiver as she only has access to the mediated text. Without the first dialogic encounter the survivor may be at a higher risk of encountering what Laub and Allard describe as a ‘failure of empathy’, which ultimately results in a ‘profound loneliness’ for the survivor.<sup>14</sup> I would argue, then, that writing in collaboration may be a way of ensuring that the survivor finds the empathic listener she needs to bear witness, thus minimizing what Griffiths calls ‘the muting isolation of trauma’.<sup>15</sup>

### *Testimony as Dialogue*

As we saw in Chapter 1, survivors of trauma are pushed by an imperative of memory to tell their story. This goes beyond a simple desire to tell and is

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<sup>13</sup> Dagenais, ‘Trauma, Healing, and Collaborative Writing’, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Laub with Allard, ‘History, Memory, and Truth’, p. 803.

<sup>15</sup> Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, p. 11.

coupled with a need for recognition, a validation of the story by the listener. Indeed, as Laub and Allard have underlined, it is we, the listeners, who ‘make the witnessing happen’:

Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other* in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*, to somebody they have been awaiting for a long time.<sup>16</sup>

Dauge-Roth further emphasises the importance of the listener in the act of bearing witness in relation to genocide in particular: ‘For those who survived, the task of testifying is a daunting one that should not be confined to the witness alone, but should involve the listeners and be a reflection on the crucial role they play within the testimonial process’.<sup>17</sup> Dauge-Roth’s engagement with survivor testimonies leads him to develop a dialogic model of testimony, which he defines in the following manner:

In the context of genocidal survival and its aftermath, to bear witness represents then the possibility of and the call for a dialogic space where survivors seek to redefine the present meaning derived from the experience of genocide and the weight of its haunting resonance within themselves and their community. In their attempt to re-envision themselves through testimony, survivors move from a position of being subjected to political violence to a position that entails the promise of agency and the possibility of crafting the meaning of who they are [...]. To bear witness is then to generate a social space within which survivors can negotiate and, eventually, reclaim on their own terms the meaning of their survival and assert the demands of the traumatic aftermath they face in order to lighten its disruptive burden.<sup>18</sup>

Dauge-Roth is thus advocating the creation of a ‘social space’ within which the act of testimony can take place, free from the constraints of a legal or medical framework. As discussed in Chapter 1, the very word ‘testimony’ originally had overt legal connotations due to its use as factual evidence in judicial cases.

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<sup>16</sup> Laub with Allard, ‘History, Memory, and Truth’, p. 809 (emphasis in original).

<sup>17</sup> Dauge-Roth, ‘Testimonial Encounter’, p. 168.

<sup>18</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 42.

In a medical context, testimony is often given by traumatised individuals as part of their ‘healing’ process, the listener functioning as therapist. This psychoanalytic conception of testimony conforms to the ‘Western trope of trauma’ which, as Schaffer and Smith explain, privileges certain kinds of stories (such as the ‘healing’ narrative) without taking into account how other cultures understand, configure and respond to traumatic events.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Weine argues that Holocaust testimony in particular ‘has in a way encouraged psychoanalysts and other mental health professionals to assert their authority and to professionalize the experience of testimony’.<sup>20</sup> Weine is critical of the psychoanalytic approach which puts too much emphasis on the ‘authoritative position’ of the (professional) listener.<sup>21</sup> He views this clinical approach to testimony as too narrow and reductive, arguing that testimony should take place in a dialogic space in which authority is shared and the voices of the witness and the receiver ‘speak and listen to one another openly and responsively’.<sup>22</sup>

At the heart of the dialogic model of testimony, then, is the Bakhtinian notion of the reciprocity of discourse:

In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other’. I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Schaffer and Smith, ‘Conjunctions’, p. 10. See also Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, which offers an in-depth discussion of the reparative function of testimony in relation to illness narratives.

<sup>20</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, quoted in Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 4 (emphasis in original).

The notion of reciprocity is central to the act of giving testimony and constitutes what is now commonly known as the ‘pacte testimonial’, which Waintrater describes in the following manner:

Cet accord est un véritable contrat moral entre deux parties: l’engagement éthique du témoignaire à ‘faire tout ce qui est en son pouvoir’ pour protéger et accompagner le témoin fait pendant à l’engagement éthique de celui-ci à dire la vérité, dans une perspective quasi judiciaire. Il est indispensable pour permettre la prise de parole du témoin, qui requiert un climat de confiance et de sécurité affective.<sup>24</sup>

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, for survivors of the genocide, a sense of security – both physical security and in terms of a ‘safe space’ in which to speak – is an essential pre-condition for the act of testimony to take place. Moreover, Waintrater is emphasising here the need for an affective response from the listener, which Langer has elsewhere called ‘sympathetic understanding’.<sup>25</sup>

Drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, Weine goes further to consider the production of testimony to be a dialogic work, in which the receiver of the testimony plays an active role in the construction of the narrative rather than simply listening.

Dialogic work assists in clarifying how the testimony cannot be said to be only a product of the survivor, who of course speaks it, but also of the receiver with whom words, memories, and stories are exchanged. A receiver stimulates and structures what is said (or not) and then documented (or not) and then transmitted (or not). Receivers inevitably want the testimony to adhere to some kind of structure, informed by their own sense of what a testimony ought to be. Therefore the receiver often supplies much of the structure, even if unwittingly.<sup>26</sup>

As such, the testimony is a collaborative construction between the witness and the listener or receiver of the testimony. The dialogic work can help the survivor to make sense of the traumatic experience and give structure to a

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<sup>24</sup> Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*, p. 187.

<sup>25</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 93.



fragmented narrative. Seen in this light, the dialogic encounter can be considered desirable for survivors of trauma, in terms of the production of both oral and written narratives, as it enables them to tell their story to someone and attribute some sort of meaning to their experiences, to have these experiences validated.

This is particularly pertinent for Rwandan women genocide survivor testimonies, as Dauge-Roth explains:

After having been dehumanized as treacherous cockroaches to justify their massacre, survivors exploit the capacity to provoke, negotiate, and revive through testimony a space of encounter and social recognition that is vital. [...] Without a listener 'being there,' there would be no encounter, no shared social space, no promise of belonging.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, for Rwandan women survivors, the listener functions as 'the enabler of the testimony', to borrow Laub's words, and helps to restore the survivor's sense of agency and belonging.<sup>28</sup> As Frank argues, the listener's receiving of the teller's story values not only the teller's experiences but also the teller him- or herself: 'The act of telling is a dual reaffirmation. Relationships with others are reaffirmed, and the self is reaffirmed'.<sup>29</sup>

This is nevertheless a somewhat utopian conception of the dialogic model, and the reality is never quite as straightforward. We must be aware that the form the dialogic encounter takes can shape or alter the witness's story according to the listener's own intentions. Thus, as Weine explains, it is essential to gauge 'to what extent the survivors are telling their stories dialogically in the testimony, and how the receiver has helped or hindered

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<sup>27</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 56.

dialogic exchanges'.<sup>30</sup> As Robyn Fivush points out in her discussion of autobiographical memory:

If our personal past takes on meaning as we share it socially with others, then the ways in which others listen to, hear, and interpret our past has implications for what aspects of the past will be validated. Listeners can accept or dismiss, negotiate, cajole, or coerce particular evaluations over others [...]. Through this jointly constructed version of what occurred and what it means, some aspects of memories are given voice whereas others are silenced.<sup>31</sup>

The listener may – deliberately or unknowingly – exert control not only over the structure of the story (chronology, linearity, etc.), but also over the type of facts that are recounted and the memories that are drawn out or suppressed. This is of vital importance when considering collaborative testimony, for the testimony created in a dialogic setting may be very different from the narrative the survivor constructs alone. Questions are raised as to who has control over the narrative, and how the text is mediated through the presence of a third party. In order to understand what is at stake in the collaborative relationship, it is useful to look to the genre of collaborative autobiography.

Collaborative autobiography is a long-standing phenomenon, but has usually taken the form of 'taped' or 'dictated' autobiography in which the individual subject tells his or her story to another person (the writer) who then records and transcribes what has been said.<sup>32</sup> In this case, the writer remains 'invisible', a sort of 'silent witness' or 'ghostwriter'. As Lejeune summarises in his essay 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas':

Le dispositif du contrat autobiographique a pour effet de faciliter une confusion entre l'auteur, le narrateur et le 'modèle' et de neutraliser la

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<sup>30</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Robyn Fivush, 'Voice and Silence in Autobiographical Narratives', *Reading On: A Journal of Theory and Criticism*, 1.1 (2006), 1–17 (p. 4).

<sup>32</sup> See Beverley, 'The Margin at the Centre', p. 32, and Mark A. Sanders, 'Theorizing the Collaborative Self: The Dynamics of Contour and Content in the Dictated Autobiography', *New Literary History*, 25.2 (1994), 445–58 (p. 445).

perception de l'écriture, de la rendre transparente. Cette fusion s'opère dans la signature autobiographique, au niveau du générique du livre.<sup>33</sup>

The subject's signature on the cover displaces the ghostwriter, resulting in their invisibility, as it does not acknowledge their contribution to the published text. This typically occurs in 'popular' autobiography, particularly when the autobiographical subject is a celebrity.<sup>34</sup> But this type of autobiography is just one of numerous situations in which collaboration takes place. Indeed, Thomas Couser has developed a spectrum of collaboration, placing 'celebrity autobiography', in which 'the subject outranks the writer', and 'ethnographic autobiography', in which 'the writer outranks the subject', at opposite ends of the continuum.<sup>35</sup> Yet in both cases, the writing is intended to be transparent, with the collaborator simply recording the voice of the subject and interfering as little as possible in the construction of the final narrative. As the reader of collaborative testimony must be aware, this transparency can be deceptive, often obscuring the actual process of writing.

Nevertheless, within recent years, as collaborative autobiography has come to be practiced 'with great frequency and openness',<sup>36</sup> there has been a distinct shift towards higher visibility of the collaborative author. Collaborative writers have begun to adopt a more self-conscious approach which, as Susan Forsyth observes,

involves higher visibility for themselves as ethnographers/writers within the text, whilst at the same time allowing their informant to speak for themselves. The whole question of 'authorship' is scrutinized as writers attempt either to displace the monological production in favour of dialogical or polyphonic texts, [...] or to transfer the

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<sup>33</sup> Lejeune, 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas', p. 235.

<sup>34</sup> See Sanders, 'Theorizing the Collaborative Self', p. 445.

<sup>35</sup> See Thomas Couser, 'Making, Taking, and Faking Lives: Ethical Problems in Collaborative Life Writing', in Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, eds, *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 2001), pp. 209–26 (p. 212).

<sup>36</sup> Couser, 'Making, Taking, and Faking Lives', p. 223.

authorship of all or part of the text (or responsibility for it) to the speaking subject.<sup>37</sup>

A visible dialogue or polyphony within the narrative has come to be privileged over the invisible ‘ghostwriter’, whilst simultaneously upholding the ethnographic aim of capturing the authentic ‘voice’ of the autobiographical subject in the writing process.

In collaborative autobiography, as Lejeune suggests, there is often a clear division of labour that takes place in a dialogic setting: ‘Dans le cas particulier de l’autobiographie, l’effort de mémoire et l’effort d’écriture se trouvent assurés par des personnes différentes, au sein d’un processus de dialogue qui a la chance de laisser des traces orales et écrites’.<sup>38</sup> Lejeune distinguishes between the model (who dictates the story) and the recorder (who writes the story), and summarises the distribution of work in the following way:

- Le modèle a pour fonction de dire ce qu’il sait, de répondre aux questions, il est momentanément déchargé de responsabilité. Du seul fait que l’autre écoute, note, interroge, et doit assumer plus tard la composition du texte, le modèle se trouve réduit à l’état de *source*. Il peut se laisser aller à sa mémoire, en étant libre des contraintes liées à la communication écrite.
- Le rédacteur se trouve au contraire investi de toutes les fonctions de structuration, de régie, de communication avec l’extérieur. [...] Condenser, résumer, éliminer les scories, choisir des axes de pertinence, établir un ordre, une progression. Mais aussi choisir un mode d’énonciation, un ton, un certain type de relation avec un lecteur, élaborer l’instance qui dit ‘je’, ou qui a l’air de l’écrire.<sup>39</sup>

While the distinction between the dictator/model and recorder/writer would appear fairly clear-cut – insofar as the dictator/model is essentially responsible

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<sup>37</sup> Susan Forsyth, ‘Writing Other Lives: Native American (Post)coloniality and Collaborative (Auto)biography’, in Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray, eds, *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 144–58 (p. 148).

<sup>38</sup> Lejeune, ‘L’autobiographie de ceux qui n’écrivent pas’, p. 236.

<sup>39</sup> Lejeune, ‘L’autobiographie de ceux qui n’écrivent pas’, p. 237 (emphasis in original).

for the content while the recorder/writer controls the form – both parties nevertheless arrive with an array of assumptions concerning narrative form, voice, content and the overall meaning of the text. They thus engage in what Mark Sanders describes as ‘a dynamic and often conflictive creative process’,<sup>40</sup> which gives rise to a number of ethical problems that both parties must negotiate.

The collaborative relationship can, in theory, be relatively unproblematic. As Couser observes, ‘[t]he vast majority of collaborative life stories result from partnerships that are voluntary, amicable, and mutually beneficial’.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Couser identifies numerous ethical issues resulting from collaboration, due primarily to the nature of the relationship:

Coauthoring another’s life can be a creative or a destructive act, a service or a disservice, an act of homage or of appropriation. The potential for abuse lies partly in something the term itself tends to elide: the process, though cooperative, is usually not in the literal sense a matter of collaborative *writing* (which has its own problems). Rather, some of the difficulty comes from the disparity between the contributions of the two partners. Obviously there are different kinds and degrees of collaboration, but, in most cases, one member supplies the ‘life’ while the other provides the ‘writing’.<sup>42</sup>

While the collaboration should ideally be egalitarian, both parties possess the potential for abuse and/or exploitation. In the case of celebrity autobiography, for example, the writer’s skills are exploited as the model takes all the credit for their work. At the other end of the spectrum, however, it is the model who is most at risk of being exploited, of being misrepresented or having their story appropriated. As my examination of the nature of the individual collaborations will show, Rwandan women’s collaborative testimonies fall at varying points along Couser’s continuum. While in certain testimonies, the clear division of

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<sup>40</sup> Sanders, ‘Theorizing the Collaborative Self’, p. 446.

<sup>41</sup> Couser, ‘Making, Taking, and Faking Lives’, p. 210.

<sup>42</sup> Couser, ‘Making, Taking, and Faking Lives’, pp. 210–211 (emphasis in original).

labour is relatively apparent, in others it becomes difficult to determine whether, and the extent to which, the survivor – or collaborator – is being exploited. Moreover, the vague information offered about the nature of the collaborative relationship often masks struggles for control over the narrative.

Collaboration is perhaps most common when compiling the autobiography of those individuals Lejeune describes as '*ceux qui n'écrivent pas*'.<sup>43</sup> In these cases, the story is narrated orally and 'taped' by the collaborator/recorder who then transcribes (and edits) the narrative. Lejeune gives the example of the autobiographies of what he calls 'les gens du peuple', 'vieux ouvriers à la retraite, paysans, artisans, travailleurs immigrés, etc.', who are unable to write their own story.<sup>44</sup> This description implies that collaboration can be useful when the subject of the autobiography is illiterate or uneducated, and Lejeune claims that the value of their stories derives from the fact that they belong to a culture 'qui se définit par l'exclusion de l'écriture'.<sup>45</sup> We could extend Lejeune's classification of 'autobiographies of those who do not write' to include texts produced by subjects from cultures which have a strong oral tradition, such as Native American, African, or Aboriginal. Yet the majority of Rwandan women who have published testimonies are well educated; as discussed in the Introduction, many of the women hold university degrees and/or professional qualifications. How, then, can we explain their turn to collaboration? According to Coquio, given that literary culture in Rwanda is little developed, writing about the genocide is usually done by a third party: 'Ce rôle du tiers dans la transmission est une constante de l'univers

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<sup>43</sup> Lejeune, 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas', p. 248 (emphasis in original).

<sup>44</sup> Lejeune, 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas', p. 248.

<sup>45</sup> Lejeune, 'L'autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas', p. 248.

génocidaire'.<sup>46</sup> In the context of post-genocide Rwanda, this applies to both fictional texts, such as those produced as part of the Fest' Africa project, and testimonies, such as Hatzfeld's edited collections of both survivor and perpetrator testimonies. In collaborative testimony, the collaborator also functions as the 'tiers' in the writing of survivors' testimonies. As Hron argues, it is usually a Western interpreter or collaborator who is responsible for mediating and editing survivor narratives, claiming that, '[i]n current cultural production, Rwandans thus rarely speak for themselves'.<sup>47</sup>

Hron highlights the potential danger of collaborating with a Western author which may result in the displacement of the survivor's voice. The use of a Western collaborator immediately introduces a power dynamic which potentially places the survivor-witness in a vulnerable position. An imbalance of power between the two contributors creates the potential for abuse: there is a risk of appropriating the survivor's story, or even displacing the survivor's voice in favour of a narrative more acceptable to a Western audience. As Krupat has elsewhere underlined, given the Western tradition of single authorship, we must be wary of 'the hegemony of Western social science as monologically authorized to represent, interpret, or explain (in the languages of the West, in books by single authors, who have written alone in their offices or studies, etc.)'.<sup>48</sup> In the autobiography of marginalised subjects, the Western collaborator may 'seek to impose a single voice as alone authoritative, thus subordinating or entirely suppressing other voices'.<sup>49</sup> This has typically been the case with ethnographic writing in which the Western collaborator exerts

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<sup>46</sup> Coquio, *Rwanda: Le réel et les récits*, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> Hron, 'Gukora and Itsembatsemba', p. 133.

<sup>48</sup> Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin*, p. 137.

<sup>49</sup> Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin*, p. 136.

what James Clifford describes as an ‘ethnographic authority’ over the narrative.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, the majority of Rwandan women’s collaborative testimonies read as single-authored narratives, which suggests that it is not the authoritative (ethnographic) voice of a Western collaborator that is foregrounded but rather that of the Rwandan women survivors. This would appear to imply that the survivors’ narratives have not been deliberately modified or manipulated, and that the collaborator has simply recorded what has been said. Upon closer examination, however, numerous tensions emerge from the texts and, as this chapter will show, some of the women themselves have elsewhere alluded to the problematic nature of the collaboration. Often the real division of labour is unspecified – if it is even acknowledged at all – either in the narrative itself or in the paratextual material. The roles of the collaborating parties become more ambiguous than those of the dictator/model and recorder/writer set out by Lejeune. One immediate problem that arises from this ambiguity is that it is not made clear who is doing the actual writing of the text, leading to an often deceptive level of apparent transparency in the final text. This is particularly problematic in the texts resulting from an interview situation (Mujawayo, Mukagasana, and Kayitare). In these cases, the role of the collaborator is very rarely made explicit and we have no information about how the interviews were conducted nor what questions were asked. In her critique of Hatzfeld’s *Une saison de machettes*, Hron expresses frustration at Hatzfeld’s self-positioning in his collection of testimonies: ‘Hatzfeld never adequately situates his own role in the interview process. [...] He also never adequately explains how he conducted the interviews and, most pertinently,

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<sup>50</sup> See James Clifford, ‘On Ethnographic Authority’, *Representations*, 2 (1983), 118–46.



what questions he asked the killers'.<sup>51</sup> In the analysis which follows, I will examine the complex position of the various collaborators working with Rwandan women survivors, both through the textual framing of the narratives and the narratives themselves in order to identify any potential conflicts arising from the collaborative dynamic.

### *Collaboration in Rwanda Women's Testimonial Literature*

Before discussing the specificities of the individual collaborations, it is useful to look more generally at the choice of collaborator and the manner in which the collaboration is presented. Mujawayo's co-author, Souâd Belhaddad, is a prize-winning author, journalist and interpreter of Algerian origin, living and working in France.<sup>52</sup> Albertine Gentou, who collaborated with Annick Kayitesi, is a French journalist, biographer and author.<sup>53</sup> Patrick May (who collaborated with three authors: Kayitare, Mukagasana and Umurerwa) was a Belgian journalist and author who also published a book on the trial of four suspected *génocidaires* that took place in Brussels in 2001.<sup>54</sup> May died in 2009, before the publication of his final collaboration with Pauline Kayitare. At the end of Kayitare's testimony there is a page dedicated to May which announces his death and also lists his previous publications, both collaborative and individual. As we can see from this brief overview, each of the collaborators is a prominent literary/journalistic figure in their own right, a fact which may

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<sup>51</sup> Hron, 'Gukora and Itsembatsemba', p. 133.

<sup>52</sup> Souâd Belhaddad was winner of the AFJ prize for female journalists in 1994. She has also published several individual works including *Entre-deux Je: Algérienne? Française? Comment choisir?* (Paris: Éditions Mango, 2001), her first book which looks at the situation of French women of Maghrebi origin, and *Algérie, le prix de l'oubli: 1992-2005* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Details of Gentou's work are available on her website: [albertine-gentou.com](http://albertine-gentou.com).

<sup>54</sup> Patrick May, *Quatre Rwandais aux assises belges: la compétence universelle à l'épreuve* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

have contributed to them being chosen for the collaboration. Furthermore, May's expertise and knowledge of Rwanda may account for him being chosen to collaborate with three Rwandan women in writing their testimonies.

For Rwandan woman survivors living in exile, access to the written word and familiarity with publishing procedures may be very limited. Indeed, in his examination of Maghrebi women's co-authored texts in France, Alec Hargreaves observes

the contrast between the inexperience of the primary authors and the more professional involvement of their aides in the media and publishing industries. While each of these books is the first produced by the primary author, for their collaborators it is just the latest in a sequence of texts on which they have worked as professional writers.<sup>55</sup>

The professional collaborator gives the survivor the access she needs to the literary institution. This underlines the importance of choosing a co-author who is already an established author within the culture in which the subject wishes to publish. The choice of an established author as collaborator is typical of *testimonio* more generally, as Beverley underlines:

Because in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, often a journalist or a writer.<sup>56</sup>

This is because the signature of the collaborator may carry more weight than that of the witness who is unknown to the reading public. As my discussion of the individual collaborations later in this chapter will show, while not all the Rwandan women's collaborative testimonies were produced in the oral interview setting described by Beverley, the weight of the collaborator's signature is a primary concern. For the Western reader, the signature of the

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<sup>55</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Testimony, Co-Authorship, and Dispossession among Women of Maghrebi Origin in France', *Research in African Literatures*, 37.1 (2006), 42–54 (p. 47).

<sup>56</sup> Beverley, 'The Margin at the Centre', p. 32.

collaborator (a well-known author or journalist) is ascribed with what Jones refers to as ‘cultural authority’<sup>57</sup> and is consequently assigned more value. It is thus the signature of the collaborator which ultimately authorises or legitimates the narrative.

The choice of a well-known collaborator could be interpreted as a marketing strategy, responding to reader expectations. For example, in her discussion of Yvonne Johnson’s collaborative autobiography, *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*, Jones argues that it is the signature of Canadian co-author Rudy Wiebe, already a celebrated author in his own right, that gives the book authority. Jones shows the inclusion of Wiebe’s name on the front cover (ahead of Johnson’s own name) to be a ‘marketing decision’ as Wiebe possesses both the ‘cultural’ and the ‘discursive authority’ necessary to make the text marketable to a Canadian audience.<sup>58</sup> This also raises more problematic questions about the overall ownership of the text and a possible imbalance of power between the witness and the collaborator. In collaborative autobiography, the placing of the signature(s) on the cover of the book determines the ownership of the final text and is a site of potential conflict. As Hargreaves indicates, the placing of a second signature on the cover and/or title page ‘in a very visible way qualifies or dilutes the ownership of the primary author’.<sup>59</sup>

If we consider Mujawayo and Belhaddad’s co-written works in light of these comments, it could well be argued that Belhaddad’s signature ‘authorises’ the published texts and makes them more marketable to a French(-speaking) audience. Interestingly, despite the cultural status and reputation of

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<sup>57</sup> Jones, ‘*Stolen Life?*’, p. 209.

<sup>58</sup> See Jones, ‘*Stolen Life?*’, p. 209.

<sup>59</sup> Hargreaves, ‘Testimony, Co-Authorship, and Dispossession’, p. 46.

the other collaborators, Mujawayo's testimonies are the only ones where the co-authorship is acknowledged explicitly on the front cover. The fact that both Mujawayo and Belhaddad are named on the cover could suggest a certain equality in the partnership and contributions to the final text. Conversely, the inclusion of Belhaddad's signature alongside Mujawayo's on the front cover could be interpreted as 'diluting' Mujawayo's ownership of the text. However, unlike the case discussed by Jones, Mujawayo's name appears first on both covers. This would appear to demonstrate that Mujawayo has retained primary ownership over her testimony, thus counteracting any power imbalance which may be inferred from their relationship. It is also important to note that Belhaddad herself is of Algerian origin so may herself be a marginal figure in terms of the French literary canon.

As Anne Goldman suggests in her discussion of Latin American women's collaborative autobiography:

Rather than assuming that the manner in which the title page divides responsibility between authority and life history represents the final and only word on the relation between speaker and editor, we need instead to contextualize this assignment of textual ownership with respect to the dialectical process which produces the edited text as a whole.<sup>60</sup>

In the case of Rwandan women's collaborative testimony, it is precisely this dialectical process that is brought to the fore in the textual framing of the narratives and the presentation of the collaboration. The texts of Kayitare, Mukagasana and Umurerwa all acknowledge the collaboration of May on the title page (inside the book). For example, Kayitare's testimony indicates that it was written '*avec la collaboration de Patrick May*'; Umurerwa's testimony was written '*en collaboration avec Patrick May*'. Similarly, Annick Kayitesi's

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<sup>60</sup> Anne E. Goldman, 'Is That What She Said? The Politics of Collaborative Autobiography', *Cultural Critique*, 25 (1993), 177–204 (p. 186).

narrative indicates that it was written '*avec la collaboration d'Albertine Gentou*'. Both Mukagasana's narratives simply have May's name directly below hers on the title page but not on the front cover. The presentation of the collaborators in this manner acknowledges the importance of their contribution to the writing of the final text, whilst clearly designating the Rwandan women as the primary 'authors'.

On the other hand, the wording employed is deliberately vague in terms of the precise nature of the collaboration, making it difficult for the reader to deduce to what extent the finished text is faithful to the original narrative of the survivor. This is particularly problematic in the mediation of the narrative from oral to written form, as is the case with the testimonies resulting from an interview situation (Mujawayo, Mukagasana, Kayitare). The written text has to some extent been 'translated' so that it conforms to conventional literary standards. For example, the language used in the written text may have been standardised as is often the case with both Australian and North American indigenous collaborative writing.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the structure of the narrative may have been modified. A typical example of this would be the reshaping of the events recounted to follow a chronological order. Sanders underlines 'autobiography's insistence upon linear history' which is placed over the model's mode of telling.<sup>62</sup> Carol Boyce Davies elsewhere describes this as the 'ordering imperative' in the production of collaborative texts.<sup>63</sup> To attempt to

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<sup>61</sup> For further discussion on this point see Michael Jacklin, 'Collaboration and Resistance in Indigenous Life Writing', *Australian-Canadian Studies*, 20.1 (2002), 27-45; Colin Johnson, 'Captured Discourse, Captured Lives', *Aboriginal History*, 11.1 (1987), 27-32; and Jones, '*Stolen Life?*'.

<sup>62</sup> Sanders, 'Theorizing the Collaborative Self', p. 448.

<sup>63</sup> See Carol Boyce Davies, 'Collaboration and the Ordering Imperative in Life Story Collaboration', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds, *Decolonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 3-19.

gauge the extent to which the survivors' narratives have been modified, it is important to examine the paratextual material that frames the main text. The textual frames (prefaces, introductions, afterwords, back cover blurbs, etc.) are often the site of information about the collaboration, and also act as 'cues' which prepare the reader before she engages with the narrative itself. Amanda Nettleback highlights the 'ambiguous implications of these textual frames' in her discussion of Australian Aboriginal women's life narratives, particularly as they affect the reception of the texts for non-Aboriginal readers.<sup>64</sup> In interpreting Rwandan women's collaborative testimonies, the reader must therefore be aware of the complexities and struggles involved in the collaborative production rather than reading the text as a transparent monologue.

### *Textual Framing*

As R. D. Theisz indicates in his critical discussion of introductions to collaborative Native American autobiography, there are several points to look for in introductions: 'the manner of the collaboration, the meeting of collaborators, the reason for the existence of the book, the cultural phase and the cultural/geographic region, the type of narrator and the subsequent treatment of the original account'.<sup>65</sup> In the case of Rwandan women's collaborative testimony, this information is in fact addressed across a range of paratextual material, including prologues, prefaces, and appendices, which must all be taken into account. While the amount and type of paratextual

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<sup>64</sup> Amanda Nettleback, 'Presenting Aboriginal Women's Life Narratives', *New Literatures Review*, 34 (1997), 43–56 (p. 49).

<sup>65</sup> See R. D. Theisz, 'The Critical Collaboration: Introductions as a Gateway to the Study of Native American Bi-Autobiography', *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 5.1 (1981), 65–80 (pp. 68–76).

material vary widely from one testimony to another, it is nevertheless important to identify as much information about the collaboration as possible in order to further investigate and understand the collaborative dynamic.

One text from my corpus is particularly problematic in this regard: Chantal Umuraza's *Une jeunesse rwandaise*. Although this testimony has only one named author (Umuraza herself), Marie-Paule Richard indicates in her preface that it was nonetheless a collaborative venture:<sup>66</sup>

Toujours prisonnière de son histoire, de l'histoire de son peuple. Les souvenirs de guerre affluent, les interrogations tourbillonnent dans sa tête, le besoin de les poser, de les écrire s'impose à elle, pour avancer. Une traversée de la peur et de la souffrance qui ne pouvait se faire sans accompagnement. Semaine après semaine je l'ai rejointe, encouragée, écoutée. (JR 11)

Other than this very brief reference to collaboration, the text is presented as a transparent, single-authored testimony, suggesting that ownership of the text lies with Umuraza herself. The fact that Richard's name is not mentioned anywhere else (mis)leads us into treating this as a single-authored testimony. We must thus question the extent of Richard's contribution to the final text and whether that contribution is deliberately being masked. Consulting other sources beyond the published text itself provides evidence that Richard did act as a collaborator for Umuraza, although Richard's description of her role remains vague, stating simply that she had 'accompagné Chantal Umuraza pour la naissance de son récit'.<sup>67</sup> The reference to the 'birth' of the narrative anticipates the metaphorical language used by other collaborators to describe

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<sup>66</sup> Marie-Paule Richard is a French author who has written in a number of genres, including the novel, short stories and poetry. She subsequently self-published a  *récit de voyage*, *Safari au Rwanda: journal de voyage* (Romans-sur-Isère: M.-P. Richard, 2008), which tells of the trip she took to Rwanda with Umuraza.

<sup>67</sup> See [alivresouverts.hautetfort.com/archive/2008/10/31/chantal-umuraza-temoignage.html](http://alivresouverts.hautetfort.com/archive/2008/10/31/chantal-umuraza-temoignage.html).

the act of testimony – for example, the ‘accouchement’ of Kayitare’s story – that will be discussed in my analysis below.

This situation is perhaps not uncommon in collaborative writing more generally. Indeed, critics of collaborative autobiography have observed that many collaborators fail to – or indeed choose not to – specify how the final written narrative was constructed in the paratextual material, or at best address the issue in very vague terms. To return to the case of Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe, for example, Susanna Egan is heavily critical of Wiebe for ‘downplaying his role as mediator’, which, in Egan’s view, ultimately results in a deceptive level of transparency.<sup>68</sup> The reader of collaborative testimony thus needs to be attuned to the fact that the narrative presented to them has undergone a process of mediation, from the original oral narrative to the written text. For, as Couser observes, ‘when mediation is ignored, the resulting text may be (mis)taken for a transparent lens through which we have direct access to its subject (rather than to its author). [...]The problem is that the monological prose belies the very labor-intensive dialogical process by which it was produced’.<sup>69</sup> The issue of unacknowledged mediation is noticeable in a number of Rwandan women’s collaborative testimonies when the nature of the collaboration remains ambiguous.

Of all the Rwandan women’s collaborative testimonies under examination in this chapter, only Mujawayo’s *SurVivantes* and Kayitare’s *Tu leur diras que tu es Hutue* have a prologue and preface respectively which give detailed information about the nature of the collaboration and the division of labour. These more lengthy textual frames will be discussed in depth in the

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<sup>68</sup> See Susanna Egan, ‘Telling Trauma: Generic Dissonance in the Production of *Stolen Life*’, *Canadian Literature*, 167 (2000), 10–29 (p. 22).

<sup>69</sup> Couser, ‘Making, Taking, and Faking Lives’, p. 213.



later sections of this chapter, which examine the collaborations individually. But it is important not to dismiss the other types of paratextual material when searching for clues about the collaboration. Umurerwa's testimony has a short preface written by May, which is primarily historical and does not address their collaboration. Nor do Mukagasana's testimonies contain a preface or any other paratextual material (besides a short *avertissement au lecteur* in the first testimony) that acknowledges the collaboration, but there are a series of *annexes* compiled by and attributed to May that give some historical background and chronological information about the genocide. Similar *annexes* also follow Umurerwa's narrative. While not directly informing us about how the testimony was written, this type of historical material shows that the collaborator has conducted research beyond the story itself. Such supplementary information may well have filtered into the narrative itself, and provides the reader with an understanding of the situation beyond the individual survivor's experiences. As Nettleback argues in relation to Aboriginal women's writing, the inclusion of such contextual information is an editorial decision which 'emphasises the nature of the book as both personal testimony and social history',<sup>70</sup> and is indicative of the aims of the book overall; although whether this is the collaborator's or survivor's express intention (or both) is difficult to determine.

However, while the use of such paratextual material may supplement the information contained in the testimonial narrative by offering a broader history of the genocide, a key problem surrounding this kind of textual framing resides in the fact that the testimony is presented as being culturally 'other'. The fact that all the testimonies are published in France and Belgium is a

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<sup>70</sup> Nettleback, 'Presenting Aboriginal Women's Life Narratives', p. 51.

determining factor in the inclusion of paratextual material; by providing historical and contextual information of this sort the books are clearly addressing the Western reader who is assumed to have little knowledge of what took place in Rwanda. This is elsewhere highlighted by Michael Jacklin in his discussion of Australian and Canadian indigenous life writing: Jacklin expresses concern about ‘the way framing devices such as front cover design, prefaces and introductions, afterwords, and back cover blurbs all function to establish a sense of familiarity for non-Aboriginal readers’.<sup>71</sup> I would argue that the compilation of historical information in the paratextual material also gives intellectual authority to the collaborator who is in a position to inform the reader. The collaborator thus ensures that the overall text conforms to familiar Western modes of discourse so as not to alienate the Western reader. On the other hand, this use of paratextual material could be a deliberate editorial strategy to make the testimony more accessible to the Western reader who is presumably the primary target audience for the testimonial work. This is certainly the case in Mukagasana’s collaborative testimonies, which are deliberately aimed at a Western (French) audience, as discussed in Chapter 2. The intentionality of the collaborating parties can thus be a source of potential conflict and lead to a struggle for control over the narrative. A detailed examination of the individual collaborations will help to determine where this control over the text ultimately lies.

### *Mujawayo and Belhaddad: An Open Dialogue*

While the majority of Rwandan women’s collaborative testimonies do acknowledge the involvement of a collaborator to some degree, Mujawayo and

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<sup>71</sup> Jacklin, ‘Collaboration and Resistance in Indigenous Life Writing’, p. 28.

Belhaddad's co-authored testimonies give the most visibility to the collaboration, both through the paratextual material and within the narrative itself. Belhaddad explains in the preface to *SurVivantes* that the first and third sections of the text consist of interviews that have been transcribed and reworked, while the middle section was written by Mujawayo herself. Belhaddad describes the style of writing in the first section of the book as follows:

Cette séquence s'est faite à partir d'entretiens retravaillés mais auxquels, volontairement, j'ai laissé le ton de l'oral, non pas par effet de style mais afin de traduire au plus près les tremblements, les hésitations, les nœuds et la sidération de cette parole. (SV 10)

The orality of the narrative is made clear through the use of descriptions in parentheses indicating the way in which Mujawayo is speaking (tone of voice, volume, etc.) and where there are silences within the narration.<sup>72</sup> Although Mujawayo's second testimony, *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, does not address the collaboration in the *avant propos*, we can assume that the first part of the narrative at least follows the same process, as there are similar indications of laughter, silence and tone of voice given in parentheses. The fact that Mujawayo and Belhaddad co-authored this second testimony not long after the first, and undertook trips to Rwanda together, points to a successful collaborative relationship and a deep level of trust that has developed between the two women. This echoes the situation of the indigenous life writers and their collaborators analysed by Jacklin: 'The initiation and development of the project, then, seems to be one of genuine reciprocity based on long standing trust and ongoing lived relationships amongst all participants'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The silences within the narrative will be examined in more detail in the fourth chapter of my thesis, *Speaking Silence*.

<sup>73</sup> Jacklin, 'Collaboration and Resistance in Indigenous Life Writing', p. 33.

Through the collaborative construction of the text, the testimony becomes a hybrid between oral and autobiographical literature, with the dialogic encounter between the two women being written into the narrative rather than erased. As Couser underlines, in these kinds of hybrid texts, ‘there is more than one subject, and the act of collaboration may itself be part of the narrative rather than treated in supplementary texts’.<sup>74</sup> Griffiths has elsewhere identified ‘the intersubjective dynamic involved in the creation of testimony after trauma’, specifically in relation to the black female post-traumatic experience across cultural contexts.<sup>75</sup> This intersubjective dynamic is certainly prevalent in Mujawayo and Belhaddad’s dialogic texts. Indeed, in an essay discussing her collaboration with Mujawayo, Belhaddad identifies two distinct subjects in their writing: ‘la part du “je” qui parle et témoigne, et celle du “je” qui écoute et retranscrit’.<sup>76</sup> This echoes Margaret Somerville’s description of the dual nature of collaboration in Aboriginal women’s life histories: ‘It is the interaction of two selves which is critical in producing the final form through which the life is expressed’.<sup>77</sup>

What is not made clear in Belhaddad’s preface to *SurVivantes*, however, is to what extent the interviews have been ‘retravaillés’. This is an ambiguous term which could in fact imply that Belhaddad may have made extensive modifications to the narrative and was in a position to exploit and manipulate the original oral material. However, the fact that Mujawayo wrote a large portion of the testimony herself would lead us to presume that she was

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<sup>74</sup> Couser, ‘Making, Taking, and Faking Lives’, p. 213.

<sup>75</sup> Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Souâd Belhaddad, ‘Être témoin du témoin ou l’Autre, c’est (parfois) moi’, *La Pensée et les Hommes*, 71 (2009), 205–8 (p. 205).

<sup>77</sup> Margaret Somerville, ‘Life (Hi)story Writing: The Relationship Between Talk and Text’, *Hecate*, 17.1 (1991), 95–109 (p. 97).

also able to read over what Belhaddad had written and was thus aware of (and approved) any modifications that might have been made. I would suggest that, given the open recognition of the collaboration and the trusting relationship between the two women, Belhaddad remained faithful to Mujawayo's telling of her story.

One indication as to how the transcribed interviews have been modified is given to the reader through the fact that, while Belhaddad's presence is felt in the way the text is structured, her voice is not present in the narrative. In other words, the text is presented as a monologue rather than a discussion between two people; there are none of Belhaddad's own questions or prompts from the original interviews written into the final manuscript. Although Belhaddad claims to be respecting the oral nature of the testimony, this makes the absence of questions, of the direct dialogue that took place between the two women, all the more striking. It would seem that Belhaddad has written herself out of the narrative in order to foreground Mujawayo's voice.

This in turn contrasts with the interview between Mujawayo and Simone Veil, facilitated by Belhaddad, that is included as an appendix at the end of the text, in which they compare their experiences of surviving trauma and the difficulties survivors face when bearing witness. A similar exchange between Mujawayo and Veil appears at the end of Mujawayo's second testimony, *La Fleur de Stéphanie*. The inclusion of these discussions between a survivor of the Rwanda genocide and such a prominent Holocaust survivor adds another layer to the collaboration. Adding Veil's signature to Mujawayo's testimony appears to be an act of endorsement, seeming to further authorise

Mujawayo's story, particularly in the eyes of a Western readership.<sup>78</sup> This is further strengthened by the fact that both interviews are immediately preceded by the following phrase in parenthesis: 'Cet entretien a été relu par Mme Simone Veil'. This confirms that Veil has given her stamp of approval to the publication, legitimising Mujawayo's experiences of trauma in relation to her own. Moreover, while we must recognise that drawing uncritical parallels between the Holocaust and the Rwanda genocide is problematic,<sup>79</sup> the inclusion of this interview in the paratextual material helps achieve the aim stated by Belhaddad of giving 'une portée universelle' to this narrative of atrocity and suffering, reaching out to a wider public.<sup>80</sup> And yet, this 'portée universelle' may itself be a point of contention for it detracts from the individuality of Mujawayo's own experiences, discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, despite the friendship and reciprocity demonstrated in their collaborative relationship, we must nonetheless question whether there is a certain level of conflict between the intentions of the two women. While Mujawayo's telling of her story foregrounds the specificity of the Rwandan experience, Belhaddad is echoing the Western notion of a universal experience of trauma and suffering discussed in the previous chapter. There is a risk, then, that collaboration may ultimately detract from the particularity of the individual experience of genocide which is so central to Rwandan women's narratives.

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<sup>78</sup> Another level of collaboration is added to Mujawayo's *SurVivantes* in the form of an excerpt from French psychoanalyst Marie-Odile Godard's *Rêves et Traumatismes*, entitled 'Que s'est-il passé au Rwanda?' (SV 299–300).

<sup>79</sup> For further discussion on this topic see Chapter 3, 'The Holocaust: The comparative debate', in Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*.

<sup>80</sup> Belhaddad, 'Être témoin du témoin', p. 206.

*Patrick May: Liberation or Appropriation?*

The relationships between collaborator May and the three survivors he worked with, Pauline Kayitare, Yolande Mukagasana, and Marie-Aimable Umurerwa, appear more ambiguous and unbalanced than that of Mujawayo and Belhaddad. In the earliest text published in collaboration with May, *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*, Mukagasana opens her testimony with the following ‘avertissement au lecteur’: ‘Je suis une femme rwandaise. Je n’ai pas appris à déposer mes idées dans des livres. Je ne vis pas dans l’écrit. Je vis dans la parole. Mais j’ai rencontré un écrivain. Lui, racontera mon histoire’ (LM 13). Immediately there is a clear division between the speaking subject (the witness) and the writer (the collaborator). However, this is the only indication we are given in Mukagasana’s first testimony as to the nature of their collaboration, and without further information we are led to assume that May remained faithful to her original narrative. Yet while May does not appear visibly to interfere with Mukagasana’s narrative, the fact that it is May who is *writing* her story opens the possibility of mediation and manipulation of the story.

It is only in her second testimony, *N’aie pas peur de savoir*, that Mukagasana describes the complex nature of the collaboration during the writing of her first testimony in more detail. For her, the process of bearing witness began before she left Africa when she began writing letters to her friends: ‘Je leur raconte mon histoire. C’est la première fois que j’écris mon histoire’ (NP 236). Later, when her friend Lise suggests that she write her story, Mukagasana admits: ‘Écrire mon histoire? Oui, j’y pense depuis longtemps. Depuis que j’ai écrit ma lettre à Lise de Bujumbura. Non, depuis

que j'étais sous l'évier, chez Emmanuelle. [...] Ce que Lise ne sait pas, c'est que je ne pense qu'à cela' (NP 262). However, she struggles to write her story, seeming to be ill-at-ease with the written word: 'Je passe mes journées à écrire. [...] Mais je ne sais pas écrire. Je sais seulement hurler ma douleur. Et ma rage. De page en page' (NP 264).

Despite writing prolifically, Mukagasana nevertheless repeatedly asserts 'je ne suis pas écrivain'. (NP 236) She explains that it was only after meeting May that 'ma parole a été faite livre' (NP 273). In this manner, May could be seen as liberating the story, helping transform Mukagasana's narrative into a written, publishable text. Mukagasana and May spent several months working intensely together to produce the final manuscript:

Mon écrivain s'est lancé à corps perdu dans le travail. Il reprend tout à zéro. Nous travaillons ensemble tous les jours pendant cinq ou six heures. Nous lisons un chapitre de mon manuscrit, puis mon écrivain me le fait raconter à nouveau, examine mes mimiques, mes réactions, mes chagrins, mes révoltes. Il couvre des centaines de pages de notes. [...] Et la nuit, mon écrivain lit des ouvrages sur mon pays. Notre livre est presque aussitôt en chantier. Mon écrivain rédige la nuit, avec fièvre. Il me téléphone parfois à trois heures du matin pour me demander un détail, quelle tête faisait le colonel Rucibigango lorsque je lui ai rendu sa grenade ou s'il y a des crocodiles dans la Nyabarongo. Son ignorance me fait rigoler, sa passion m'émeut. (NP 272)

Here, Mukagasana states that May's writing of the final text was informed not just by Mukagasana's own recounted experiences but by historical and critical works about the conflict in Rwanda. Thus, elements of other sources may well have been incorporated – either knowingly or unknowingly – into the finished narrative. However, by checking facts with Mukagasana during the writing process, May is giving her authority over the story. This is suggestive of May's desire to remain faithful to Mukagasana's narrative in the writing of the text, foregrounding her lived experiences.



Moreover, Mukagasana's repeated references to May as 'mon écrivain' suggest, on the one hand, that a certain level of intimacy has developed between the collaborators. On the other hand, Mukagasana is also speaking of her collaborator in a possessive manner, suggesting that she is using him for her own ends. Central to the reciprocal process of collaboration is the idea of an exchange. As Hargreaves observes in his discussion of co-authored texts by French women of Maghrebi descent, '[t]he idea of an exchange implies a relationship in which both parties gain'.<sup>81</sup> While Hargreaves questions how much the Maghrebi women subjects have gained from the collaborative venture, I would argue that, in Mukagasana's case, the collaboration has enabled her to fulfil her goal of writing and publishing her testimony in the West. Indeed, the anecdote at the end of the passage cited above is also indicative of the ignorance of a Western audience, an ignorance that Mukagasana expressly wishes to redress through writing her testimony. In the 'avertissement au lecteur' of her second testimony, Mukagasana specifically addresses a French readership in order to educate them about what happened in Rwanda: 'Français, la France ne veut pas savoir. [...] Parce que la France a peur de découvrir qu'elle est coupable de complicité dans le génocide rwandais. Je cherche seulement à vous informer' (NP 13). However, for a survivor of genocide living in exile, this is no easy task. While Mukagasana feels she has survived in order to be able to tell her story, she nonetheless struggles to find a suitable means to do so: 'Je ne veux plus mourir. Je veux témoigner. Je veux me recueillir sur la sépulture de mes enfants et puis témoigner à la face du monde. Mais du diable si je sais comment je vais m'y prendre pour témoigner' (NP 252). For the Rwandan survivor, the desire to

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<sup>81</sup> Hargreaves, 'Testimony, Co-Authorship, and Dispossession', p. 52.

confront a global audience is made possible through the intervention of the collaborator.<sup>82</sup> It is May in his role as mediator who thus provides Mukagasana with a platform to present her testimony to the French reading public.<sup>83</sup> In this manner, Mukagasana and May's collaboration seems less about a struggle for control and more about a mutually beneficial relationship. Their collaborative writing thus approaches the model of 'shared authority' laid out by oral historians.<sup>84</sup> This term is used in oral history work to describe 'the dialogue that defines the interview process itself and the potential for this dialogue to extend outward'.<sup>85</sup> We can see this potential developing from Mukagasana's first testimony, which is restricted to a description of her experiences during the genocide, to her second testimony, which broadens its socio-historical (and temporal) scope and deliberately extends out to a wider Western audience.<sup>86</sup>

The collaboration between Kayitare and May is of a similar nature to that of Mukagasana and May; again it is May who writes the text, after listening to Kayitare recount her story. In both these cases the primary named author (on the front cover) is in fact the 'speaker', while the collaborator is the actual 'writer' of the text. Interestingly, however, neither May nor Kayitare herself makes any reference to the collaborative process, either in the paratextual material or in the narrative itself. It is Belgian journalist Colette

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<sup>82</sup> This echoes Coquio's claim that '[c]'est ici, dans ce désir d'affrontement à une autre échelle, qu'intervient le tiers comme adjuvant décisif dans l'entreprise de témoigner, qu'il rend possible à titre de co-auteur'. See Coquio, *Rwanda: Le réel et les récits*, p. 112.

<sup>83</sup> The desire to challenge the Western reader and break the silence surrounding the genocide in the West will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

<sup>84</sup> This term was coined by Michael Frisch as the title of his 1990 collection of essays, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Linda Shopes, 'Commentary: Sharing Authority', *The Oral History Review*, 30.1 (2003), 103–10 (p. 103).

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion of the temporal scope of survivors' testimonies.

Braeckman who addresses the collaborative process in her preface.<sup>87</sup> She explains that it was in fact she who initiated the collaboration by introducing Kayitare and May with the aim that they work together, which suggests that she too shares a certain sense of ownership over the final text. As a well-known writer and public figure, Braeckman's signature lends weight to Kayitare's testimony and her contribution in the preface adds yet another layer of collaboration to the production of the testimony.

Braeckman describes the nature of their collaboration in the following manner:

Patrick, durant plusieurs semaines, entremêla l'écoute et l'écriture. L'écrivain semblait consumé par une sorte de feu intérieur. Il ne sortait plus guère, il me disait que Pauline avait bouleversé sa vie, que son récit l'habitait, qu'il lui fallait arriver au bout de son texte. [...] Un jour, le téléphone retentit. C'était Patrick, épuisé, triomphant: il était arrivé au bout, la petite avait tout raconté, lui, avait tout rédigé! Le manuscrit était là, écrit à l'arraché, comme si ni l'un ni l'autre n'avaient de temps à perdre. (TLD 10–11)

From this description, it becomes clear that the relationship between Kayitare and May follows the model of the 'dictated autobiography', with a clear distinction between the dictator/model and the recorder/writer. However, Braeckman then goes on to explain how May added to Kayitare's story, creating a text that went beyond the recorded narrative:

Pauline était éclatante, radieuse, comme délivrée. Non seulement le récit livré par Patrick correspondait en tous points à ce qu'elle avait vécu, mais il allait plus loin que l'évènement, il était d'imprégné [*sic*] d'émotions qu'elle ne s'avouait qu'à peine et que le talent de l'écrivain avait pleinement perçues. (TLD 11)

Although we cannot be sure to what extent May modified Kayitare's original narrative, Braeckman suggests that Kayitare herself was not unhappy with the finished manuscript. This implies that she was able to look over the text he had

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<sup>87</sup> Colette Braeckman is particularly involved in news coverage of Central Africa and is author of *Rwanda: Histoire d'un génocide* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

written based on her own oral narrative, and was thus included in – rather than excluded from – the writing and editorial processes, suggestive of an egalitarian rather than an unbalanced relationship between the collaborators.

May is again presented as the enabler or liberator of the testimony. In her preface, Braeckman recounts how Kayitare was suffering from ‘[l]e poids d’une mémoire trop longtemps refoulée’ (TLD 8).<sup>88</sup> She goes on to recall a conversation she had with Kayitare’s husband about Kayitare’s need to find someone to listen to her story:

Ce qui lui manque, c’est quelqu’un qui serait capable de l’‘accoucher’ de ce récit qu’elle porte en elle. Quelqu’un qui aurait assez d’empathie pour la comprendre à demi-mot, assez de modestie pour la laisser parler, assez de talent pour apprivoiser sa parole à elle et la restituer dans sa vérité... (TLD 8–9)

Braeckman implies that the act of testimony has a certain redemptive quality when she claims Kayitare was ‘délivrée’ (TLD 11) upon the completion of her narrative. Similarly, she evokes the therapeutic effects of testimony that she perceives in Kayitare when she states: ‘Depuis que Patrick l’a libérée de ses fantômes, Pauline a retrouvé la sérénité’ (TLD 12). In so doing, Braeckman is highlighting what Nettleback has elsewhere described as the ‘liberatory function’ of personal testimony through collaboration.<sup>89</sup> Braeckman employs the typically Western discourse of trauma and healing, which presumes that a traumatised individual may be ‘cured’. This places the collaborator in a position of power over the survivor, adopting the role of ‘healer’.

Interestingly, however, Kayitare herself has described the collaboration to me in a personal correspondence using a similar discourse of liberation and healing:

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<sup>88</sup> It is interesting to note that Braeckman’s language reflects Kayitare’s own description of the physical weight of loss, the ‘poids insupportable’ (TLD 164), discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>89</sup> Nettleback, ‘Presenting Aboriginal Women’s Life Narratives’, p. 47.

Pendant plus de 17 ans, je n'ai jamais pu dire ni à mon père ni à mon mari avec qui je venais de passer une bonne dizaine d'années. Par miracle, Patrick May est arrivé dans ma vie, il a été mon confident, il m'a aidé à m'approprier de mon identité et assumer mon histoire. Il a su m'écouter jusqu'au bout de ses forces, (il était atteint d'un cancer incurable), je l'ai accompagné dans ces derniers jours, mon livre est son dernier testament professionnel.<sup>90</sup>

Her own interpretation of their collaborative relationship also reinforces May's position as healer, granting him authority over her narrative. The fact that Kayitare describes her book as May's last 'testament professionnel' also indicates his professional and intellectual contribution to the text. Braeckman also refers to the fact that May had already enabled Mukagasana 'd'aller au bout de son extraordinaire témoignage' (TLD 9). This intertextual reference, situating Kayitare's collaborative testimony alongside another of May's collaborations with a Rwandan woman survivor, serves to underscore May's cultural and intellectual authority as an 'expert' on the Rwanda genocide, thus authorising Kayitare's story and validating her experiences in the eyes of the Western reader.

Unlike Kayitare and Mukagasana, Marie-Aimable Umurerwa wrote her own story and chose to approach May simply to 'correct' her manuscript:

J'avais lu le premier livre de Yolande et Patrick May 'La mort ne veut pas de moi' qui m'avait énormément touchée sur beaucoup de points. J'ai cherché Patrick pour qu'il m'aide en corrigeant mon manuscrit. [...] J'avais un manuscrit dactylographié de 160 pages A4. Nous lisons chapitre par chapitre. Il corrigeait la grammaire et la formulation des phrases. Il arrivait qu'il ne parvienne pas à saisir le sens de mes phrases et on les retravaillait ensemble.<sup>91</sup>

While the relationship between May and Kayitare is presented in an idealistic manner, it is clear from Umurerwa's comments that her relationship with May was much more problematic. She claims that they were not in agreement about

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<sup>90</sup> Personal correspondence with Pauline Kayitare, 20 May 2012.

<sup>91</sup> Personal correspondence with Marie-Aimable Umurerwa, 20 June 2012.

a number of issues, primarily the inclusion of historical and explanatory elements in the testimony:

Cela a été un grand débat avec Patrick. Il voulait que j'inclue les éléments historiques dans mon texte prétextant approcher plus facilement un lectorat occidental. Je n'étais pas d'accord; non pas parce que ce n'était pas pertinent, mais parce que je ne voulais pas que mon témoignage soit pris comme/pour une analyse politique. Mais aussi parce que je n'étais pas sûre de maîtriser leur (fondement) véracité.<sup>92</sup>

Moreover, she was not in agreement that his signature should appear on the cover of her book:

Patrick exigeait que son nom soit marqué sur le livre. J'ai eu l'impression qu'il voulait s'approprier mon histoire, alors qu'il n'était (pour moi) qu'un correcteur avisé. Je n'étais pas d'accord non plus. Je n'acceptais pas de sa signature à mon témoignage. La seule solution pour qu'il puisse figurer sur la couverture du livre a été de produire ces éléments et de les signer en son nom.<sup>93</sup>

Umurerwa's experience of the collaboration highlights an awareness of the risk of appropriation. This is the only case where a struggle for control is made apparent. Nevertheless, this tension was only brought to light through personal correspondence with the author and is not alluded to anywhere in the published text. On reading the text, we are encouraged to believe that the collaborative relationship was relatively unproblematic, and that both parties were satisfied with the compromise hinted at in Umurerwa's comments above.

### *Collaboration as Survival?*

Although this analysis has foregrounded the complex and often conflicting nature of collaborative testimony, I believe that the collaborator's importance in establishing a dialogue between the survivor and the Western audience is paramount, particularly in the aftermath of genocide. While the collaboration

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<sup>92</sup> Personal correspondence with Marie-Aimable Umurerwa, 20 June 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Personal correspondence with Marie-Aimable Umurerwa, 20 June 2012.

may be fraught with tensions and underlying struggles, I would argue that it is generally a positive experience for the Rwandan women survivors discussed in this chapter. In her examination of black women's writing bearing witness to trauma, Griffiths underlines the importance of the physical encounter between the survivor and the receiver of testimony. Following the traumatic event, '[a] kind of break between body and language occurs that [...] only a connection to another body can bridge'.<sup>94</sup> The necessity for the survivor of trauma to find an empathic listener in order for the act of bearing witness to take place goes some way towards explaining why so many survivors of the genocide in Rwanda have chosen to tell their stories through a process of collaboration. While the genocide is still a relatively recent event, the pain of its memory still so raw, perhaps the fear of not being heard is still too great; the collaborator provides the survivor with the empathic listener she needs, regardless of the reception of the finished text. Thus the role of the mediator is twofold; on the one hand, sparing the survivor some of the pain of a 'missed encounter' and, on the other, acting as a conduit to the listening public (via access to the publishing industry).

While this chapter has focused primarily on collaborative testimonies, there is one final case that is crucial to highlight here, as it opens up further questions about the necessity of collaboration. Interestingly, while Berthe Kayitesi's testimony was single-authored – Kayitesi claiming that 'le texte m'appartient entièrement'<sup>95</sup> – it was her fortuitous meeting with Coquio that enabled her to publish her story. Kayitesi had been writing a manuscript for about five years, but without any express intention to publish. After meeting

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<sup>94</sup> Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Berthe Kayitesi, Ottawa, 9 October 2012.

Coquio at a conference, she decided to show the manuscript to Coquio who then encouraged her to publish. Coquio describes this meeting in her preface to Kayitesi's narrative. Like May, Coquio is an established author; she is also an academic scholar in France, and her contribution to the final text again seems to endorse and validate the testimony. In an interview with me, Kayitesi suggested that without Coquio's backing and knowledge of the publishing world, Kayitesi would have struggled to publish her narrative alone. She also explained that she knows of other survivors who have written accounts of what they experienced during the genocide, but whose texts have been rejected by publishers.<sup>96</sup> In his study of the ethics of representing those he describes as 'vulnerable subjects', Couser has raised the issue of the control exerted by publishing houses:

After all, not all life writing gets published; life writing is always already monitored by mostly anonymous cultural forces that operate through the literary marketplace. The winnowing process of publishing literally silences many life writers by denying them access to print.<sup>97</sup>

From this we can infer that, in practical terms, at least some kind of collaborative relationship is necessary in order for Rwandan women survivors to make their testimonies public. Moreover, the interest of the market in such material also determines which type of testimonies get published. While there is certainly a market for literatures of trauma in Western culture – due in part to the prominence of the figure of the witness, highlighted in Chapter 1 – there are many other 'anonymous cultural forces' at work which silence Rwandan women's voices, as my discussion in the following chapter will show.

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Berthe Kayitesi, Ottawa, 9 October 2012.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 200.



On a more personal level, Karell perceives collaborative writing as a kind of ‘survival strategy,’ particularly for women.<sup>98</sup> If the telling of trauma is necessary for survival, as Laub and Allard have argued, then collaboration becomes a way of facilitating that telling and enabling survival:

The survivors needed to survive not only so that they could tell their story, they also needed to tell their story in order to survive. The urge to bear witness, to create knowledge in an audience via one’s testimony, is intended ultimately to create knowledge in oneself from which life can proceed.<sup>99</sup>

For survivors of the Rwanda genocide, sharing their stories in a receptive and unthreatening social space is thus a vital part of the ongoing process of survival for, as Dauge-Roth underlines: ‘Surviving implies a daily negotiation that is both personal and collective, where the gesture of passing on one’s pain and the absence of so many relatives who were at the heart of one’s own social identity becomes one of the possible affirmations of one’s survival’.<sup>100</sup> The successful creation of this space depends on an ethical engagement on the part of the collaborator. Although not able to fully identify with the survivor’s experience, the collaborator nonetheless helps create a platform for the survivor’s voice to be heard. This can be seen in Belhaddad’s description of her work with Mujawayo: ‘Dans nos ouvrages, Esther écrivait sur le génocide, moi, j’écrivais autour. Nous étions deux dans l’écriture, deux dans la volonté ferme de transmettre une mémoire, de la rendre universelle, mais elle était seule à la (re)vivre, à la porter’.<sup>101</sup> While the survivor’s experience of trauma remains (at least partially) unknowable to the Western receiver of testimony, it is nevertheless through such engaged dialogic work that we can begin to bridge

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<sup>98</sup> See Karell, *Writing Together, Writing Apart*, p. xxxix.

<sup>99</sup> Laub with Allard, ‘History, Memory, and Truth’, p. 808.

<sup>100</sup> Dauge-Roth, ‘Testimonial Encounter’, p. 168.

<sup>101</sup> Souâd Belhaddad, ‘L’infinie solitude du rescapé’, *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah*, 190 (2009), 397–406 (p. 401).

the gap between the experience of survivors and the Western audience, thus ensuring the transmission of the memory of the genocide.

Despite collaborative attempts to communicate Rwandan women survivors' experiences to a Western readership, the number of published testimonies remains relatively small. This is indicative of the tendency within the West to dismiss survivors' narratives as simply too horrible, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Moreover, survivors continue to be silenced both by the Rwandan government's official narrative and by the indifference of the international community. The next chapter will look at how Rwandan women draw attention to and seek to break the 'culture of silence' that continues to surround the genocide. It will also address the physical manifestations of silence within the testimonies themselves, a silence which, rather than embodying an 'unspeakable' memory, is shown to play an important communicative role.

#### Chapter 4: *Speaking Silence*

*Si je témoigne, ce n'est pas pour me confiner  
dans un rôle de victime mais pour briser le pacte  
d'indifférence et de silence érigé autour de ce génocide.  
(Annick Kayitesi, *Nous existons encore*)*

Despite the presence of an 'enabling' collaborator discussed in the previous chapter, Rwandan women still face many obstacles to making their voices heard, both in Rwanda and in the West. In Rwanda, a 'culture of silence' seems to have been established around the genocide; survivors are only permitted to tell their stories in certain circumstances. As with many postconflict societies, the act of giving testimony in Rwanda is still contested ground. In the current climate of cohabitation and reconciliation, the present situation – including the financial stability, security, physical health and emotional well-being – of each individual survivor determines whether they are able to testify or whether they must keep silent. Most survivors in Rwanda are preoccupied with the daily task of survival and do not necessarily have the time or resources to make artistic or other representations of their experiences. Moreover, many Rwandan women are reticent about testifying, particularly survivors of rape and sexual violence. Besides the shame these women often feel in sharing their personal experiences, the fear of repercussions following the reintegration of former perpetrators into communities can also prevent them from bearing witness.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the silence of the victims motivates the survivor-witness's act of testimony: the survivor-witness is speaking *on behalf of* the silent victims, both dead and living. Those who were killed have left a gaping absence in the lives of the survivors, and their narratives are haunted by this absence. Meanwhile, those who are living continue to be silenced, both by

the dominant discourse in Rwanda and by that of the international community. In this chapter, I intend to examine the continued silencing of survivors both in Rwanda and in exile. I will explore the reasons for this silence, how it is constructed, and how it affects survivors. I hope to show how writing therefore has a double function for women survivors: the act of writing itself is a means of breaking the silence and also of giving form to this silence, testifying to its existence.

My analysis will also examine the physical manifestations of silence within the testimonies in order to show how the leitmotiv of silence has become an integral part of Rwandan women's writing. On the one hand, women write about silence, whether it be the silence of the victims (what Forest terms 'le silence absolu des victimes'<sup>1</sup>) or that of the survivors who are still denied a voice. On the other hand, the texts themselves are punctuated by heavy silences, filled with inexpressible pain and the weight of loss. Through a variety of narrative strategies, the authors are calling on the reader to listen attentively to the silences and accord them meaning. My understanding of silence in this chapter will thus go beyond the traditional binary opposition of language and silence to encompass the multiple meanings of silence in the face of trauma and its representation. I hope to show how silence can become a discourse in its own right, but also how what Laub refers to as the 'boundaries of silence'<sup>2</sup> contained within the narratives themselves contribute to the act of surviving and of resistance.

Before engaging in a closer analysis of the testimonies, this chapter will first develop a reflection on silence in relation to the problematic notion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Forest, 'Quelques notes à la suite de Giorgio Agamben', p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', p. 62.

‘impossibility of testimony’, the ‘unsayable’ at the heart of the traumatic experience. An examination of the use of both Holocaust testimonies and testimonies issuing from other violent events around the world will help us to understand the specificities of the genocide in Rwanda and the ensuing silences. While the context of the genocide in Rwanda was indeed unique, I will argue that Rwandan genocide survivors are nevertheless caught in a position of double impossibility – in which both silence and speech are impossible – similar to that of any survivor of a traumatic historical event.

### *Notion of the ‘Unsayable’*

In models of trauma theory, silence is shown to be a predominant response to trauma and is often equated with the incommunicable nature of pain. This has come to form the basis of the notion of the ‘impossibility’ of testimony bearing witness to trauma, evoked in Chapter 2. Here, it is important to return again to the example of the Holocaust, as this event has been central to the elaboration of theories of testimony’s impossibility. As Agamben notes, the Holocaust is widely perceived as a ‘unique and unsayable’<sup>3</sup> event. Commenting on the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, Agamben observes: ‘At a certain point, it became clear that testimony contained an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to’.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Caruth speaks of the ‘impossible history’ of the Holocaust that haunts the survivor: ‘The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible

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<sup>3</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 13.

history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess'.<sup>5</sup>

Early Holocaust critics such as George Steiner have argued that such an experience belongs outside language altogether. Steiner writes: 'The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the *unspeakable* is to risk the survivance of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth. Words that are saturated with lies or atrocity do not easily resume life'.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Hartman has developed a more nuanced reflection on the linguistic difficulties inherent in representing the traumatic experience: 'Indeed, the shattering of traditional frames of reference also puts in question the resemblance of words, which can become false friends when their task is characterization of the death camp experience'.<sup>7</sup> Hartman is suggesting that communication is in fact possible, but that the survivor-witness and the audience's interpretation of the words are so different that there is a strong risk of misunderstanding. This is highlighted in Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* when Levi explains that simple words such as 'cold', 'hunger' and 'fatigue' acquire a whole new level of meaning to the concentration camp survivor compared to how they are understood in their regular usage.<sup>8</sup> Language thus proves to be inadequate to convey the traumatic experience to others as there is no shared frame of reference or meaning between the survivor-witness and the audience, often resulting in silence on the part of the survivor-witness.

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<sup>5</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958–1966* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985 [1967]), p. 146 (emphasis in original).

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002 [1996]), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, p. 69.

On an individual level, keeping silent is often seen as a form of denial or repression, what Laub refers to as an ‘internal silence’,<sup>9</sup> which can be broken in the act of testifying. Testifying, then, is a conscious decision made on the part of the witness. However, as Laub ascertains, silence rather than testimony is the norm in the context of the Holocaust: ‘To *not* return from this silence is rule rather than exception’.<sup>10</sup> This is because ‘the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling and, therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails’.<sup>11</sup> The survivor-witness is thus caught in a paradox or double bind, as intimated in Chapter 1, between the imperative of memory and the impossible telling of the experience. Beyond the difficulty in communicating the experience of trauma, this double bind is part of what Waintrater refers to as the ‘moral dilemma’ in which the witness to a traumatic historical event is caught, torn between the duty to bear witness (‘devoir de mémoire’) and a silence that is respectful of the dead and the atrocities they have suffered.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Holocaust survivors, as Hartman explains, on the one hand, ‘[e]ven as public recognition of the Holocaust increases, so do charges about exploiting, profaning, or trivializing the suffering. Many of the more sensitive prefer a respectful silence’.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that silence, like the act of testimony, can also be a conscious decision rather than merely a form of repression. For the Holocaust witness, Hartman writes, ‘[t]here is always a decision for or against silence’.<sup>14</sup> Steiner argues that silence may be ‘the only *decent* response’<sup>15</sup> to the violations perpetrated during

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<sup>9</sup> Laub, ‘Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening’, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Laub, ‘Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening’, p. 58 (emphasis in original).

<sup>11</sup> Laub, ‘An Event Without a Witness’, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> See Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Hartman, *The Longest Shadow*, p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Hartman, *The Longest Shadow*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Steiner, *Language and Silence*, p. 15 (emphasis in original).

the Holocaust. Just as the survivor-witness is responding to a moral duty to bear witness, as shown in Chapter 1, it would seem that the decision to remain silent also contains a moral component. Nevertheless, Hartman warns that ‘keeping silent only strengthens those who wish to deny or evade knowledge’.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as LaCapra warns, inherent in the decision to remain silent is the risk of rendering the traumatic event sublime, beyond language. LaCapra defines the sublime as ‘a sort of secular sacred, related to that which goes beyond ordinary experience and is almost, if not altogether, transcendent’.<sup>17</sup> Such a sublimation or sacralisation of the event ‘may prompt a foreclosure, denigration, or inadequate account not only of representation but of the difficult issue of ethically responsible agency both then and now’.<sup>18</sup> As highlighted in Chapter 1, Rwandan women survivors have a moral duty to break the silence surrounding the genocide in order to counter this risk of denigration and to transmit knowledge about the event, however difficult that transmission may be. This is particularly pertinent, for example, in relation to the case of rape survivors in Rwanda. As Zoë Waxman observes:

The decision to remain silent is of course still a decision – it remains the right of every woman to tell her story or not as she chooses. Nonetheless, women can – and do – find themselves silenced. As perpetrators of rape know all too well, rape can silence women in a way that deliberately alienates them from their families and communities.<sup>19</sup>

This silencing of rape victims is a situation deplored by the authors of the published testimonies, who thus assume responsibility to speak on behalf of the silenced victims.

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<sup>16</sup> Hartman, *The Longest Shadow*, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Zoë Waxman, ‘Testimony and Silence: Sexual Violence and the Holocaust’, in Sorchia Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson, eds, *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 117–29 (p. 126).



Furthermore, according too much emphasis to the notion of the inexpressibility of trauma diverts attention from existing testimonial accounts, or from a deeper understanding of the silences contained within these accounts. In *Déportation et génocide*, Wieviorka argues that the notion of the unsayable is in fact a lazy concept in terms of historic research on the Holocaust:

En matière d'histoire, la notion d'indicible apparaît comme une notion paresseuse. Elle a exonéré l'historien de sa tâche qui est précisément de lire les témoignages des déportés, d'interroger cette source majeure de l'histoire de la déportation, jusque dans ses silences.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, in his preface to Geneviève Decrop's *Des camps au génocide*, Pierre Vidal-Naquet agrees that it is too easy to 'se débarrasse[r] du problème posé par le génocide des juifs en le reléguant dans l'impensable. [Le génocide] a été pensé, c'est donc qu'il était pensable'.<sup>21</sup> In relation to the genocide in Rwanda, American journalist Gourevitch argues that words like 'unspeakable', 'unthinkable' or 'unimaginable' are in fact 'words that ultimately were telling you not to speak, think or understand, that they basically are words that get you off the hook and then in a sense give you license for both kinds of ignorance: literal ignorance – not knowing – and ignoring'.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the abundance of existing Holocaust testimonies, those numerous endeavours by survivors to put the unsayable into words despite all obstacles, show this notion of impossibility to be in itself inherently flawed. Michaël Rinn argues that these attempts to communicate the unsayable shake up our conventions of understanding and thinking about language:

Paradoxalement, cette pratique du *dire malgré tout* – malgré la réalité historique inouïe, les insuffisances langagières, les interdits de

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<sup>20</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide: Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1992), p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> Geneviève Decrop, *Des camps au génocide: la politique de l'impensable* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 60.

représentations, etc. – vise à la fois à rendre acceptable ce langage impossible et à bloquer les parcours interprétatifs conventionnels.<sup>23</sup>

According to Rinn, this *mise en langage de l'indicible* serves to reveal 'la dimension outrageusement humaine du processus d'extermination. Ainsi, ce dont les textes parlent ne peut pas être conçu comme une tragédie au sens classique du terme: il nous faut penser ça comme un acte humain'.<sup>24</sup> Rinn urges us to recognise that that which seems unthinkable, inhuman, is in fact a wholly human act. This relates back to the discussion in Chapter 1 of Dauge-Roth's understanding of the 'ob-scene' nature of genocide imposing itself on the reader's cultural scene, forcing the reader to acknowledge the shared humanity of the survivors and perpetrators alike.<sup>25</sup>

While the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and their critics have brought this paradoxical notion of impossibility or unsayability to the fore, it is important to examine how this notion relates to the experience of different kinds of trauma. My analysis of Rwandan women's testimonies in this chapter will show how Rwandan women genocide survivors seem to be caught in a similar double bind. Nevertheless, the specificity of the context of the genocide in Rwanda – and thus the experiences of and responses to this trauma – must be demarcated from that of the Holocaust to avoid a conflation of the two events. As Hron, referring back to Caruth's notion of an 'impossible history', underlines:

The 'impossible history' of the genocide in Rwanda is even more complex. In addition to survivors' experiences, the 'impossible history' of the Tutsi genocide not only includes the horrific events of 1994, [...] it also trans-historically refers back to the 'originary' genocide, the Holocaust. The Tutsi genocide only subsists as a spectre of this 'real'

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<sup>23</sup> Michaël Rinn, 'Rhétorique de l'indicible', in Catherine Coquio, ed., *Parler des camps, penser les génocides* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), pp. 391–400 (p. 391: emphasis in original).

<sup>24</sup> Rinn, 'Rhétorique de l'indicible', p. 391 (emphasis in original).

<sup>25</sup> See Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 83.

genocide. The history of the genocide in Rwanda thus always, and, more ostensibly, reflects the hegemonic history of the West.<sup>26</sup>

Hron goes on to argue that Western critical discourse tends ‘to theorize the genocide in Rwanda in the terms of generic “limits of representation”’ rather than trying ‘to analyze the Rwandan genocide in its socio-cultural, historical or political *specificity*, or to delineate the *particularity* of the Rwandan experience’.<sup>27</sup> In order to avoid falling into such a generic analysis, I will now move away from the Holocaust to look at other historical and cultural interpretations of silence, and show how silence has come to take on multiple resonances and meanings in situations of conflict and violence around the world. By developing a more nuanced understanding of silence in a variety of contexts, I hope to be able to shed light on the silences occurring in the context of the genocide in Rwanda and its aftermath in particular.

### *Thinking About Silence*

Broadly speaking, silence has traditionally been considered the absence of language, particularly in Western culture where, as Cheryl Glenn points out, ‘speech is synonymous with civilization itself’.<sup>28</sup> In this context, where language is accorded supremacy, ‘[s]ilence is subordinate to speech; it is speech that points out silence and points to the silence within itself’.<sup>29</sup> Glenn urges us to move away from this simplified understanding of the relationship between silence and language and instead imagines ‘an interpretative framework of speech and silence in a reciprocal rather than an oppositional

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<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Hron, “‘But I find no place’: Representations of the Genocide in Rwanda”, in Colman Hogan and Marta Marin-Dòmine, eds, *The Camp: Narratives of Internment and Exile* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), pp. 196–224 (p. 198).

<sup>27</sup> Hron, “‘But I find no place’”, p. 212 (emphasis in original).

<sup>28</sup> Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), p. xii.

<sup>29</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. 3.

relationship. The spoken and the unspoken reciprocate as they deliver often complementary rhetorical significance'.<sup>30</sup> Expressed somewhat differently, André Brink also suggests a more fluid understanding of the relationship between language and silence in his discussion of South African literature bearing witness to apartheid:

Silence is not to be thought of as an opponent or an adversary; it is not simply the 'other' of language. If words are indeed, from a certain point of view, wrested from silence, it is equally true that silence may be read to inhere in language itself. This provides a clue to the kind of dialogic writing I have in mind: a coexistence of silence and the word. If all writing demonstrates the tension between the spoken and the unspoken, the sayable and the unsayable, these elements of the dialogue should not be seen as opposites in a binary equation, but at most as end points on a sliding scale – the kind of notion fuzzy mathematics would express in a scale *between* 0 and 1.<sup>31</sup>

Just as scholars such as Dauge-Roth and Weine view testimony as a dialogic 'encounter', Brink is hinting here at another form of dialogic encounter, between silence and language, within the written texts themselves, a relationship that comes to the fore in Rwandan women's testimonies, as my analysis below will demonstrate.

Before examining the particularities of language and silence within the testimonies, it is important to lay out the approaches to silence that have been developed in recent scholarship. In her detailed study of how silence is embedded in our language, society and institutions, Robin Patric Clair distinguishes first a literal approach, which views silence as the space between words; an epistemological approach based on the phenomenon of tacit knowledge; and an ontological approach which asserts that silence is a

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<sup>30</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> André Brink, 'Interrogating Silence: New Possibilities Faced by South African Literature', in Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, eds, *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 14–28 (p. 14: emphasis in original).

characteristic of life itself. To these approaches Clair adds the *ideological* approach which illuminates the ways in which certain discourses silence marginalised groups of people.<sup>32</sup> This last approach views silence as ideological, not only as a powerful aspect of oppression but also as a possible means to emancipation. My own exploration of silence within Rwandan women's testimonies will combine elements of the literal and psychological perspectives, examining the interplay between words, silence and absence in the texts. These testimonies are inhabited by a palpable tension between the spoken and the unspoken. They also confront the issue of the continued ideological silencing of survivors in present-day Rwanda, something that I shall address in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

For marginalised groups who have been silenced by dominant groups, silence can take on multiple meanings. Silence does not only signify oppression; it can also become a self-contained form of resistance, defiance of authority, or even a form of empowerment. As Benita Parry writes: 'Within the discussion of colonial and postcolonial discourse, silence has been read as a many-accented signifier of disempowerment and resistance, of the denial of a subject position and its appropriation'.<sup>33</sup> We need to be aware of the complexities of these silences, as well as their cultural and political specificities for, as Leslie Dwyer argues in her discussion of post-1965 Bali, '[s]ilence, like speech, is a cultural and political creation that takes place in

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<sup>32</sup> See Robin Patric Clair, *Organizing Silence: A World of Possibilities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Benita Parry, 'Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J. M. Coetzee', in Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, eds, *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 149–65 (p. 152).

particularly contoured setting'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, as Rosalind Shaw reminds us in her exploration of the silence following Sierra Leone's war,

there are different kinds of silence. The silences of those who live under political repression, of a torture survivor in the face of incommunicable pain, [...] of women in South Africa's TRC who wish to tell their stories on their own terms, and of survivors of Sierra Leone's conflict who urge others to 'forgive and forget' are the outcomes of disparate processes of social memory and forgetting.<sup>35</sup>

Shaw criticises Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission for treating the survivors' silences only as repression and incommunicable pain without taking into account other types of silence.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, in his work on the anthropology of genocide, Robben explains that while silence may indeed occur among survivors of genocide and mass violence, 'as a deliberate strategy or a defensive reaction against experiences too painful to admit to consciousness', it is more often a form of agency, something which is consciously negotiated. In this case, 'Silence is not the inability to articulate the inexpressible or a form of unconscious resistance to insight, as classic psychoanalysis would have it, but a muteness that emphasizes remembrance, truth, and accountability'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Glenn warns that 'silence is too often read as simple passivity in situations where it has actually taken on an expressive power'.<sup>38</sup> It is precisely these 'expressive powers' of silence that come to the fore in Rwandan women's testimonies. Yet these testimonies also emphasise what I would describe as the 'repressive power' of silence involved in the

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<sup>34</sup> Leslie Dwyer, 'A Politics of Silence: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali', in Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O'Neill, eds, *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 113–46 (p. 134).

<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Shaw, 'Displacing Violence: Making Pentecostal Memory in Postwar Sierra Leone', *Cultural Anthropology*, 22.1 (2007), 66–93 (p. 89).

<sup>36</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone ran from 2002 and 2004 and, like South Africa's TRC, was intended to document the human rights abuses inflicted during the country's 11-year civil war.

<sup>37</sup> Robben, 'The Imagination of Genocide', p. 326.

<sup>38</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. xi.

various processes of social memory and forgetting in post-genocide Rwanda. While the issues related to national remembrance in Rwanda will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis, it is important at this stage to bring to light the different types of silence present in Rwandan women's testimonies and how these silences manifest themselves in and through the narrative.

### *Gendered Silence*

At this stage, it is necessary to consider that which is specific about women's experiences of violence and the silences ensuing from these experiences, in order to show the ways in which silence and gender are inextricably linked. In *Les Femmes et la guerre*, Gagnon poses the question that is central to this chapter: 'Comment écrire le silence des femmes?'<sup>39</sup> Implicit here is the claim that there is a specific form of silence belonging to women, that silence, like experience, is in fact gendered. Clair links the historic silence of women in Western culture back to early theories of the origins of language, theories which 'not only marginalized silence, but also marginalized women'.<sup>40</sup> This has resulted in the 'invisibility of women in language',<sup>41</sup> which has helped to strengthen Western belief in 'women's natural silence'.<sup>42</sup> In her study of silence as a rhetorical art, Glenn demonstrates how the silence of women has emerged as a socio-historic concept over the centuries, arguing that 'silence has long been considered a lamentable essence of femininity, a trope for oppression, passivity, emptiness, stupidity, or obedience'.<sup>43</sup> However, as Glenn effectively argues, this silence is not so much a condition of femininity as an

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<sup>39</sup> Gagnon, *Les Femmes et la guerre*, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Clair, *Organizing Silence*, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Clair, *Organizing Silence*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. 2.

imposition by a dominant (male) social group on a weaker one: 'Throughout Western social history, all people gendered feminine (or weaker) have been systematically muted if not silenced'.<sup>44</sup> It would appear that this notion of gendered silence is not limited to the West but is a condition of social history throughout the world, particularly in relation to women's experiences of conflict and violence. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, women across the globe have historically been the 'victimes muettes' of war.<sup>45</sup>

Women's experiences of violence and conflict have constantly been obscured from history by the dominant discourse. Silence – be it an imposition or an act of resistance – has thus become central to women's lived experiences of violence and their interpretation of these experiences. Glenn suggests that 'silence may well be the most undervalued and *under*-understood traditionally feminine site and concomitant rhetorical art'.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore important to make sense of and give value to the silences of marginalised women. According to Fiona Ross in her analysis of South African women's testimonies given at the TRC hearings,

women's 'silence' can be recognised as meaningful. To do so requires carefully probing the cadences of silences, the gaps between fragile words, in order to hear what it is that women say. Words can be weapons; giving voice to the voiceless, the specific aim of the Commission, assumes, perhaps patronisingly, that the world is knowable only through words and that to have no voice is to be without language, unable to communicate. The testimonies reported here suggest otherwise.<sup>47</sup>

Given that the TRC in South Africa, like other judicial institutions, is controlled by the State, Ross argues that, 'through their silence, women

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<sup>44</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> See Gagnon, *Les Femmes et la guerre*, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Glenn, *Unspoken*, p. 2 (emphasis in original).

<sup>47</sup> Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 50.



testifiers continue to resist an incursion of the state, perhaps now benevolent, but an incursion nevertheless'.<sup>48</sup> This underlines the importance for women survivors to be able to speak about their painful memories on their own terms for, as Ross explains, 'the forms of speech required in public interventions [...] may involve speaking from a position that does not necessarily do justice to the self'.<sup>49</sup> This echoes Sorcha Gunne's discussion of the effects of bearing witness at the South African TRC on women survivors of rape:

To speak about rape in a space that is disempowering does not constitute healing. Silence in the context of the TRC, therefore, becomes a narrative strategy of protest to negotiate agency and reclaim subjectivity for those who have suffered sexual violation. The failure of the TRC as a ritual process was, to some degree, a failure to hear these silences.<sup>50</sup>

Gunne points to the restrictions placed on survivors testifying in a legal setting, and underlines the need for a 'safe space' within which the survivors can tell their story on their own terms, a necessary condition for bearing witness that will be addressed in Chapter 5.

In the Rwandan context, testimony itself is gendered. Interestingly, in the current climate of post-genocide Rwanda, researchers have found that women genocide survivors are more willing to talk about their experiences than men. As Coquio observes in her preface to Berthe Kayitesi's *Demain ma vie*, the production of written testimonies is primarily being undertaken by women: 'Production où les femmes, plus enclines à témoigner que les hommes, jouent un rôle décisif – comme c'est le cas dans la société rwandaise aujourd'hui' (DV 11). That women are playing an active role in the rebuilding

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<sup>48</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p. 59.

<sup>49</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> Sorcha Gunne, 'Questioning Truth and Reconciliation: Writing Rape in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* and Kagiso Lesego Molepe's *Dancing in the Dust*', in Sorcha Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson, eds, *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 164–80 (p. 168).

of the country and in the transmission of the memory of the genocide is telling of an unprecedented ‘engagement féminin’ in Rwanda and throughout the Rwandan diaspora. Alain Goldschläger compares the position of Rwandan women to that of women Holocaust survivors:

Contrairement à la situation de la *Shoah* où très peu de femmes (et principalement d’anciennes résistantes) ont pris la plume juste après la fin de la guerre, les Rwandaises furent celles qui parlent. L’effet cathartique de la parole répond sans doute à un besoin primordial pour ces victimes d’une politique déclarée d’utilisation du viol et des sévices sexuels comme outil de génocide.<sup>51</sup>

The Rwandan women who have published testimonies have refused to remain silent about their own and other women’s experiences – speaking particularly on behalf of women who are unable to speak out such as survivors of rape and sexual abuse – and are reclaiming a sense of agency. Nevertheless, the vast majority of survivors, both in Rwanda and throughout the diaspora remain silent/silenced. An examination of the framework in which this silencing occurs can help us to understand the causes (both internal and external) of this ongoing ‘cultural silencing’.

### *Cultural Silencing in Rwanda*

While trauma theory would encourage us to believe that silence is a predominant reaction to the traumatic experience, Fujii found when conducting fieldwork in Rwanda, ‘[g]enocide survivors were usually quite willing to talk about their experiences of violence’.<sup>52</sup> This willingness to discuss a traumatic experience is not what we are led to expect from Western models of trauma theory, where silence and repression are shown to be dominant responses to

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<sup>51</sup> Alain Goldschläger, ‘Témoignages des victimes: modes opératoires’, *La Pensée et les Hommes*, 71 (2009), 127–134 (p. 133).

<sup>52</sup> Fujii, ‘Shades of Truth and Lies’, p. 235. Other scholars have also highlighted Rwandan women survivors’ willingness to talk. See, for example, Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*.

trauma. It would seem that, in the case of the genocide in Rwanda and its aftermath, it is less a question of silence on the part of the survivors than of *silencing*, a notion which Dauge-Roth appropriately calls ‘cultural silencing’<sup>53</sup>. Mujawayo’s two testimonies are particularly enlightening on the question of cultural silencing in Rwanda. In *SurVivantes*, Mujawayo describes how survivors kept silent in the months following the genocide, and how, in the current climate of reconciliation in Rwanda, they are once again being silenced. She explains how, after the genocide, the survivors quickly began to be perceived as an inconvenience: ‘Je pourrais dire, en une phrase, pourquoi, rescapé, on s’est tu après le génocide: on sentait qu’on dérangeait’ (SV 20). Survivors were – and continue to be – a ‘disturbing presence’,<sup>54</sup> both for the former *génocidaires* and for the Tutsi returning from exile after the genocide:

Au Rwanda, on nous dit aujourd’hui: ‘On en a assez parlé’. On est coincés, nous les rescapés, entre les Hutu, nos voisins de toujours qui nous ont tués, et les Tutsi, nos frères qui sont rentrés d’exil après plus de trente ans, après les vagues de massacres de 1959 et de 1973, qui ont toujours rêvé de rentrer au Rwanda mais ne s’attendaient pas à y revenir marchant sur les cadavres. (SV 19)

For the latter group, the much dreamed-of homecoming was tainted by the horrific circumstances in which it occurred (a civil war and genocide) and survivors were a constant reminder of this. Survivors are thus encouraged to stop talking about the past and move on with their lives. In this respect, the experience of Rwandan survivors in the aftermath of the genocide is reminiscent of the situation of Holocaust survivors described by Yael Danieli:

After liberation, as during the war, survivors were victims of a pervasive societal reaction comprised of obtuseness, indifference, avoidance, repression and denial of their Holocaust experience. Like other victims, survivors’ accounts were too horrifying for most people

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<sup>53</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> See Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 92.

to listen to or believe. [...] Like other victims, they were also told to ‘let bygones be bygones’ and get on with their lives.<sup>55</sup>

Survivors in Rwanda were silenced – and continue to be silenced – on multiple fronts, by those who perpetrated the genocide, by those returning to Rwanda after the genocide, and by the wider community who did not want to hear their stories of atrocity.

Moreover, in post-genocide Rwanda, survivors silence their experiences in order to be able to cohabit with the former *génocidaires*. For example, as former perpetrators come to the end of their sentences and are released back into the community, it often becomes unsafe for survivors to speak out about what happened for fear of repercussions. As one survivor whose testimony is included in the edited collection *The Men Who Killed Me* remarks: ‘My neighbours don’t want me to testify at the *gacaca* courts, because most of the perpetrators will be leaving prison any day now. I live in a neighbourhood with many *génocidaires* and I am afraid for my safety’.<sup>56</sup> This decision to remain silent is a coping mechanism Susanne Buckley-Zistel describes as ‘chosen amnesia’:

to choose amnesia serves a particular function deriving from particular needs of the present. [...] *Amnesia* is hence *chosen* as opposed to coerced, since it signifies less a public denial than a coping mechanism to avoid antagonisms and to be able to live peacefully. Remembering to forget is thus essential for local coexistence.<sup>57</sup>

While Buckley-Zistel speaks of *choice*, this term is problematic given the *necessity* of survivors to remain silent on certain issues in order to achieve

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<sup>55</sup> Yael Danieli, ‘Preliminary Reflections from a Psychological Perspective’, in Theo van Boven, Cees Flinterman, Fred Grünfeld, and Ingrid Westendorp, eds., *Seminar on the Right to Restitution, Compensation and Rehabilitation for Victims of Gross Violations of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (Maastricht: Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, 1992), pp. 196–213 (p. 197).

<sup>56</sup> De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me*, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> Susanne Buckley-Zistel, ‘Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 76.2 (2006), 131–50 (p. 132: emphasis in original).

peaceful local coexistence. Moreover, survivors often risk their own lives by speaking out against the *génocidaires*. Mujawayo's *La Fleur de Stéphanie* describes how, very soon after the genocide, survivors who broke the silence began to be eliminated: 'Cette réalité-là, la contrainte au silence des rescapés sous peine de mort, est rarement relayée, que ce soit à l'intérieur du pays ou à l'étranger. Par clanisme ou par certitude idéologique, les génocidaires, eux, ont beaucoup parié sur la mutité installée sur les collines' (FS 74). Thus, the particular 'amnesia' at work in post-genocide Rwanda resembles rather what Luisa Passerini describes as *imposed* amnesia. As Passerini argues, in such circumstances, silence can be a way of preserving a memory and projecting it into the future. The traumatic memory is not spoken until it is safe to do so. In this case, silence is connected with remembering rather than forgetting: 'there can be memory within silence and memory through silence'.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, as Dauge-Roth explains, cultural silencing is a form of 'symbolic violence' enacted on the witness by the audience who is unable to hear her story and cuts off the speaker before she has finished. This silencing constitutes a form of cultural resistance on the part of the audience to the encounter with the 'ob-scene', 'with what is culturally excluded, a disruption that is – and should remain – beyond the realm of what is commonly accepted as legitimate'.<sup>59</sup> As Mujawayo writes: 'Les gens ne pouvaient pas supporter d'entendre, c'était trop pour eux. Trop quoi, je ne sais pas. Tu commences à raconter, raconter, et ils n'acceptent pas d'écouter, c'est terrible. Ils disent: "C'est trop horrible." Ils disent: "C'est trop, c'est trop..."' (SV 20). To show

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<sup>58</sup> Luisa Passerini, 'Memories Between Silence and Oblivion', in Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 238–54 (p. 248).

<sup>59</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 48.

the extent of this cultural silencing and its effects on survivors, Mujawayo gives the example of her friend Alice, whose story was particularly disturbing to listen to and who was therefore frequently met with a refusal to listen: ‘Il y a parfois des histoires que personne ne veut ou ne peut écouter jusqu’au bout, comme par exemple, celle d’Alice’ (SV 21).

Quand Alice racontait son histoire, on l’arrêtait toujours quand elle arrivait au moment des bébés qui pleuraient et qu’elle ne pouvait pas prendre avec elle, dans le trou où elle avait été jetée vivante parmi les cadavres. Ce moment, c’était trop horrible pour les gens et on l’arrêtait au milieu parce que c’était trop dur. ‘C’est trop horrible, arrête!’ Mais c’est encore plus horrible pour elle de ne pas terminer. Alice, son histoire, elle a jamais pu la raconter jusqu’au bout. (SV 23)

Dauge-Roth observes that Mujawayo mimics the censoring of Alice’s story by leaving it unfinished in the first chapter of her own narrative, but finally telling it to the end in a later chapter – ‘Pour une fois, raconter l’histoire d’Alice jusqu’au bout...’ – devoted to Alice’s story: ‘By doing so, Mujawayo’s testimony performatively undoes the cultural silencing Alice faced each time she tried to testify’.<sup>60</sup>

While this form of cultural silencing often occurs on an individual level, it also occurs on a national – and even international – scale. Indeed, in post-genocide Rwanda, survivors are only permitted to tell their story in a certain context. As Mujawayo emphasises in her discussion of the widows’ organisation AVEGA, despite their need to talk about their experiences, survivors were only at liberty to discuss the genocide amongst themselves:

Au début d’Avega, on se rencontrait seulement pour parler du génocide. Parler, parler, parler, parler, que de ça, que de ça, que de ça. Se raconter comment chacune avait survécu, qui y était passé, qui on avait perdu. Mais on n’en parlait qu’entre nous. Avec les autres – au travail, dans le voisinage, en famille – on se taisait. (SV 77)

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<sup>60</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 46.

In post-genocide Rwanda, survivors are also being silenced by the official government discourse. As Buckley-Zistel explains, ‘in present memory, some aspects – most notably past tensions between Hutu and Tutsi – are eclipsed from the discourse’.<sup>61</sup> This underlines the double character of memory in Rwanda: while the memory of the genocide is omnipresent (through the existence of memorials, commemorations, etc.), certain aspects of the genocide are being erased/excluded from collective memory. Vidal claims that the official commemorations in fact serve the ideological projects of the current government: ‘la commémoration figure le désastre en construisant une histoire officielle qui tend à interdire, supplanter ou refouler, selon les situations, une connaissance libre et plurielle de ce qui s’est passé’.<sup>62</sup> As will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, through a ‘selective’ use of survivor testimonies, the government ‘ne retient que certaines victimes, ou encore les hiérarchise, ce qui revient à exercer symboliquement une violence supplémentaire à l’égard des victimes exclues ou marginalisées’.<sup>63</sup> While Vidal focuses primarily on the exclusion of Hutu survivors from official ceremonies, I would also add widows and survivors of rape and sexual abuse to Vidal’s category of excluded and marginalised victims.<sup>64</sup> However, rather than a result of the government’s efforts to control the history of the genocide for its own political agenda, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, the marginalisation of

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<sup>61</sup> Buckley-Zistel, ‘Remembering to Forget’, p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> Vidal, ‘La commémoration du génocide au Rwanda’, p. 575.

<sup>63</sup> Vidal, ‘La commémoration du génocide au Rwanda’, p. 575.

<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, with regards to the exclusion of rape survivors, this situation may well be changing for, as Rwanda law professor Usta Kaitesi remarked during an interview with me in Rwanda in April 2012, there is an increasing recognition of survivors of sexual violence during public commemorations. For instance, 2012 was the first year that a rape survivor had been selected to testify at the official commemoration ceremony held at the Nyanza memorial site in Kigali. Interview with Usta Kaitesi, Kigali, 26 April 2012.

widows and rape survivors is rather due to the social stigma attached to the women.

The government's control of the memory of the genocide is framed by Jennie Burnet in terms of what she calls the 'amplified silence', which is generated by state-sponsored practices of memory.<sup>65</sup> Burnet points to ordinary women's attempts to maintain control over their memories of violence in the face of this amplified silence, practices of narrative resistance which will be examined in the next chapter. Nevertheless, Passerini argues that this kind of official imposed silence or 'forgetting' also requires a certain amount of complicity on the part of the survivor: 'If such public (and extending to the private) "amnesia" is imposed by the authorities, very often it requires some sort of complicity on the part of those who, not being in a position of power, accept and prolong an imposed silence'.<sup>66</sup> As Mujawayo demonstrates in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, a number of survivors have chosen to accept this imposed amnesia. In the second part of the testimony, entitled 'Paroles de "réconciliateurs"', Mujawayo gives the example of several women survivors (and one man) who have chosen to suppress their own experiences and emotions in order to work towards national reconciliation: among other things, these women hold positions as *gacaca* judges (Intègres) and participate in the reintegration programmes of former *génocidaires* in TIG work camps.<sup>67</sup> Mujawayo herself expresses both her admiration and her fear for these women:

C'est trop: demander à des rescapés de prier des génocidaires, les yeux dans les yeux, à révéler les secrets de nos morts, à indiquer les lieux des

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<sup>65</sup> See Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>66</sup> See Passerini, 'Memories Between Silence and Oblivion', p. 243.

<sup>67</sup> These 'camps de travaux d'intérêt général', commonly known under their French acronym TIG, are an alternative form of punishment for confessed category two perpetrators where they perform unpaid work of public interest. More information can be found on the following website: [www.rcs.gov.rw/camps/](http://www.rcs.gov.rw/camps/).



dépouilles puis tenter de les initier à la paix, c'est trop. Et elles-mêmes s'en demandent trop. Elles vont protester, en souriant en plus, par cette phrase devenue leitmotiv au Rwanda: avons-nous le choix? (FS 205)

According to Mujawayo, the government is asking too much of survivors through their role in national reconciliation. Indeed, as Belhaddad observes in the preface to *La Fleur de Stéphanie*: 'l'effort est toujours demandé à la victime qui a déjà subi le pire' (FS 11).

However, as the passage cited above demonstrates, survivors in Rwanda often feel they do not have a choice whether or not to participate in reconciliation. This echoes Susan Thomson's suggestion that the government is in fact 'forcing' reconciliation, a position that will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5.<sup>68</sup> Mujawayo raises the concern that, while survivors are being pressured into participating in national processes of reconciliation, there is no one to support these women in daily confrontations with their former persecutors. She admires the courage exhibited by these women, but also questions the psychological consequences of their work with the *génocidaires*:

je crois que, pour la victime d'hier, démontrer à son bourreau aujourd'hui qu'elle ne le rejoindra pas dans sa barbarie, c'est une victoire. (Long silence.) [...] Elles ont fait le pari fou de vouloir se rapprocher de cet autre qui voulait notre fin. Mais qui se rapproche d'elles? (FS 210–211)

It is the survivors of the genocide who are tasked with helping the former *génocidaires* reintegrate into the community, often at the high price of suppressing their own trauma. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this type of prolonged contact with former perpetrators has harmful effects on the psychological and emotional well-being of survivors as well as on their ability to heal from trauma.

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<sup>68</sup> See Susan Thomson, 'Whispering Truth to Power: The Everyday Resistance of Rwandan Peasants to Post-Genocide Reconciliation', *African Affairs*, 110.440 (2011), 439–56 (p. 441).

### *International Silence*

Beyond the silencing occurring on a national level, it is also important at this stage to examine the silencing of the genocide in Rwanda by the international community. As Hron effectively demonstrates in her discussion of representations of the genocide in Rwanda, the genocide occupies a 'non-space' in the Western imagination. Hron argues that, despite the transparency and ubiquity of the mass execution taking place in Rwanda in 1994, the genocide received very little international media coverage at the time and is hardly remembered years later; Hron gives the example of the conspicuous absence of world leaders at the ten year commemoration ceremonies in Rwanda:

Decidedly then, despite its evident 'every-place,' the genocide in Rwanda subsists as somewhat of a 'non-space' in global consciousness, world politics or media representation. Bluntly put, such a 'non-space' may be defined as a space of insignificance, if not non-existence, not unrelated to the 'impossible history' of most non-Western experiences.<sup>69</sup>

Diop also underlines this indifference of the international community:

Il serait toutefois absurde de prétendre que la presse internationale s'était donné le mot pour faciliter la tâche aux tueurs. Elle n'avait aucune raison particulière d'en vouloir au Rwanda. La vérité est plus simple mais peut-être aussi plus terrible: le Rwanda n'intéressait personne.<sup>70</sup>

While it is important to bear in mind that disinterest is a more passive reaction than active silencing, such passive indifference can nevertheless lead to the same silencing of survivors' stories. In terms of Western attitudes towards Africa, this indifference is not simply a case of 'bystander's avoidance', to use Dawes's phrase, but exposes a more general denial of African suffering.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Hron, "“But I find no place”", p. 200.

<sup>70</sup> Boubacar Boris Diop, *L'Afrique au-delà du miroir* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> See Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 23.

Indeed, this disinterest is symptomatic of what Diop calls ‘la négrophobie européenne’ – a category that I would extend to the West more generally: ‘Dans cette logique, ceux qui sont morts au Rwanda n’ont juste pas eu le temps de frapper les premiers au cours de ces éternels “massacres interethniques” devenus lassants pour tout le monde’.<sup>72</sup> This goes some way to explaining why Western societies have preferred to portray the events in Rwanda as the outcome of ‘ancient tribal hatreds’ rather than recognising genocide to be what anthropologist Alexander Laban Hinton describes as ‘the dark side of modernity’ that affects all humanity, thus ridding themselves of any responsibility.<sup>73</sup>

The continued silencing of the events of 1994 on an international level also helps to assuage a certain sense of guilt. According to Dauge-Roth, for the international community, ‘survivors embody a disturbing memory, which revives a chapter of Rwanda’s history that most people would like to see closed’.<sup>74</sup> This is particularly the case in France, where the government’s role in the genocide is still under dispute.<sup>75</sup> France’s reluctance to discuss the genocide in Rwanda, to speak openly and analyse its own role during the events of 1994, is an example of ‘erasing’ history, of excluding the disempowered and denying them a voice. This echoes Passerini’s notion of

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<sup>72</sup> Diop, *L’Afrique au-delà du miroir*, p. 41.

<sup>73</sup> See Alexander Laban Hinton, ‘The Dark Side of Modernity: Toward an Anthropology of Genocide’, in Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) pp. 1–40 (p. 1).

<sup>74</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of France’s role in the genocide, see for example Krosiak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*, De Saint-Exupéry, *Complices de l’inavouable*, Jean-Paul Gouteux, *La Nuit rwandaise: L’implication française dans le dernier génocide du siècle* (Paris: L’Esprit frappeur, 2002), and Andrew Wallis, *Silent Accomplice: The Untold Story of France’s Role in the Rwandan Genocide* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007). For a discussion of the role of the West more generally, see Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: the Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000).

‘public silence’.<sup>76</sup> To clarify this concept, Passerini gives the example of France’s silence surrounding the Algerian War, highlighting the violent repression of the demonstration organised by the FLN in Paris on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1961, which resulted in at least 48 people dead (with an official count of 3).<sup>77</sup> According to Passerini, in the case of Algeria, the French authorities’ effort to hide their own responsibilities led to ‘an oblivion in public memory’ and the disappearance of the war from French collective memory.<sup>78</sup> Krosiak claims that France’s involvement in Rwanda is characterised by the same ‘lack of transparency’, which has resulted in a similar ‘public silence’ surrounding the genocide.<sup>79</sup>

Several of the Rwandan women authors address France’s controversial role in the genocide. Pauline Kayitare’s narrative is one of the rare accounts to emerge from the region controlled by *Opération Turquoise* during the genocide and highlights the operation’s ambiguous mandate. This zone in the West of Rwanda was the last to cede control to the advancing RPF – remaining under French control until 21 August 1994 – and created a safe passage for many *génocidaires* to flee across the border into former Zaire.<sup>80</sup> As well as criticising the proximity of French officials to the Habyarimana government and the controversies of *Opération Turquoise*, survivors are also extremely critical of

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<sup>76</sup> Passerini, ‘Memories Between Silence and Oblivion’, p. 243.

<sup>77</sup> In 1998, France did acknowledge 40 dead, which is still an under-estimate but does represent some kind of belated acknowledgement.

<sup>78</sup> Passerini, ‘Memories Between Silence and Oblivion’, p. 243.

<sup>79</sup> See Krosiak, *The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*, p. 58. For an examination of French African policy more generally, see Tony Chafer, ‘Franco-African Relations: No Longer So Exceptional?’, *African Affairs*, 101 (2002), 343–63. Chafer argues that the ‘special nature’ of the Franco-African relationship, which had long been characterised by personal links between African political leaders and members of the French governing elite (such as the relationship between Habyarimana and Jean-Christophe Mitterrand), became the focus of unprecedented criticism following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (see p. 347).

<sup>80</sup> As well as the aforementioned texts focusing on France’s role in the genocide, Dallaire’s *Shake Hands with the Devil* gives a detailed account of France’s lack of cooperation with the UN between the months of June and August 1994.

international inaction during the genocide, particularly of the UN following the withdrawal of their troops.<sup>81</sup> As Mukagasana writes in *N'aies pas peur de savoir*: 'Je pense à la photo de Mitterrand, celle où il parade fièrement en voiture aux côtés de Habyarimana. Je pense que je n'ai pas d'amis, que la France, la Belgique, l'ONU nous ont abandonnés, nous les Tutsi, à la rage d'une république devenue folle' (NP 118). Many of the other women express a similar sense of abandonment in their testimonies and reproach the international community for its passivity. For example, in the opening prologue of her first testimony, Mujawayo writes: 'Un million de personnes a été exterminé en moins de cent jours dans un silence assourdissant et une indifférence totale' (SV 13).

Mukagasana is also deeply critical of the fact that humanitarian intervention was more concerned with providing aid for the refugees in the former Zaire in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, which exacerbates survivors' feelings of abandonment. She asks 'pourquoi les organisations humanitaires oublient-elles les rescapés? L'abandon est sans fin. C'est comme si le monde entier nous en voulait' (NP 204). Similarly, Annick Kayitesi claims: 'En parlant des rescapés, je veux montrer l'abandon des survivants par la communauté humaine, pendant et surtout après le génocide' (NE 240). She goes on to state that: 'Abandonner ainsi des êtres humains, c'est la honte de l'humanité. Il faut le dire, il faut le clamer' (NE 245). All of humanity is included in her accusations. In this manner, the indifference of the international community and the ongoing silencing of survivors are drawn as presenting

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<sup>81</sup> Following the death of 10 Belgian UN soldiers at the hands of the Rwandan army, the UN Security Council voted on 21 April to reduce the size of its military mission by almost 90 percent to 250 soldiers. See Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 275; Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, p. 218; Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, pp. 321–22.

what Dauge-Roth describes as a form of ‘genocidal complicity’.<sup>82</sup> For survivors, breaking the silence of the international community is crucial in having their experiences acknowledged and recognised by a global audience. As Dauge-Roth explains, ‘[i]n our encounter with the testimonial literature bearing witness to the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, we must therefore face not only the horror and pain of genocide, but also our complicity in a political and symbolic violence that silences the survivors’.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, speaking out about what happened is crucial for breaking Rwanda’s ‘culture of impunity’.<sup>84</sup> The implications of this culture of impunity for national reconciliation will be discussed in Chapter 5, but continuing impunity for the perpetrators also has consequences for the individual survivors, often preventing them from testifying for fear of reprisal. Nevertheless, for Rwandan genocide survivors, keeping silent could also be construed as ultimately granting victory to the *génocidaires*, for, as Manz observes in her study of Guatemalan survivors of trauma: ‘Silence affirms – as the terrorist state expects – that nothing indeed has happened and binds the murderers and the survivors into a depraved covenant’.<sup>85</sup> In his essay ‘Au-delà du silence’, Wiesel evokes a similar dilemma encountered by the Holocaust survivor:

Voilà la victoire de l’ennemi, telle qu’elle nous paraissait alors: même si nous devons nous en sortir, nous serions incapables de porter témoignage. Or, s’il y avait en nous un désir de vivre, ou plutôt de survivre, c’était pour inscrire notre mort dans la mémoire des vivants.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> See Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide*, p. 73.

<sup>84</sup> For further discussion on the continuing tensions surrounding the perceived impunity of the former *génocidaires*, see Chapter 5, ‘Unresolved Allegations and the Culture of Impunity’, in Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*.

<sup>85</sup> Manz, ‘Terror, Grief, and Recovery’, p. 301.

<sup>86</sup> Wiesel, *Silences et mémoire d’hommes*, pp. 9–10.

For Rwandan women, then, breaking this ‘depraved covenant’ and inscribing the memory of the dead in the memory of the living is of the utmost importance.

### *Breaking the Silence*

It would appear, then, that Rwandan women’s *prise de parole* is borne first and foremost out of a desire – and a necessity – to break the silence surrounding the events of 1994 and which is still propagated in Rwanda and throughout the international community. Annick Kayitesi is perhaps the most explicit in her desire to break the silence surrounding the genocide and expose the indifference of the international community. As Kayitesi states in *Nous existons encore*, she is bearing witness in order to break ‘le pacte d’indifférence et de silence’ (NE 20) that has been built around the genocide. For Kayitesi, silence is synonymous with forgetting and erasure, and the act of bearing witness constitutes a combat against forgetting, a way of honouring the memory of the victims and of making their occulted histories known. She declares: ‘Je lutte pour que la mémoire des miens ne sombre pas dans l’oubli’ (NE 24–25).

The heavy silence of the dead is omnipresent in every testimony in my corpus. The weight of loss resonates strongly through the texts. One of the principal aims of the *génocidaires* was to eradicate any trace of their victims, and descriptions of violent destruction frequently return in all the women’s testimonies. Annick Kayitesi speaks of entire families who have been wiped out and whose memory will be lost forever:

Chez nous au moins, ma sœur et moi sommes là pour honorer nos disparus, mais qu’en est-il de ceux chez qui il n’y a aucun rescapé? Les

souvenirs s'en vont et, avec eux, la certitude de leur existence. Ils sont morts doublement. Ils n'ont même pas la possibilité de se perpétuer dans le cœur de leurs proches. Il n'y a plus personne pour honorer leur nom ou cultiver leur mémoire. (NE 190–91)

Scholastique Mukasonga evokes a similar sentiment in the following passage describing the destruction of the family home:

Les tueurs se sont acharnés sur la maison jusqu'à en effacer la moindre trace. La brousse a tout recouvert. C'est comme si nous n'avions jamais existé. Et cependant ma famille a vécu là. Dans l'humiliation, la peur de chaque jour, dans l'attente de ce qui allait survenir et que nous ne savions pas nommer: le génocide. Et je suis la seule à en détenir la mémoire. C'est pour cela que j'écris ces lignes. (IC 47)

In this manner, given the extreme dehumanisation of the Tutsi both before and during the genocide, bearing witness to what the dead victims suffered becomes a way of restoring their humanity. As Berthe Kayitesi remarks, there is no longer any physical evidence testifying to the existence of her relatives: 'Il n'y a même plus de chemin qui mène où ils ont vécu, et c'est comme s'ils n'avaient pas existé' (DV 74–75). Writing her testimony thus becomes a way of remembering those who died, of speaking their silence and writing their existence: 'Et ce témoignage aille jusqu'à les faire vivre ne fût-ce qu'un instant' (DV 76).

Following the dehumanisation of the victims by the *génocidaires*, the naming of the dead takes on the utmost importance for survivors. For, with all other documentation destroyed, the testimonies of the living remain the only way of telling their existence. Rwandan women authors accord a great deal of importance to evoking the names of those who died. In *Inyenzi ou les Cafards*, Mukasonga draws up a list of the thirty-seven members of her family she lost during the genocide: 'j'égrène les noms de ceux qui n'ont personne pour les pleurer. Je crie leurs noms, vers qui? pour qui? [...] Ils sont tous là dans la nuit



claire de ma mémoire' (IC 143–45). In a similar manner, from the opening pages of her testimony, Berthe Kayitesi bombards the reader with the names of people she knew during her childhood who were killed during the genocide, including families of which not one single member survived: 'Et en cette page, il me revient de dire qu'ils ont existé, qu'ils étudiaient, comme toi, comme tes proches; qu'ils travaillaient comme toi et tes proches, qu'ils jouaient, qu'ils avaient des noms, des visages, une vie avec tous les projets qui vont avec' (DV 59). Perhaps the most striking example of naming the dead occurs at the end of Mujawayo's *SurVivantes* where she lists the names of nearly 300 members of her extended family who were killed during the genocide. The structure of this list, which also includes brief descriptions of how the individuals were related, closely resembles that of a family tree. This suggests that Mujawayo is attempting to record and, as far as possible, to recreate the family network that was destroyed during the genocide. Bonnet observes that each Rwandan woman's testimony becomes a repository for the names of the absent victims, thus demonstrating 'la nécessité de rappeler, inlassablement, les noms de tous les proches [...] pour que tous puissent reposer en paix'.<sup>87</sup> The act of bearing witness allows these women to bury their dead, to offer them the sepulture which was denied to them. As Mukasonga acknowledges: 'Les assassins ont voulu effacer jusqu'à leur mémoire mais, dans le cahier d'écolier qui ne me quitte plus, je consigne leurs noms et je n'ai pour les miens et tous ceux qui sont tombés à Nyamata que ce tombeau de papier' (IC 158).

As well as bearing witness on behalf of those who died, Rwandan women also speak out on behalf of the living, for the survivors who are still being silenced today, both in Rwanda and beyond. Annick Kayitesi writes:

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<sup>87</sup> Bonnet, 'La "prise d'écriture" de Rwandaises rescapées du génocide', p. 80.

Selon les chiffres officiels, du 6 avril au 4 juillet, on a dénombré en cent jours entre huit cent mille et un million de victimes... Mais on ne parle là que des morts. On oublie les handicapés, les traumatisés, les seuls au monde qui jamais ne se remettront et les soixante-dix pour cent de femmes, ces fillettes rescapées, atteintes du sida à la suite de viols. Oui, on compte les défunts et, dans une politique d'effacement, on occulte les survivants. (NE 129–30)

For Kayitesi, her own 'besoin de témoigner est d'autant plus intense que nombre de rescapés, de filles violées, d'adolescents incompris sont condamnés au silence' (NE 245). Here, Kayitesi expresses a strong desire to break the silence which dominates the lives of many survivors; she is testifying not only to honour the memory of the dead but also to give a voice to those forgotten survivors.

When Kayitesi evokes her own experience of sexual abuse by her guardian, Raymond, in France after the genocide, she claims to be breaking the silence not just for herself – 'il est important pour moi de ne pas le taire. Ça me déculpabilise' (NE 149) – but also for other victims of rape: 'Toutes les victimes, même les rescapées des génocides, souffrent de cette culpabilité. [...] Dans ce cas encore, il est de mon devoir de témoigner. Je n'ai pas d'autre choix. J'aurais honte à présent de me taire' (NE 153). However, she is extremely conscious of the difficulty in expressing and making public such an intimate experience:

Pourtant c'est difficile. Cela touche la vie intime. Raymond me faisait souffrir, me salissait. [...] J'ai porté plainte parce que cet homme a profané mon bien le plus précieux. Mon intimité. Il n'en avait pas le droit. C'est quand même la seule chose qui me restait d'intacte. Il a fallu qu'il la détruise aussi. (NE 154–55)

Her pain and anger at this most intimate violation come through all the more strongly in the repetition of the fact that he took her virginity:

Tout chez moi était anéanti sauf ça! Il n'y avait que cette pureté que je pouvais encore sauvegarder.

Même cela ne me fut pas épargné.  
J'étais abîmée. (NE 155)

While many of the authors express a fear of being raped, only two women describe actual experiences of sexual violence: Annick Kayitesi and Pauline Kayitare, who is violated by an Interahamwe member during the genocide, a man known to her. Kayitare's narration of this event also emphasises the intense shame and humiliation she suffered: 'Je me sens profondément salie, humiliée, anéantie. Je me sens prête à mourir' (TLD 65).

The fact that these women speak out about their own experiences of sexual violence is crucial in breaking the silence of the existing cultural taboo surrounding rape that stills persists in Rwandan society. As Berthe Kayitesi's narrative indicates, women are even accused of sleeping with the *génocidaires* in order to survive, an attitude which further marginalises women survivors. Kayitesi describes an encounter with a man on a bus in 1995: 'L'homme se tourna vers moi pour me demander: "Comment as-tu survécu?" Avant même que je n'ouvre la bouche, il avait ajouté en riant "ou alors tu as couché avec eux?" Je me suis tue' (DV 206). As Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin have observed: 'In Rwanda, because the stigma of rape is enormous, women who have been violated often hesitate to talk about it. Psychological trauma is thus compounded by social isolation'.<sup>88</sup> According to Fujii:

People's silence about sexual violence also seemed to reflect a common shame around this form of violation. [...] victims who talk about their rape generally bring more, not less, shame to themselves and their families. For this reason, they often choose to remain silent as a way to protect their families.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Newbury and Baldwin, 'Aftermath: Women in Postgenocide Rwanda', p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Fujii, 'Shades of Truth and Lies', p. 238.

Given that at least 200,000 Rwandan women were victims of some form of sexual violence during the genocide, the need to break this silence is urgent.<sup>90</sup>

For both Kayitesi and Kayitare, testifying to their own experiences functions as a means of denouncing the current situation in Rwanda, particularly the ongoing inequalities between victims and perpetrators. Kayitare writes:

Et puis, il y a ces situations absurdes et insupportables: ainsi, les génocidaires emprisonnés atteints de maladies, comme le sida, sont soignés – et c’est bien sûr normal. Mais comment admettre que de leur côté, tant de femmes qui ont attrapé le sida à la suite d’un ou de plusieurs viols, commis précisément par ces génocidaires, ne reçoivent, elles, aucun soin? (TLD 124–25)

Mujawayo’s *SurVivantes* also addresses the problems faced by survivors of sexual violence. For example, the directors of AVEGA became aware of the number of rape victims when more and more women receiving therapy through AVEGA began confiding that they were contaminated by HIV/AIDS. Mujawayo explains that this admission was their way of admitting to being raped, of sharing what they had been through without being explicit: ‘C’était leur façon de dire l’indicible’ (SV 197). Based on this information, AVEGA then carried out a study which led them to conclude that:

quatre-vingts pour cent des femmes qui ont survécu ont été violées, et plus de la moitié d’entre elles est infectée par le sida. Les génocidaires les ont sciemment contaminées, ils leur ont inoculé une mort lente. Une grande partie de ces victimes y a déjà succombé. L’autre, survivante, n’a quasiment aucun moyen de se soigner. (SV 197)

Breaking the silence surrounding rape and HIV among genocide survivors is thus doubly important, not only in shedding light on the difficulties survivors face in talking about their experiences and getting treatment, but also in helping to combat the isolation of survivors who have been marginalised because of their experience.

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<sup>90</sup> Newbury and Baldwin, ‘Aftermath: Women in Postgenocide Rwanda’, p. 4.

### *Writing Silence*

While the previous section was concerned with breaking the silences surrounding the genocide, it is also important to remember that silence is also an integral part of the testimonies themselves. Mujawayo's testimonies are perhaps the most striking in this respect as much of the text consists of interviews transcribed and reworked by her co-author, Belhaddad. In the writing process, Belhaddad indicates where there were silences – and the length of these silences – in the original interviews: (*silence*), (*long silence*), etc. In the same manner, Belhaddad also indicates laughter, bodily gestures, and the tone of voice and volume in which Mujawayo is speaking. In so doing, Belhaddad explains that she intended to preserve 'le ton de l'oral':

non pas par effet de style mais afin de traduire au plus près les tremblements, les hésitations, les nœuds et la sidération de cette parole. Une parole associative qui tente de dire l'indicible: le génocide, et le chaos qu'il a imprimé à l'intérieur de tout rescapé. (SV 10)

These silences arise in a variety of different circumstances and can be interpreted in much the same way as silences in an oral testimony. For example, in *SurVivantes*, when Mujawayo recounts the death of her adoptive sister, Rachel, who was thrown alive into a latrine and had her arms cut off when she tried to climb out: 'cette image des membres coupés de Rachel m'était encore plus intolérable... (*long silence*) Mais combien de temps ça a bien pu prendre avant qu'elle ne soit étouffée dans cette merde?...' (SV 249: emphasis in original). The silence in this passage indicates a memory that is too painful, forcing the narrator to temporarily halt her narrative. Moreover, the use of italics to indicate the silence also serves to draw attention to it. The same method is used in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, for example in the passage where Mujawayo finally discovers where the remains of her sister are:

Elle est, elle est... dans un conduit d'égout. Enfin, pas vraiment un égout mais un puits perdu. Dans les villes, les habitants creusent des trous où sont recueillies toutes les eaux usagées de la maison; donc, ce n'est pas un égout. (Silence.) Remarque, comme ce sont les eaux du quartier, forcément, c'est... (Nouveau silence.) Ils l'ont jetée là, elle et ses enfants, et ils y demeurent depuis près de douze ans. (FS 15)

Thus, silence is written explicitly into the narration, allowing the reader to follow the pace and tone of the narrative as well as giving greater insight into the emotions of the survivor-witness. What is only implied in this passage nonetheless paints a vivid image in the reader's mind about what happened to the victim's body. This echoes the discussion of 'shock' images in Chapter 2, where an aesthetic image captures the viewer's attention and forces them to confront the full extent of the atrocity.

Other Rwandan women adopt similar narrative strategies to integrate silence into their testimonies. For example, the narration of *Nous existons encore* is often punctuated by ellipses, for example when Annick Kayitesi recounts the murder of one of her friends as she is talking to him through a closed door: 'Et Victor s'est tu. Brutalelement. Reste le bruit des os qui craquent et d'un corps qu'on brise... Hébétee, je réalise que là, derrière la porte, c'est mon ami qu'on est en train de dépecer. Toute vie me quitte. [...] Victor ne criait pas...' (NE 117–18). The ellipses in this passage function in much the same way as the writing of the word 'silence' in brackets insofar as they indicate a hesitation, a silence in the speech. Similarly, rather than limiting understanding, the pauses in the narration here allow the reader to imagine the sounds of the man being butchered on the other side of the door, emphasising the sensory nature of the experience of genocide evoked in Chapter 2.

A tacit understanding between the narrator and the reader is thus established; the imagination of the reader fills in the holes and gaps left in the

narration. As Rinn observes, the ellipsis is a rhetorical figure often used in the context of genocide and evokes a tacit knowledge:

Elle consiste à ne pas remplir le programme narratif dont le lecteur a pourtant identifié le déroulement et les codes internes. La charge émotive soulevée par le non-dit est telle qu'elle crée une sorte de consensus culturellement déterminé, comme si l'auteur et le lecteur se mettaient d'accord pour ne pas prendre acte de détails insoutenables. Ainsi, au-delà de la vérité des faits, l'ellipse cache des émotions que l'auteur sait pertinemment partager avec son lecteur: ce qui manque dans le texte est censé être d'autant plus présent dans l'acte interprétatif.<sup>91</sup>

The complicity of the reader is also evoked in *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* when Mukasonga speaks of the death of an old acquaintance: 'En 1994, on s'est acharné sur la vieille dame. Je ne dirai pas comment on l'a humiliée, violée, suppliciée' (IC 92). Here, it is up to the reader to imagine the suffering that this women endured before she died. In this way, the unsaid/unspoken occupies a central place in the narration, and the reader is invited to hear and understand the silence at the heart of the testimony.

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, Ross highlights the need for both words and silence in the communication of trauma: 'The communication of pain rests on words, gesture and silence'.<sup>92</sup> Like language, silence itself becomes a narrative strategy, which Rinn calls 'la stratégie discursive de l'indicible'.<sup>93</sup> In her work on South African women's testimony, Ross observes that a respectful silence can exist between family members who wish to spare one another the extent of each person's suffering:

A space of silence exists within the family. It may be respectful, a kind of will to silence, generated to protect one another from the knowledge of the extent of hurt. It may also be the silence of being unable or unwilling to meet the extent of pain suffered. To confront any member of the family with the knowledge would be to breach the barriers they

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<sup>91</sup> Rinn, 'Rhétorique de l'indicible', p. 397.

<sup>92</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p. 49.

<sup>93</sup> Rinn, 'Rhétorique de l'indicible', p. 399.

have constructed and to force new spaces of acknowledgement that may not be beneficial to any concerned. Here, one can only acknowledge the need for silence and amnesia of particular kinds.<sup>94</sup>

In Rwanda, silence between individuals may be due in part to the ‘culture of silence’ discussed in Chapter 2 that has long formed a central part of Rwandan society. However, in relation to the horrors of genocide, silence can also be a way of protecting family members from the painful truth. This is evident in Mukasonga’s *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* in the episode where the author recounts how her brother-in-law spared her the details of her sister’s death: ‘il ne m’a pas tout dit. Il n’a pas pu me dire ou il a voulu m’épargner l’insoutenable horreur’ (IC 123–24). Similarly in Kayitare’s narrative, the author recounts how she and her cousins kept information from each other during the genocide, after several other family members had been killed:

Nos retrouvailles sont terriblement tristes. Nous échangeons d’abord des renseignements presque anodins [...]. Mais face aux questions graves, je n’ai pas la force de dire la vérité. [...] Ils comprennent que je mens, mais ils ont la générosité de ne pas poursuivre leurs questions. Je vois dans leurs yeux qu’ils font secrètement le deuil de leur mère. De mon côté, je n’ose pas leur demander où ils ont enterré Mukecuru, de peur d’apprendre qu’ils n’ont pas eu la possibilité de le faire... Un silence réciproque s’est installé entre nous. (TLD 78)

This reciprocal silence seems to function as a way of protecting loved ones in the aftermath of the genocide, perpetuating the tradition of internalising emotions discussed in Chapter 2.

However, Mujawayo suggests in *SurVivantes* that, for Rwandan survivors of genocide, it is less a question of a ‘culture of silence’ than what Danieli has elsewhere described as a ‘conspiracy of silence’. According to Danieli, public reaction to the Holocaust resulted in a ‘*conspiracy of silence*

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<sup>94</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p. 3.



between Holocaust survivors and society in general'.<sup>95</sup> Mujawayo suggests that this same conspiracy of silence exists amongst Rwandan survivors, perpetrators and outside observers. This is emphasised in her description of survivors' silence in the immediate aftermath of the genocide in part as a desire to protect others:

C'est peut-être par souci de discrétion qu'on nous a fuis. Les gens croient qu'ils te font du bien en te disant de ne pas raconter. Mais en fait, je crois que c'est nous qui protégeons les autres en nous taisant. Ils voulaient tous faire semblant, je voulais faire semblant aussi. D'être normale. (SV 83)

Furthermore, Mujawayo admits to engaging in this 'conspiracy' when, in her role as a public witness, she attempts to protect her audience by sparing them the details of the horror:

Parfois, en conférence, j'adoucis volontairement les récits de rescapés que je cite, pour ne pas déranger l'auditoire, ne pas le choquer. J'épargne des détails, j'évite de parler des horreurs car j'ai l'impression que les gens sont mal à l'aise de toute la cruauté qui s'est passée et j'ai l'impression qu'ils ne vont pas me croire – puisque c'est *incroyable*. (SV 91: emphasis in original)

This recalls my discussion in Chapter 1 of the unimaginable nature of the horrors of the genocide, underling the complicity of the reader in the silencing of survivors. This conspiracy of silence is not without consequences for the survivor. According to Danieli, for Holocaust survivors, such a silence 'further impeded the possibility of their intrapsychic integration and healing, and made their task of mourning their massive losses impossible'.<sup>96</sup> While the effects of this silence on Rwanda survivors' ability to heal will be addressed in the final chapter, I would argue here that Mujawayo's detection of this conspiracy of silence surrounding the genocide further emphasises the necessity for the survivor to break this silence in order for the truth about the events to be

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<sup>95</sup> Danieli, 'Preliminary Reflections', p. 197 (emphasis in original).

<sup>96</sup> Danieli, 'Preliminary Reflections', p. 198.

known as well as for initiating the process of working through trauma for survivors.

### *Space of Double Impossibility?*

Survivors of atrocity are ultimately faced with a ‘double bind’ that Sarah Kofman describes in the following manner:

Comment parler, alors qu’on éprouve un ‘désir frénétique’ de dire, tâche impossible, telle quelle, cette expérience, de tout expliquer à l’autre, que l’on est en proie à un délire de paroles, et qu’en même temps il vous est impossible de parler? Impossible sans *suffoquer*. Comme si l’excès même de réserve, de retenue de la parole mise à l’abri de toute compromission avec le langage du pouvoir, provoquait chez celui qui a été constamment au voisinage de l’Enfer [...] un étrange *double bind*: une revendication infini de parler, un *devoir parler à l’infini*, s’imposant avec une force irrépressible – et une impossibilité quasi physique de parler: une *suffocation*; une parole nouée, exigée et interdite, parce que trop longtemps rentrée, arrêtée, restée dans la gorge et qui vous fait étouffer, perdre respiration, vous asphyxier, vous ôte la possibilité même de commencer.<sup>97</sup>

For the survivor, it is necessary to accept this state of *suffocation* and to find ways of bringing the silence into our field of understanding or, to use Elaine Scarry’s words, to lift the pain into the visible world.<sup>98</sup>

Women survivors – and perhaps *all* survivors – of the Rwanda genocide nevertheless find themselves in a situation of double impossibility. As Waintrater explains, in the case of witnesses to genocide, silence is as much an impossibility as speech because it ‘condamne à une seconde mort ceux qui n’ont même pas droit à la trace que constitue une sépulture’.<sup>99</sup> In the foreword to his essay *Le Génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger*, Rurangwa writes:

Témoigner, c’est s’exposer aux foudres de tous ceux qui ont peur de dire les choses telles qu’elles sont. Pour celui qui a peur de la vérité, le

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<sup>97</sup> Sarah Kofman, *Paroles suffoquées* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), pp. 45–46 (emphasis in original).

<sup>98</sup> See Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 13.

<sup>99</sup> Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*, p. 51.

rescapé du génocide est un être gênant. C'est pourquoi on préfère son silence. Mais c'est ce même silence qui le tue. Parce que parler des siens, pour les siens et au nom des siens, est l'unique sens de sa survie. Et on veut qu'il se taise! Mais se taire pour lui est synonyme de mourir.<sup>100</sup>

Bearing witness becomes necessary both for honouring the memory of the victims and for breaking the silence which has governed the life of survivors since the genocide, and constitutes an essential stage of the continued process of surviving trauma, a process which will be discussed in the next chapter in terms of moving from *surviving* to *living*.

The next chapter will analyse the conditions within which survivors in Rwanda begin to share their testimonies and attempt to rebuild social relations. On a community level, survivor organisations have helped Rwandan women speak of their experiences in a safe environment and have that experience validated by the group. This sharing of the traumatic experience enables women to regain a sense of control over both their memories of the genocide and their lives. On a national level, official commemoration ceremonies as well as judicial institutions such as the *gacaca* courts have also facilitated testimony about the genocide. As Stéphanie, another survivor presented in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, explains, during the discussion groups she facilitates as part of her work for Oxfam, 'quelque chose de stupéfiant se passe durant ces échanges: les Rwandais parlent, se livrent et disent des vérités. C'est si rare dans notre pays accoutumé depuis des décennies aux lois du silence, du non-dit, de la solidarité communautaire...' (FS 180). However, as I will highlight in the next chapter, the fact that only 'des bribes de vérité' (FS 18) are emerging rather than the whole truth about what happened places severe limitations on the process of reconciliation. I will argue that, given the obstacles that the national processes

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<sup>100</sup> Rurangwa, *Le Génocide des Tutsi expliqué à un étranger*, pp. 12–13.

of justice and reconciliation pose to survivors' ability to heal from trauma, for many survivors, making the transition from *surviving* to *living* is still just an imagined reality.

## Chapter 5: From Surviving to Living

In *Demain ma vie*, Berthe Kayitesi's final chapter begins with a section entitled 'De la survie au témoignage et vers la vie' (DV 257),<sup>1</sup> in which she explains how, for survivors of the genocide in Rwanda, the notions of survival, life and testimony are intertwined:

Avant de suspendre ce que j'avais à dire sur mon expérience de rescapée d'un génocide, il devient impératif d'ajouter quelques lignes sur ces trois mots indissociables: survie, témoignage, vie. [...] Il est plus facile de distinguer entre le temps de la vraie survie et le temps du témoignage, que de savoir quand commence le temps de la vie. La vie chevauche les deux autres mais elle a une saveur différente: parfois plus forte, parfois amère. (DV 257)

As Kayitesi indicates here, the passage from surviving to living is not a simple, one-way process, and the survivor can often find herself caught between the two. Moreover, not only does Kayitesi distinguish between the 'la survie' and 'la vie', but she also indicates that testimony plays a crucial part in the transition between the two. In light of Kayitesi's distinction, this chapter will show how 'surviving' implies simply coping with the trials of everyday life, whereas 'living' involves taking a proactive role; a survivor can only really be *living* if she has regained a sense of control over her life. The act of bearing witness enables the survivor to begin making the passage from surviving to living, functioning as an essential step towards regaining control over one's own personal history.

This chapter will examine the conditions that facilitate the passage from surviving to living, and assess those factors – such as the silencing injunctions discussed in the previous chapter – which may prevent genocide survivors

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<sup>1</sup> The collection of testimonies published by the Association Duhozanye also contains a chapter entitled 'De la survie à la vie': see Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save*, p. 94.

from successfully making this transition, both on an individual and a societal level. I will explore the extent to which, in the case of Rwandan women survivors, the testimonial process effectively allows them to work through their trauma and re-engage in the present. Many trauma theorists suggest that the act of bearing witness can function as a form of catharsis for traumatised individuals and lead to a sense of closure.<sup>2</sup> I will investigate whether the Western model of therapeutic healing is sufficient or appropriate for Rwandan women genocide survivors, or whether a culturally specific model of healing is more effective, particularly in the case of community organisations. In so doing, I will highlight the tension within the testimonies between the need to resort to Western modes of discourse in order to be heard and the potential inadequacy of this discourse in making Rwandan women's experiences comprehensible to a reading audience. The testimonies in my corpus show that, while bearing witness may not lead to closure, for many of the women, giving testimony plays a central role in regaining control over their own lives.

While survivors may be able to regain a certain amount of control on an individual and community level, the government's policy of national unity and reconciliation exerts rigorous control over information about the genocide in the public sphere, thus placing numerous restrictions on the ways in which individuals can remember. This chapter will demonstrate how, in the years following the genocide, control over information about the events of 1994 has led to what I will describe as 'selective remembering' in Rwanda, both on an individual and collective level. On the national level, the current government is

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<sup>2</sup> As Luckhurst points out, the notions of cure, recovery and closure are part of 'the familiar language and trajectory of contemporary psychotherapy', although these notions are deceptively reassuring: see Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 44. Indeed, Herman suggests that both patients and therapists alike are often seduced by the 'compelling fantasy of a fast, cathartic cure': see Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 174.

involved in what Moritz Schuberth describes as the Rwandan government's 'large-scale campaign to rewrite the country's history and to reshape society'.<sup>3</sup> By controlling the information, and how this information is disseminated, the government is ultimately attempting to control people's memories. This will become apparent in my discussion of the national processes of reconciliation in the second part of this chapter. For example, official ceremonies encourage people to remember in a certain way at a certain time. I will argue that, through writing and publishing their narratives so that they become permanent accounts of the genocide accessible to anyone at any time, Rwandan women are reclaiming control over the information about what happened to them and their loved ones, and thus over their own stories. Moreover, by choosing to testify on their own terms, these women are challenging the national structure and highlighting the inadequacies of the current culture of remembrance for the individual.

The later sections of this chapter will also address the complex questions of justice, truth and forgiveness to determine the extent to which the policy of national unity and reconciliation has affected survivors' ability to heal from their trauma. In order to highlight the difficulties inherent in the process of reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda, I will draw parallels between the testimonies of my corpus and the words of other survivors and perpetrators, whose testimonies appear in edited collections such as De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu's *The Men Who Killed Me* and Hatzfeld's *Une saison de machettes*. These edited collections of testimonies highlight many of the same concerns raised in the individual-authored testimonies and provide a

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<sup>3</sup> Moritz Schuberth, 'The Politics of Knowledge Production in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 35.1 (2013), 78–92, p. 79.

useful point of comparison between national commemoration and survivors who cannot leave Rwanda. As the previous chapters have shown, the ongoing struggles of survivors in Rwanda are a central concern for women who have published their testimonies abroad, which is why many survivors outside Rwanda maintain links and continue working with survivors in Rwanda, both through their commitment to survivor organisations and through continuing to publish texts – testimonial, academic and fictional – raising awareness about the genocide and the ongoing plight of survivors. Despite the differing means of production of the different types of testimonial texts, this chapter will point towards survivor testimony as a space of dialogue, where testimonies from both inside Rwanda and from across the diaspora form part of a wider community of testimony.

### *Survie, témoignage, vie*

The passage from surviving to living is a focus shared by many survivors in post-genocide Rwanda and across the diaspora. Several of the women authors refer to this in their testimonies. The notion of moving from surviving to living is clearly indicated in the title of Mujawayo's *SurVivantes* where, by capitalising the first 'V', Mujawayo is emphasising the notion of 'Vivantes'. This seems to suggest that 'survivante' and 'vivante' are two separate concepts but that they are inextricably linked. This distinction is visually highlighted on the cover of the original edition of the book, where the word 'SurVivantes' is written in two different colours – 'Sur' in yellow and 'Vivantes' in white.<sup>4</sup> At

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<sup>4</sup> In the later edition, published by Métis Presses in 2011, the title is written as 'surVivantes' without capitalising the 's', which accords even more significance to the second part of the word. On the cover, the word is visually broken into two parts and written on two separate lines.



several points in her narrative, Mujawayo expresses this distinction in terms of being among the living-dead ('mort-vivant') and being fully alive ('vivante-vivante').<sup>5</sup> She writes that, like many survivors in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, she was not really living:

Tu te dis que tu es vivante [...]. Mais est-ce que tu l'es vraiment?... puisque tu n'as plus de support, plus de répondant, plus de miroir pour te renvoyer de l'amour de toi... En fait, tu n'es qu'un zombie, un mort vivant. Voilà, c'est ça: après le génocide, j'étais une morte vivante. (SV 223)

This notion of living without being alive is expressed elsewhere in the testimony in terms of feeling 'inexistante' (SV 170) and 'moins que rien' (SV 235). This shows that, despite having 'survived', survivors' entire existence and sense of self worth had been completely shattered by the genocide. For Mujawayo, living – becoming a 'vivante-vivante' – constitutes an act of defiance to show the *génocidaires* that they had not been successful in their mission.

Mujawayo's book opens with an epigraph taken from her 'dernier soir d'entretien' with Belhaddad (placed below a quote from Levi's *Les naufragés et les rescapés*):

Celui que [*sic*] me voulait exterminée, il ne me verra pas finie. Au contraire, je voudrais bien que me voir bien seyante [*sic*] le ronge et qu'il se dise: 'J'ai fait tout ça pour rien, elle vit'. Je ne sais pas si cette réaction chez moi relève de la fierté ou d'un instinct à tenir le coup. Je sais seulement qu'être vivante-vivante, plutôt que survivante, est une façon de les punir. C'est ma seule vengeance possible. (SV 5)

For Mujawayo, then, becoming a *living* person with a full life fulfils a certain sense of justice. The act of putting the suffering and anger into words is shown to be a crucial step towards achieving this:

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<sup>5</sup> Marie-Aimable Umurerwa also speaks of belonging to 'le monde des morts vivants' (CL 107).

Heureusement, il m'en est resté assez, de colère, pour décider, au fil du temps, en y mettant des mots, que moi, je ne voulais pas être morte vivante mais vivante vivante. Voilà: le génocide, ainsi, n'aura pas accompli sa totale mission. Je ne suis plus une morte vivante. (SV 223–24)

Mujawayo shows that taking this step towards living is an active choice on the part of the individual, but not a choice that is available to all survivors. We must bear in mind that the women who have written and published their testimonies are all living in the West in a relatively privileged position compared to many survivors still living in Rwanda.

According to Weine, survivors of political violence are affected by several factors which 'may contribute to the loosening of the hold of the traumas, and may make the survivor more able to benefit from testimony'.<sup>6</sup> These include being without threat, being free to choose and to move, being in exile, being young, and having others to tell.<sup>7</sup> For each of the Rwandan women survivors examined in this thesis, some – if not all – of these factors contribute to them being able to tell their story, and to benefit from this telling. Weine underlines here the importance of safety, coupled with finding a receptive audience, which, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2, are essential conditions for Rwandan women to be able to tell their story. Weine also touches on the geographical and generational differences which affect Rwandan women's ability to make the passage from surviving to living through testimony. As discussed in Chapter 3, geographical location certainly affects women survivors' capacity to tell (and publish) their story. In terms of the age of survivors, I would argue that there is a noticeable generational difference that emerges from my corpus, for it seems to be the younger survivors (Pauline

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<sup>6</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> See Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. 117.

Kayitare, Annick Kayitesi and Berthe Kayitesi) who appear to project more into the future and envisage a life beyond the trauma. The next section of this chapter will show how these younger survivors are more forward-thinking and hopeful about the prospect of regaining a full life, but also emphasise that it is a life in exile that offers them this possibility.

### *Projection into the Future*

One of the key elements involved in recovering from trauma is what Ross describes as a ‘pursuit of the ordinary’, or the attempt to return to a ‘normal’, everyday life.<sup>8</sup> As Das and Kleinman have observed, ‘resuming the task of living (and not only surviving), asks for a renewed capability to address the future’.<sup>9</sup> Thus, there is a clear temporality linked to the notions of surviving and living, which suggests that *surviving* occurs in the present whereas *living* is attainable in an imagined future. For many survivors, the state of *surviving* is in fact experienced as a kind of absent present. According to Waintrater, in the aftermath of the genocide, survivors are experiencing a type of ‘gel psychique’, a defensive mechanism which ‘se caractérise par une sorte de détachement affectif et de dépersonnalisation, qui protègent le sujet soumis à des épreuves qui risquent de déborder ses capacités psychiques’.<sup>10</sup>

The survivor is thus caught in a space of double temporality, between the painful past and the imagined future. Indeed, Kayitesi describes the difficulty of finding a balance between the past and the future, between engaging and disengaging with the present:

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<sup>8</sup> See Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> Das and Kleinman, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Waintrater, ‘Le temps de l’extrême’, p. 419.

Le poids des responsabilités n'est plus pressant, mais dans ma tête, c'est flou. Je vais revenir à la normale. Car dans le fond, je vis une double vie. Par moments j'ai quinze ans, et à d'autres je me sens vieille. Les stratégies mises en place ces dernières années m'échappent, et je réagis comme si j'étais encore dedans. Ou alors voulant m'en éloigner, je m'en écarte trop. (DV 283)

As such, the survivor appears to fluctuate between two states of existence, between the traumatic past and the anticipated future, while the present remains conspicuously absent. Annick Kayitesi expresses a similar sense of flux in

*Nous existons encore:*

Jusqu'en 1994, j'avais eu une vie, peu importe laquelle, mais j'en avais eu une. Ensuite pendant trois mois, je l'avais perdue. Et après je l'ai reconquise, disons que je me suis construit une autre existence... En revenant au pays en 1997, je ne savais plus ce qu'il restait de la première et en quoi consistait la seconde... Je ne voyais qu'un énorme accroc. (NE 192)

While Annick Kayitesi's narrative clearly underlines the rupture between 'l'avant' et 'l'après' of the genocide, which she experiences as two different but connected states of existence, Berthe Kayitesi's testimony strongly emphasises the idea of a projection into the future, as the title of her book suggests. The author explains that, in the years following the genocide, she fought to construct a future for herself and her siblings:

De juillet 1994 à août 2004, la force de vie a animé tout mon être. [...] L'absence de mes parents, le manque que je ressentais à différents moments, au lieu de me rendre simplement triste ou de me faire souffrir, ont renforcé cette marche vers l'avenir. Je vivais au présent mais sans me sentir vivre: la projection dans l'avenir était plus importante et je me suis vue très loin dans le temps, j'ai forgé jour après jour ce qu'allaient devenir ma vie et celle des miens. (DV 258)

As such, while *living* may not be immediately possible in the present, survivors continue in the struggle to regain control of their lives and construct a better future. The idea of a 'marche vers l'avenir' is also echoed in the heading of the

third part of Annick Kayitesi's book 'Une femme en marche' (NE 179), an image which suggests a sense of purpose, of moving towards the future.

Several of the survivors express a need to distance themselves – both physically and emotionally – from the site of their trauma and from the pressures of survival in order to move towards *living*. As Berthe Kayitesi writes: 'Ça va prendre plus ou moins de temps, mais je sens que ce détachement est nécessaire pour passer à l'autre étape de ma vie. Me dégager pour m'engager' (DV 284). For Kayitesi, the physical distance from her country and from her familial responsibilities seems necessary for her to be able to move forward with her life. Indeed, Kayitesi concludes her narrative with her desires for the future: 'J'envisage, un jour, de porter mon propre enfant et de donner la vie, bien que je ne me sente pas prête à retourner dans les responsabilités familiales. Elles m'effraient. Mais on me dit que c'est différent. J'attends pour voir' (DV 284). Her narrative conveys a sense of hopefulness – albeit a tentative one – of being able to return to a 'normal' life and have a family of her own. Pauline Kayitare also envisages having children one day: 'Qui sait, peut-être plus tard aurai-je des enfants et je voudrais qu'ils puissent grandir dans un pays où ils ne seront pas pourchassés pour ce qu'ils sont' (TLD 130). Yet this future only seems possible in a foreign country that is free from the ongoing tensions and struggles in Rwanda. Similarly, Annick Kayitesi's final chapter is entitled 'L'espoir de demain', in which she describes the hope – again tinged with uncertainty – that her life abroad affords her:

je réalise sans l'ombre d'un doute que je vais finir par dépasser les spectres de mon passé et par gérer mon histoire d'une manière ou d'une autre. [...] Ne sachant toujours pas où aller et bien que j'aie toujours l'impression de participer à une opération de sauvetage, j'avance. À l'aveugle, certes. Mais dans la certitude de sortir bientôt du tunnel. Il

paraît incontestable, les études aidant, que je me rapproche de ma vérité... (NE 221)

Here, Kayitesi touches on the importance of being able to study as a means towards accessing the life she desires.

For Kayitare, a life in exile will also give her the opportunity to study and build a professional life for herself. She expresses an ‘envie de poursuivre mes études dans un État de droit, de devenir une citoyenne du monde et d’exercer un vrai métier’ (TLD 130). Chapter headings such as ‘A Paris!’ (TLD 131) set a hopeful if not optimistic tone which punctuates her narrative.

Oui, je n’éprouve plus qu’un désir, celui de trouver le moyen de gagner la France; sans que cela soit tout à fait clair en moi, j’ai le sentiment que ce sera la seule manière de tourner la page, la seule manière d’oublier ce génocide, maman, Innocent, Joseph, Joséphine, Séraphine et Patrick, la seule manière de chasser la vision obsessionnelle du noyé aux yeux ouverts. (TLD 130)

Choosing a life in exile therefore presents itself as a possible route for escaping the struggles of the present and building a future. Nevertheless, as many survivors have discovered, this choice is not necessarily a solution, for the memories Kayitare seeks to forget will follow her in her future life. As Annick Kayitesi exclaims when she is called to testify against a former perpetrator: ‘j’ai coupé avec le Rwanda et il me rattrape!’ (NE 214) The struggle for survivors, then, is to find a way of simultaneously regaining control over their lives and living with the traumatic past. According to Greenspan, within survivor testimonies,

We are dealing therefore, with a *simultaneity* of continuity and radical break. The wound heals *and* it does not, the pain moderates *and* it remains unqualified; to follow survivors’ retelling, we must hold on to both truths at once. [...] Survivors’ recounting emerges from some unstable locus within these shifting fields.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 21 (emphasis in original).

It is important for survivors to find a balance between these ‘shifting fields’ of past and present/future, and it is at this stage that testimony emerges both as what LaCapra terms a means of ‘working through the past’ and as a ‘form that allows a reengagement with life in the present’.<sup>12</sup>

As we have seen, an essential aspect of moving from surviving to living involves being able to make choices about one’s own life. As Berthe Kayitesi reflects:

J’ai compris que c’était à moi de décider ce que devraient être la vie des miens et la mienne. [...] Qu’il me fallait suivre mon cœur et ma pensée, et assumer seule les conséquences de mes choix et décisions. C’est à ce moment-là que j’ai commencé mon combat de survivre. (DV 135–36)

But with choice also comes pain. When the survivor is acting simply in response to ‘l’urgence de la survie’ (DV 259), doing what is necessary to survive without any real free choice, then the painful memories of what they have lived through are pushed aside. Kayitesi explains that, in the aftermath of the genocide, ‘[l]’urgence de s’en sortir a fermé la porte à la mémoire souffrante’ (DV 258). Ignoring the suffering is one of the many ‘stratégies empruntées pour survivre’ (DV 261). But once the urgency of survival has been met, then the suffering that has been building up begins to surface: ‘J’ignorais que tout s’enregistre et que tout me rattraperait dès que je ralentirais ma course, quand je n’aurais plus besoin de courir, de répondre à l’urgence de la survie’ (DV 259). Indeed, for Kayitesi, it is only once she has left Rwanda to continue her studies in Canada that her traumatic memories resurface:

Les souvenirs de ce que je croyais classé net m’ont pas donné le temps de m’adapter dans ce nouveau pays. [...] Tout est remonté à la surface, mon passé s’est mis à redéfiler sans arrêt: le dernier contact avec mes parents, le cimetière, la famille d’accueil au Congo, l’orphelinat, les retrouvailles avec les miens, et puis l’errance. (DV 261)

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<sup>12</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, p. 16; p. 122.

Ironically, it is when Kayitesi has finally regained a certain level of control over her own life – once the ‘gel psychique’ described by Waintrater has been lifted – that the repressed memories return to haunt her and temporarily prevent her moving forward. It is at this stage in her life that ‘l’écriture est devenue un besoin vital’ (DV 285) and she begins writing her story in order to work through her painful traumatic memories.

### *Selective Remembering*

Although survivors who have chosen a life in exile are unable to break from their traumatic past, they have nevertheless begun to find a way to communicate their stories and regain control over their lives. While this path may be fraught with obstacles, such as the restricted access to the Western publishing industry discussed in Chapter 3, survivors in Rwanda are subjected to a different set of cultural and political forces which may prevent them from telling their stories. Before going on to discuss how these forces affect individual survivors, it is important to examine how the past is remembered on a national level in post-genocide Rwanda. Writing broadly about postconflict societies, Aleida Assmann distinguishes four general models adopted by nations dealing with a traumatic past. Firstly, Assmann highlights the model of ‘dialogic forgetting’ in which conflicting parties engage in a ‘pact of silence’ in order to achieve closure after periods of violence, as was the case between European nations following the Second World War.<sup>13</sup> In the second model, ‘remembering in order to never forget’, the past is memorialised following an asymmetric experience of violence, such as the Holocaust. This model acts not

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<sup>13</sup> See Aleida Assmann, ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past’, in Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag, eds, *Other People’s Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 45–46.



only as ‘a therapeutic remedy for survivors’ but also as ‘a spiritual and ethical obligation for the millions of dead victims’.<sup>14</sup> The third model, ‘remembering in order to overcome’, involves mastery of the past in order to move towards reconciliation, an example being the TRC in South Africa. This model involves recognition of the victims’ memories with a clear aim of working through the atrocities of the past in order to begin anew.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the model of ‘dialogic remembering’ occurs where two or more states share a common legacy of violence. Both sides accept their portion of guilt and become linked through ‘their common knowledge of a shared legacy of a traumatic past’.<sup>16</sup>

While Assman does not specifically address Rwanda in her article, her models are a useful starting point to help us understand the current structures of memory and remembrance in post-genocide Rwanda. At first glance, Rwanda would appear to fit the third model, where public remembering of the past has become a means of collective ‘catharsis’. As Assman notes, ‘through the re-representation of a painful event on stage a traumatic past can be once more collectively re-lived and overcome in the very process of doing so’.<sup>17</sup> Within the current climate of reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda, testimony has become central to the development of what Assmann describes as a ‘civic culture of remembrance’: survivor testimony has fulfilled the functions of both ‘legal witness’ through participation in the *gacaca* courts and the ICTR, and of ‘moral witness’ during official commemoration ceremonies.<sup>18</sup> Elements of the

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<sup>14</sup> Assmann, ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future’, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> See Assmann, ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future’, p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Assmann, ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future’, p. 58. Assman sees this particular model as still more of a project than a reality, but argues that the European Union provides an ideal framework for dialogic remembering (p. 57).

<sup>17</sup> Assmann, ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future’, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> See Assmann, ‘From Collective Violence to a Common Future’, p. 51: Assmann is referring to the concept of the ‘moral witness’ developed by Avishai Margalit in *The Ethics of Memory*. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the moral witness is fulfilling a ‘testimonial mission’

second model are also present in Rwanda, with numerous memorials being established across the country, such as the genocide memorial centres in Kigali and Murambi. These memorials pay homage to the thousands of dead victims and have become sites of mourning for many survivors. In post-genocide Rwanda, as Clark observes, '[m]emorialisation is particularly important for survivors who lament that they have never been able to bury their loved ones who died during the genocide'.<sup>19</sup>

However, in reality, Rwanda is following a model of what I would term 'selective remembering', in which certain memories are privileged while others are repressed or silenced. This selective remembering is implemented from the top down by the government to ensure that certain aspects of the past are deliberately forgotten in an attempt to reshape the past and control information about the genocide.<sup>20</sup> A number of scholars have suggested that the government has instrumentalised the memory of the genocide for its own political ends.<sup>21</sup> For example, Burnet argues that Kagame's government has deliberately constructed a 'new language' with which to talk about the genocide.<sup>22</sup> This is particularly apparent in the categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator', 'innocent' and 'guilty'. While Rwandan identity has been largely de-racialised, only people of Tutsi ethnicity are classed as 'victims' or

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with the clear 'moral purpose' of denouncing the evil acts committed by the perpetrators and bearing witness to the suffering of the victims: see Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 265.

<sup>20</sup> According to Eugenia Zorbas, there are numerous 'silences' being imposed on the reconciliation process by the government, including the failure to prosecute alleged RPA crimes, the lack of debate on, and the instrumentalisation of, Rwanda's 'histories', the collective stigmatisation of all Hutu as *génocidaires*, and the papering over of societal cleavages through the 'outlawing' of 'divisionism'. See Zorbas, 'Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *African Journal of Legal Studies*, 1.1 (2004), 29–52 (pp. 40–48).

<sup>21</sup> See Burnet, 'Whose Genocide? Whose Truth?'; René Lemarchand, 'Genocide, Memory and Ethnic Reconciliation in Rwanda', in Stefaan Marysse, Filip Reyntjens and Stef Vandeginste, eds, *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs: Annuaire 2006–2007* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 21–30; Vidal, 'La commémoration du génocide au Rwanda'.

<sup>22</sup> Burnet, 'Whose Genocide? Whose Truth?', p. 89.

‘survivors’ when referring to the genocide, and the term ‘perpetrator’ is collectively applied to all those of Hutu ethnicity.<sup>23</sup> As a result, Hutu are excluded from national memory. This rigid categorisation is further encoded in the 2008 constitutional amendment. Prior to this amendment, the genocide was officially referred to as *itsembabwoko n’itsembatsemba* (genocide and massacres). However, as Burnet notes, in 2008 the government chose to adopt more exclusive language, *jenoside yakorewe abatutsi* (genocide against Tutsi), thus ‘codifying the long-term symbolic erasure of Hutu victims of the genocide from national mourning activities’.<sup>24</sup>

In a similar vein, Vidal argues that the government is engaged in what she terms a ‘travail de mémorisation forcée’ that is implemented principally through national commemoration processes. The politicisation of commemorative ceremonies has led to what Schuberth describes as a state of ‘selective mourning’ where only those officially classed as ‘victims’ have the right to mourn.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it has been implied that, by controlling the memory of the genocide, the RPF-led government benefits from impunity for the revenge killings exacted against Hutu in 1994. According to Filip Reyntjens, the government is exploiting what he describes as ‘genocide credit’, meaning that the government uses the genocide as a source of legitimacy to escape condemnation.<sup>26</sup> While there is much scholarship detailing the positive

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<sup>23</sup> See Burnet, ‘Whose Genocide? Whose Truth?’, p. 80; Helen Hintjens, ‘Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda’, *Ethnicities*, 8.1 (2008), 5–41 (p. 24). Eltringham has also observed the construction of a ‘crude, binary framework’ that portrays Tutsi as *rescapés* and Hutu as *génocidaires*. See Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> See Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*, p. 200.

<sup>25</sup> Schuberth, ‘The Politics of Knowledge Production’, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> See Filip Reyntjens, ‘Rwanda, Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship’, *African Affairs*, 103 (2004), 177–210 (p. 199). Paul Gready also argues that the genocide gives the Rwandan government a certain ‘moral legitimacy’, which has made the international community reluctant to challenge Kagame’s regime. See Gready, “‘You’re Either With Us or

measures taken by the government during the difficult period of transition following the genocide,<sup>27</sup> these critiques do point towards a potentially dangerous form of memory control which, rather than leading to reconciliation, may have resulted in deep social divisions along ethnic lines. Indeed, Lemarchand is critical of the government for institutionalising ‘a mode of thought control profoundly antithetical to any kind of inter-ethnic dialogue aimed at recognition and forgiveness’.<sup>28</sup> This politicisation of memory has a profound effect on the ways in which individuals remember the genocide and the ways in which they tell their stories, particularly in terms of facilitating individual and social healing.

### *Healing through Narrative*

The act of writing, then, for Rwandan women authors is an attempt to counter the official narrative and to work through their trauma in their own way. On an individual level, Henke explains how the process of writing functions as a mechanism for healing traumatised individuals. According to Henke, traumatic memories must be brought to the fore and reconstructed in narrative for the process of healing to begin: ‘Only by bearing literary witness to a coherent and compelling life narrative can she [the survivor] resuscitate traumatic memories [...] and inaugurate a cathartic ritual of healing’.<sup>29</sup> As Laub has elsewhere argued, the potential healing from trauma is contingent on the individual’s ‘ability to create a cohesive, integrated narrative of the event’.<sup>30</sup> For Henke, it

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Against Us’: Civil Society and Policy Making in Post-Genocide Rwanda’, *African Affairs*, 109.437 (2010), 637–57 (p. 640).

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Clark’s discussion of the *gacaca* initiative, *The Gacaca Courts*.

<sup>28</sup> Lemarchand, ‘Genocide, Memory and Ethnic Reconciliation in Rwanda’, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> Laub, ‘An Event Without a Witness’, p. 87.

is through writing – or ‘scriptotherapy’ – that the individual fashions ‘an enabling discourse of testimony and self-revelation, to establish a sense of agency’.<sup>31</sup> The healing property of the written narrative thus resides in the individual being able to regain a sense of agency through the act of writing: ‘the life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency’.<sup>32</sup> Henke nevertheless recognises the temporary nature of the healing derived from scriptotherapy, which is a concern also shared by Rwandan women survivors. Their testimonies suggest it is up to the individual to translate the temporary sense of empowerment provided by telling their story into something more permanent in their own lives.

A number of the women authors describe a feeling of dissatisfaction upon completing their testimony; others express a need to testify again and again as a single account is insufficient. For Mukagasana, bearing witness has become the principle purpose of her life. She concludes her second testimony with the following phrase: ‘Oui, c’est devenu cela, ma vie. Me battre pour la mémoire de mon peuple’ (NP 295). For Mujawayo, completing her first testimony leaves her with a feeling of uselessness: ‘Je n’avais pas imaginé, ou tout simplement je n’y ai pas réfléchi, que la fin de ce livre allait me donner un tel sentiment d’inutilité’ (SV 244). She nevertheless feels compelled to continue testifying, publishing her second testimony two years later:

Depuis plus de dix ans, pour entretenir leur mémoire et celle d’un million de Tutsi éliminés, mon temps n’est qu’une course effrénée et qui jamais, ne cessera. Témoigner, témoigner, toujours témoigner. Pour eux, Innocent, mon mari, mon père, ma mère, ma sœur Stéphanie, ma sœur Rachel, mes neveux, les miens, tous les miens absents dont j’ai tenu le compte, tu te rappelles. Plus je témoigne, plus je martèle leur

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<sup>31</sup> Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, p. xvi.

<sup>32</sup> Henke, *Shattered Subjects*, p. xvi.

souvenir. Mais plus je témoigne, et plus leur souvenir me martèle. Je peux, un jour peut-être, faire le deuil des miens, je ne pourrai jamais faire le deuil de ce qu'ils ont subi. (FS 13–14)

Bearing witness on behalf of those who died appears to have become a central part of Mujawayo's existence, yet it remains extremely painful for her to do so, both emotionally and psychologically.

### *The Role of the Community*

In the absence of formal structures for psychological care, many survivors turn to the community for recognition and support. However, in post-genocide Rwanda where many social networks have been destroyed, it is difficult for survivors to find the support they need. Herman identifies the 'damage to relational life' as a primary effect of trauma: 'Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others'.<sup>33</sup> As such, a key result of trauma is disconnection from society which leads to a profound sense of isolation. Herman underlines the importance of the community in making new connections and helping the survivor overcome trauma and rebuild a sense of self:

Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world. In this process, the survivor seeks assistance not only from those closest to her but also from the wider community. The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of social connections and community in enabling survivors to feel that they exist is underlined by Berthe Kayitesi when she describes her

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<sup>33</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 70.

relationships with her ‘entourage proche: les camarades, les voisins, les collègues. J’aimais beaucoup tout ce monde autour de moi qui me faisait exister’ (DV 259). These social connections are key to helping the survivor overcome her trauma, whereas social rejection can have a negative impact on the survivor.

As Herman observes, the breach between the individual and society can only be fully restored if certain conditions are met:

Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgement of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses – recognition and restitution – are necessary to rebuild the survivor’s sense of order and justice.<sup>35</sup>

Because so many survivors do not receive this justice and recognition at the official, national level, they seek recognition at a more local level, among those in a similar position to themselves. This echoes Ricœur’s model of triple attribution of memory: between the poles of individual memory and collective (national) memory, there operates an intermediary level of memory, that of a *mémoire partagée*. Ricœur describes this dimension of shared memory as ‘un plan intermédiaire où s’opèrent concrètement les échanges entre la mémoire vive des personnes individuelles et la mémoire publique des communautés auxquelles nous appartenons’.<sup>36</sup> As indicated in Chapter 2, this shared memory occurs between what Ricœur terms ‘les proches’, between those people who surround us in our social and familial relationships. According to Ricœur, it is ‘les proches’ who ‘approuvent ce que [l’individu] atteste: qu[’il] puis[se]

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<sup>35</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 70.

<sup>36</sup> Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, p. 161.

parler, agir, raconter’.<sup>37</sup> In the case of Rwanda, where families and social networks have been destroyed, it is through forging new social relationships in the local community that women can begin to share their memories with others like them. Through rebuilding social networks and sharing their stories, Rwandan women are able to gain the recognition of their experiences – and of their existence – that is necessary for healing. One important tool for rebuilding social networks in post-genocide Rwandan society is the numerous community organisations that have become the site of *la mémoire partagée* and function as intermediary spaces between individual and national memory.<sup>38</sup>

### *Community Organisations*

When seeking to understand how societies cope with their traumatic past, Hayner underlines the importance of taking into account cultural variability. Similarly, psychiatrists Cécile Rousseau and Aline Drapeau have observed that ‘culture provides the tools for grieving. When it comes to trauma, culture, which is obviously involved in the reparative process, may be equally involved in determining how, and how intensely, trauma is relived’.<sup>39</sup> The ‘ideal form of support’ for survivors may therefore reside within the existing cultural and social structures.<sup>40</sup> In Rwanda, this support comes not from the imported forms of Western therapy and international aid, but from a wide array of community organisations. Newbury and Baldwin have documented ‘Rwanda’s tradition of

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<sup>37</sup> Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, p. 162.

<sup>38</sup> There are now hundreds of survivor organisations in existence in Rwanda, many of which are grouped under the umbrella organisation, *Ibuka*. For more information consult [www.ibuka.rw](http://www.ibuka.rw). A similar umbrella organisation, Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, exists specifically for women’s associations. See [profemmes-twesehamwe.org](http://profemmes-twesehamwe.org).

<sup>39</sup> Cécile Rousseau and Aline Drapeau, ‘The Impact of Culture on the Transmission of Trauma: Refugees’ Stories and Silence Embodied in Their Children’s Lives’, in Yael Danieli, ed., *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1998), pp. 465–86 (p. 465).

<sup>40</sup> See Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, p. 146.



vibrant organization activity', which has facilitated the development of numerous community organisations in post-genocide Rwandan society.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the proliferation of women's organisations, developed to address the urgency of women's needs in the aftermath of the genocide, has been helped by the fact that 'collaboration and cooperation among women in Rwanda have long historical roots'.<sup>42</sup> Drawing on pre-existing cultural traditions, these community organisations are a culturally specific – and often gender specific<sup>43</sup> – form of coping with the traumatic legacy of genocide in Rwandan society.

In Rwanda, because so many families and social networks were decimated during the genocide, these community organisations have come into existence to help survivors re-forge social bonds and cope with their traumatic past. According to Burnet, women 'turned to associations for the emotional and social support they would have received from kin or neighbours in the past'.<sup>44</sup> For many Rwandan women survivors, community organisations can help facilitate the transition from surviving to living. For example, Berthe Kayitesi was one of the founders of the organisation *Tubeho*, whose principal aim was to help orphans cope with their problems in the aftermath of the genocide<sup>45</sup>:

Pour faire face, nous avons, à l'aide des aînés qui agissaient comme nos parrains et conseillers, fondé une association appelée '*Tubeho*', qui veut dire 'Vivons'. Ce nom donné à notre association était porteur de ce que nous étions jusqu'alors et de ce que nous projetions d'être. En réalité on était toujours dans la survie, et on aspirait à la vie, à la vraie vie. (DV 217)

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<sup>41</sup> Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin, 'Aftermath: Women's Organizations in Postconflict Rwanda', Working Paper No. 304, *Center for Development Information and Evaluation* (Washington: U.S. Agency for International Development, July 2000), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Newbury and Baldwin, 'Aftermath: Women's Organizations in Postconflict Rwanda', p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> For example, AVEGA works with both genocide widowers and widows, although there are far fewer male than female survivors.

<sup>44</sup> Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*, p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> While I have been unable to find the exact date the association was founded, by 2009 the association was supporting over 400 orphans in the neighbourhood of Kimironko in Kigali. See Kayitesi, Deslandes and Lebel, 'Facteurs de résilience chez des orphelins rescapés du génocide', p. 70.

While it is difficult to tell from the French translation whether the name chosen for the organisation is in the present or the imperative tense, both tenses give a sense of immediacy and again sound like a defiant call to the former *génocidaires*: the very fact that the survivors are *living* means that the perpetrators were not successful in their aim of exterminating all Tutsi.<sup>46</sup> While rebuilding their lives is a long process, without the support and solidarity of community organisations many survivors would not have been able to move forward. For example, Kayitesi tells the story of her friend Olive, another member of *Tubeho* for whom, '[s]ur le long chemin de la survie, la solidarité fut une grande arme' (DV 226). She concludes Olive's story by showing how Olive has managed to achieve a full life: 'Grâce à *Tubeho*, elle avait un toit, pour elle et les siens. Elle s'est mariée en 2006. Elle est mère de deux enfants' (DV 228).

In their study of women's organisations in post-genocide Rwanda, Newbury and Baldwin observe the 'remarkable' proliferation of community groups emerging in the second half of the 1990s to meet the material and emotional needs of survivors:

these groups helped women reconstruct their lives through emergency material assistance, counseling, vocational training, and assistance with income-earning activities. In addition, many organizations provided a space where women could reestablish social ties, seek solace, and find support.<sup>47</sup>

In *Survivantes*, Mujawayo highlights these same fundamental aims when she describes the circumstances in which the genocide widows' association,

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<sup>46</sup> On the English-language website of the non-profit organisation 'Friends of Tubeho', the word *Tubeho* is translated as 'let's live', which is also a call to survivors to reject their position as victims and to reengage with the present. See [friendsoftubeho.org](http://friendsoftubeho.org).

<sup>47</sup> Newbury and Baldwin, 'Aftermath: Women's Organizations in Postconflict Rwanda', p. 1. The authors quote a 1997 study which estimated that 'in each of Rwanda's 154 communes there were an average of about 100 women's organizations – or a total of more than 15,400 groups' (p. 2).

AVEGA, came into existence, its principle function being to bring women together and help them overcome the difficulties encountered after the genocide.<sup>48</sup> Mujawayo writes: ‘Avega n’est pas une association de femmes normales, on existe uniquement pour tenir le coup après ce qu’on a vécu de commun: un génocide qui devait nous exterminer et dont on est miraculeusement rescapées’ (SV 239). She describes their outreach work in the aftermath of the genocide, seeking out other widows who did not know of the existence of AVEGA but who could benefit from its help. One particularly poignant example is when they discovered a group of women who had been living in a pigsty since the genocide:

On était complètement abattues... Tu viens voir d’autres veuves pour leur dire que toi aussi, tu as désespéré et que, grâce à la solidarité, tu as pu tenir le coup, et tu les trouves dans les mêmes conditions que des cochons et des lapins. [...] Ah, cette porcherie, pour moi, ça reste le traumatisme du traumatisme des rescapés... (SV 235–36)

This description portrays a striking difference between women who have benefitted from the solidarity provided by community organisations and those who have been left to fend for themselves, women ‘qui ne savent même plus qu’elles ont le droit le plus normal d’exister’ (SV 236). This further underlines the importance of organisations such as AVEGA in terms of reaching out to isolated survivors, particularly widows, and helping them to develop social connections and rebuild their lives.

Traditionally, widows were not accorded a high social status in Rwanda. As Mujawayo explains: ‘Une veuve, au Rwanda, ça ne porte pas bonheur. Un proverbe dit: “*Uwo wanga aragapfakara, ibisigaye atunge ibyo*”

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<sup>48</sup> AVEGA was founded in January 1995 by a group of 50 widows. Today they have over 25,000 members across the country, making them one of the largest survivor organisations in post-genocide Rwanda. For more information consult the organisation’s website: [avegaagahozo.org](http://avegaagahozo.org).

(“Ce que tu peux souhaiter à ta pire ennemie, c’est d’être veuve, même si elle garde toutes les richesses”)’ (SV 229). For the widows of the genocide, the stigma attached to being a widow is compounded by the horrific circumstances under which they lost their husbands. As the widows of the Association Duhozanye attest, their low social status is worsened by the fact that they are Hutu widows of Tutsi men.<sup>49</sup>

Like AVEGA, the Association Duhozanye is an organisation committed to ‘l’amitié, la solidarité et l’entraide’.<sup>50</sup> For the members of the association, grouping together and sharing their stories was crucial in helping them survive the genocide and move on with their lives:

Elles se sont rendus [*sic*] compte que le fait de se rassembler et de pouvoir échanger sans réserve sur les drames que chacune d’entre elles avait vécus, constituait une forme de thérapie psychologique utile à leur équilibre mental leur permettant d’avoir la force nécessaire pour sauver ce qui pouvait encore l’être: lutter pour la vie des survivants.<sup>51</sup>

These types of community organisations provide essential material and psychological support to survivors, and can also serve as a form of empowerment for women, providing them with an occupation and a sense of purpose. In the case of AVEGA, for example, as representative Odette Kiyirere explained to me in an interview, women who were able to ‘heal’ with the support of the organisation often went on to be trained as ‘Animatrices psychosociales’ in order to help other survivors.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, while organisations such as AVEGA and Duhozanye have helped many survivors deal with their traumatic past, these organisations have not escaped the impact of socio-political divisions. Ethnicity still plays a

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<sup>49</sup> See Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>50</sup> Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save*, p. 97.

<sup>51</sup> Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save*, pp. 94–95.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Odette Kiyirere, Kigali, 19 April 2012.

key role in how these organisations define themselves. For example, Hutu widows who had been married to Tutsi men were not welcome in a number of survivor organisations because they were not considered to be ‘victims’ of the genocide and have been forced to form their own groups such as Duhozanye. Moreover, they are excluded from receiving developmental assistance set aside for genocide survivors.<sup>53</sup> As Duhozanye has observed, a number of different ‘catégories de veuves’ have emerged in post-genocide Rwandan society, defined by the circumstances under which the women were widowed: Tutsi widows of Tutsi men, Hutu widows of Tutsi men, widows of former perpetrators, etc.<sup>54</sup> By maintaining these exclusive categories, community organisations may be perpetuating the social divisions imposed by the official political narrative, despite the fact that these organisations share the same goals. But, as many survivors tell us, it is difficult to reconcile with those who have been portrayed as your enemy in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. Over recent years, more and more stories of positive, inter-ethnic reconciliation have emerged, but it will certainly be many more years, generations even, before the social divisions are fully eroded.

Women’s experiences of community organisations thus highlight the importance – and the continued difficulty – of rebuilding social trust for individual survivors. It is important at this stage to examine the ways in which the rebuilding of social trust occurs on a wider level, particularly through the community-based *gacaca* court system, as this is the system that most survivors come into contact with in their everyday lives. For survivors, learning the truth about what happened and being able to mourn their loved

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<sup>53</sup> See Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*, p. 142.

<sup>54</sup> See Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save*, p. 96.

ones are essential for making the transition from *surviving* to *living*. However, Rwandan women's testimonies show that national processes of reconciliation pose major obstacles to individual survivors being able to regain control over their lives. By foregrounding the voices of women in Rwanda, the testimonies highlight the problematic notions of justice, truth and forgiveness in post-genocide Rwanda, and show their solidarity with survivors who are unable to leave Rwanda and are forced to cohabit and reconcile with former perpetrators. It is important to note that 'cohabitation' and 'reconciliation' are in themselves relational terms, which involve a certain amount of reciprocity. However, in post-genocide Rwanda, survivors often do not have a choice over whether to cohabit with the former *génocidaires* or whether to participate in processes of reconciliation.

### *Gacaca*

The *gacaca* courts are a modified version of Rwanda's traditional community-based justice system, where both survivors and perpetrators are called to bear witness to establish the truth about what happened in 1994. Inaugurated in 2001 to deal with the backlog of genocide cases, 250,000 judges were elected by their communities across 11,000 jurisdictions.<sup>55</sup> As Clark summarises:

Broadly speaking, the dual aims of *gacaca* are to prosecute genocide suspects – approximately 120,000 of whom had already been detained in jails around the country when *gacaca* was inaugurated – and to begin a process of reconstructing the damaged social fabric.<sup>56</sup>

According to Clark, the Rwandan population 'links *gacaca* closely with healing and forgiveness, highlighting the need for rebuilding individual lives as well as

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<sup>55</sup> See Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 3.

the nation after the genocide'.<sup>57</sup> The *gacaca* courts thus have an important role to play in rebuilding Rwandan society.<sup>58</sup>

A number of studies examine the efficacy of the *gacaca* courts as a form of 'transitional justice'.<sup>59</sup> While some have openly praised the success of the *gacaca* courts, other critics have recognised certain controversies surrounding this form of justice, particularly in terms of its implications for survivors. On the one hand, for example, Peter Uvin is quoted as describing the *gacaca* courts as a 'brilliant' initiative, which 'offers something to all groups – prisoners, survivors – it offers them all hope, and a reason to participate'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, early on in the *gacaca* initiative, Uvin observed that '*gacaca* law contains a politically astutely designed set of incentives to encourage popular participation and acceptance', and was hopeful that 'the *gacaca* procedure could produce more truth than the formal justice system has so far managed to do'.<sup>61</sup> Uvin is not wholly positive about the *gacaca* process, however, acknowledging that the system 'compromises on principles of justice as defined in internationally-agreed human rights and criminal law'.<sup>62</sup> Thomson, on the other hand, adopts a highly critical stance, arguing that, for many Rwandans, 'the *gacaca* courts represent a form of state control in their lives,

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<sup>57</sup> Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 257.

<sup>58</sup> It is important to note that the *gacaca* initiative ended in June 2012. However, because all the testimonies consulted were published before this date, I will be talking about *gacaca* in the present tense.

<sup>59</sup> The first book-length study is Clark's *The Gacaca Courts* (2010). Other studies include: Timothy Longman, 'An Assessment of Rwanda's *Gacaca* Courts', *Peace Review*, 21.3 (2009), 304–12; Max Rettig, 'Gacaca: Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Postconflict Rwanda?', *African Studies Review*, 51.3 (2008), 25–50; Alana Erin Tiemessen, 'After Arusha: Gacaca Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *African Studies Quarterly*, 8.1 (2004), 57–76; and Peter Uvin, 'The *Gacaca* Tribunals in Rwanda', in David Bloomfield, Teresa Barnes and Luc Huyse, eds, *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook* (Stockholm: IDEA, 2003), pp. 116–21.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted by Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 3: this quote by Uvin was originally cited in an article by George Packer, 'Justice of a Hill: Genocide Trials in Rwanda', *Dissent*, 49.2 (2002), available at [www.dissentmagazine.org/article/justice-on-a-hill](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/justice-on-a-hill).

<sup>61</sup> Uvin, 'The *Gacaca* Tribunals in Rwanda', p. 118.

<sup>62</sup> Uvin, 'The *Gacaca* Tribunals in Rwanda', p. 118.

which promotes fear and insecurity as opposed to unity or reconciliation'.<sup>63</sup> Burnet's long-term fieldwork in both urban and rural communities leads her to a similar conclusion. She argues that, '[r]egardless of how well Gacaca is operating [...], the process has increased conflict in local communities (or, at least, brought that conflict to the surface) and has intensified ethnic cleavages in the short term'.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, while the *gacaca* courts have been promoted as a flagship for truth and reconciliation, because of the legal ambiguities surrounding the mention of ethnic identity,<sup>65</sup> Thomson argues that the *gacaca* courts have allowed 'no frank or open discussion of how ethnic categories shaped the violence of the genocide', nor 'any official recognition of lived experiences that differ from the official version, in which only Tutsi were victims and only Hutu killed'.<sup>66</sup> However, as Danielle Beswick underlines, the legal parameters of the speech crimes inciting 'divisionism' and 'genocide ideology' remain deliberately 'vague', which allows the state to manipulate them to silence critics.<sup>67</sup>

As the testimonies of Rwandan women show, survivors themselves are aware of the practical reality behind the *gacaca* initiative. As Kayitare acknowledges: 'Le but est de tenter de réconcilier les Rwandais par

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<sup>63</sup> Thomson, 'Whispering Truth to Power', p. 445.

<sup>64</sup> Jennie Burnet, 'The Injustice of Local Justice: Truth, Reconciliation, and Revenge in Rwanda', *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 3.2 (2008), 173–93 (p. 174).

<sup>65</sup> While ethnicity has not been legislated out of existence, the Rwandan government has nevertheless promoted what Eltringham describes as a 'de facto proscription of ethnicity': see Eltringham, 'The Past is Elsewhere: The Paradoxes of Proscribing Ethnicity in Post-Genocide Rwanda', in Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, eds, *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence* (Madison WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), pp. 269–82 (p. 270). Public speech acts inciting 'ethnic divisionism' and 'revisionism, negationism and trivialisation the genocide' were criminalised in the 2003 revision to the constitution. See articles 13 and 33 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, available through the Ministry of Defence website: [www.mod.gov.rw/?Constitution-of-the-Republic-of-Rwanda](http://www.mod.gov.rw/?Constitution-of-the-Republic-of-Rwanda).

<sup>66</sup> Thomson, 'Whispering Truth to Power', p. 445.

<sup>67</sup> See discussion of 'divisionism and genocide ideology' in Danielle Beswick, 'Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment: The Challenge of Political Space in Rwanda', *Development and Change*, 41.2 (2010), 225–51 (pp. 236–41).



l'instauration de la justice et l'établissement de la vérité sur ce qui s'est passé pendant ces trois mois épouvantables. Et en même temps, bien sûr, de désengorger les prisons...' (TLD 123). The testimonies of Rwandan women also provide us with first-hand accounts of the difficulties *gacaca* poses for survivors who are called to testify against their persecutors. Not only is it difficult for survivors to testify in *gacaca*, but to then have their testimony questioned and be made to directly confront the killers who often show no remorse has severe psychological consequences for many who participate. In terms of the psychological effects on the individual, Karen Brounéus's research has produced some disconcerting results. She explains that, contrary to expectations,

Witnesses in the *gacaca* reported higher levels of depression and PTSD than nonwitnesses [...]. Furthermore, longer exposure to truth telling has not lowered the levels of psychological ill health, nor has the prevalence of depression and PTSD decreased over time despite an ongoing reconciliation process.<sup>68</sup>

As well as running the risk of being retraumatised through the *gacaca* proceedings, certain survivors who have participated also express a strong sense of disappointment that *gacaca* has not brought the perpetrators to justice or provided the necessary support for survivors.<sup>69</sup> This disappointment is highlighted by a number of survivors, many of whom have lost faith in the system. For example, as Béatrice Mukandahunga simply states: 'I don't go to the *gacaca* courts, because there is no justice in *gacaca* courts'.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Jeanette Uwimana claims: 'I don't go to the *gacaca* courts anymore, because

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<sup>68</sup> Karen Brounéus, 'The Trauma of Truth Telling: Effects of Witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts on Psychological Health', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 54.3 (2010), 408–37 (p. 409).

<sup>69</sup> It is worth noting that *gacaca* is a local process and varies greatly from location to location, so survivors' experiences of the process of course also vary widely from individual to individual.

<sup>70</sup> De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me*, p. 129.

the people we are accusing are being released. I don't see the point in taking the risk of sharing my testimony there if it doesn't make any difference'.<sup>71</sup>

Other women feel that it is too dangerous to participate and accuse the perpetrators. For example, Gloriose Mushimiyimana tells of her fear of participating: 'It would be a lie if I said that I can forgive the Interahamwe. I will never testify at the *gacaca* courts, because my sister was beaten on her way home from the *gacaca* court where she appeared as a witness'.<sup>72</sup> Françoise Mukeshimana claims: 'I have not forgiven the Interahamwe. Those who wronged me did not face justice, and I cannot go to the *gacaca* courts as long as they are still free, because I am afraid the Interahamwe will kill me'.<sup>73</sup> Brounéus found similar reactions among victims in South Africa, who reported feeling 'disappointment' after participating in the TRC and described being 'stigmatized, abandoned, and threatened by their community as a result of participating in the proceedings'.<sup>74</sup> The fear of accusing the perpetrators in public and the lack of ensuing justice can be deeply damaging to the psyche of the survivor, and many survivors choose not to participate in *gacaca* or other legal processes. Nonetheless, many survivors do choose to participate in *gacaca* despite the risks, for, as the testimonies of Rwandan women show, survivors' participation in justice is central to the process of moving from surviving to living, allowing them to regain control over their stories and to cease being victims of the *génocidaires*.

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<sup>71</sup> De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me*, p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me*, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me*, p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> Brounéus, 'The Trauma of Truth Telling', p. 411.

### *Confronting the Perpetrators*

According to Mujawayo, the first women who dared to denounce the rapes that they had endured during the genocide at the ICTR were members of AVEGA. Rather than gaining a sense of justice from participating in the tribunal, these women found the experience humiliating and traumatising:

La plupart de ces femmes en revenaient exténuées [...]. Parler en public avait été une humiliation pour elles [...]. Elles avaient été harcelées par la défense, qui ne posait plus des questions pour comprendre mais pour les déstabiliser et, fragilisées psychologiquement, elles perdaient les pédales. [...] Elles étaient là à témoigner contre un homme qui se portait bien car on avait tout fait pour qu'il reste en vie, tandis qu'elles, victimes, n'étaient pas soignées. Elles rentraient au Rwanda, laminées, leur traumatisme plus que jamais à vif. (SV 252)

Based on the negative experiences of other survivors, Mujawayo expresses strong doubts about the ICTR and decides not to participate in it herself: 'Dans ces conditions, je préfère donc ne rien attendre d'une justice qui ne me calmera pas et, même, exacerbera ma souffrance' (SV 253). Even though she believes that bringing the perpetrators to justice is necessary, she expresses similar doubts about the efficacy of the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda: 'Des tribunaux qui, hier, servaient à gérer des affaires de vol de vaches devraient désormais gérer des crimes de génocide!' (SV 254). She views the *gacaca* system as inadequate for dealing with crimes of genocide and concludes that, 'c'est une justice impossible à mes yeux. Je n'y crois pas: les témoins ne parlent pas, les victimes sont suspectées et les coupables protégés' (SV 256).

In her second testimony, *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, Mujawayo talks in much greater detail about *gacaca*, both in general and in terms of her own personal experience. On the one hand, while Mujawayo recognises that reinstating the traditional tribunals was deemed a necessary 'réponse à une contrainte atroce: devoir cohabiter après et malgré un génocide' (FS 55), she

cannot imagine ‘comment une telle pratique pouvait s’adapter à la situation du génocide’ (FS 47). Mujawayo’s commentary on *gacaca* is at once informative and deeply personal. She explains her anger and frustration at hearing her sister’s killers deny any knowledge of what happened: ‘Ma colère était immense, ce jour-là. Aussi immense qu’impuissante’. (SV 62). She also explains how survivors are not permitted displays of emotion during the *gacaca* proceedings:

L’autre a coupé les tiens, ou bien il a participé aux tueries, ou bien encore il en a été témoin sans s’y opposer, et la loi t’interdit explicitement tout affect, tout emportement. C’est-à-dire que, toi, tu as une envie instinctive de lui rentrer dedans, et tu ne peux même pas le faire avec les mots. (Silence.) Tu vois, je te dis tout ça indignée, je m’étrangle et je peste et je m’emporte dans l’écriture comme je n’ai pas le droit de le faire dans la parole mais, comme tout le monde, moi aussi, je me suis conformée à la loi. Sur place, ne va pas croire que j’ai fait la rebelle. (FS 59)

Her testimony poignantly highlights how difficult this confrontation is for survivors under such rigid circumstances:

Qu’ils restent calmes, je comprends, ce n’est pas leur sœur, ce ne sont pas leurs neveux et leurs familles qui ont été jetés dans les toilettes... Mais nous autres, rescapés... Va t’en, toi, débattre sans émotion d’un tel événement. Pourtant, voilà bien ce qui nous est demandé. Heureusement, j’avais la chance d’avoir mes deux sœurs avec moi, assises côte à côte, et de temps à l’autre, on se tenait la main. (FS 64)

There is a clear discrepancy, then, between survivors’ and perpetrators’ experience of *gacaca*, with survivors placed in the impossible position of debating with the *génocidaires* about the unimaginable horrors they have suffered.

Annick Kayitesi also describes confronting the man she holds responsible for her mother’s death, Adolphe, who denounced them, and many others, to the militia. She describes Adolphe’s trial as ‘une parodie de justice’, where the judges ‘se désintéressaient complètement de mon récit’ (NE 215).

However, unlike many of the other survivors and despite being ‘[b]lessée par la conclusion du procès’ (NE 216), Kayitesi does not regret participating in the trial: ‘En dépit de l’échec du procès, de la libération des prévenus et de l’incompréhension que la cour m’a manifestée, je me félicite d’y avoir participé. J’ai témoigné, c’est ce qui compte. Et je témoignerai encore’ (NE 220). For Kayitesi, bearing witness in a legal setting is thus a conscious choice that constitutes part of her individual process of recovery, of moving from surviving to living. Kayitesi recognises the importance of being a legal as well as a moral witness, terms discussed in Chapter 1, and emphatically encourages other survivors to testify, particularly survivors of rape: ‘Si les victimes se dérobent, ce genre d’agression tuera d’autres. [...] Il faut quand même en parler. Que cela se sache! Pourtant c’est difficile. Cela touche la vie intime’ (NE 154). Despite how difficult it is for the survivor to bear witness to such a personal suffering, Kayitesi suggests that it is nevertheless necessary in order to achieve justice and facilitate individual healing.

### *Collective Guilt*

Another of the obstacles to successful reconciliation in post-genocide Rwandan society is the notion of collective guilt. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, extending the category of ‘guilty’ to encompass all Rwandan Hutu means that many Hutu who suffered during the genocide are excluded from the category of ‘victim’. Despite recognising that not all Hutu were guilty – indeed, several of the women were helped by a Hutu – there is occasionally a tendency in the women survivors’ testimonies to employ the general word ‘Hutu’ to refer to the *génocidaires*. For example, when Annick Kayitesi returns to her grandparents’

home, she is shocked by the extent of the destruction: ‘Sur la route, on ne reconnaissait plus rien, aucune espèce de fleurs, plus d’habitations, rien! Le désert, une campagne rasée. Les Hutus avaient tout effacé, les personnes, les maisons, les chiens, la clôture’ (NE 190).

Numerous other survivors conflate Hutu with *génocidaires* in their narratives, whether consciously or unconsciously. In her testimony *Comme la langue entre les dents*, Marie-Aimable Umurerwa is critical of this collectivisation of guilt, at one stage claiming to be ‘écœurée’ when she sees a Hutu refugee being accused by Tutsi of stealing property: ‘Oui, il suffit d’être hutu pour être suspect. Comme si tous les Hutu étaient automatiquement des assassins’ (CL 96). Yet later she herself conflates the Hutu with the *génocidaires* upon seeing footage of Rwandan refugees on the television. Her reaction becomes a source of contention between Umurerwa and her husband (a Hutu). He accuses her: “‘Tu es toujours à humilier les Hutu. [...] Interahamwe? Tu oublies que mes parents sont parmi eux. Et mes parents sont eux aussi des Interahamwe, peut-être?’” Interahamwe? Hutu? Me voilà prise en flagrant délit de faire l’amalgame’ (CL 161). While Umurerwa claims to feel ‘injuste’ in her judgement of the refugees, this episode nevertheless serves to underscore the complexity of Tutsi survivors’ emotions towards the Hutu, and also highlights the ongoing tensions over ethnic relations, even within the same family. Mukagasana experiences a similar reaction when she sees the lorries of foreign NGOs taking provisions to the former Zaire:

‘C’est cela, me dis-je. Nous, les rescapés du génocide, nous sommes en train de crever de faim dans un pays exsangue, tandis que les organisations humanitaires envoient chez nos assassins des camions pour les nourrir’. Je me ressaisis, non, tous les réfugiés ne sont pas des assassins, il y a des enfants parmi eux, otages de leurs propres parents. Ils ont le droit de manger, eux aussi. (NP 204)

While it is highly problematic and divisive to view all Hutu as collectively guilty of perpetrating genocide, the collectivisation of guilt has also had legal implications in bringing individual perpetrators to justice. Eltringham observes the existence of a ‘tension between a collective globalisation of guilt and the judicial principle of individual responsibility’.<sup>75</sup> Perpetrators accused in a legal setting (such as the ICTR, national courts or *gacaca* courts) are able to minimise their individual responsibility by situating their actions within the collective. This can be detrimental in bringing individual perpetrators to justice and also serves to prolong the culture of impunity in Rwanda. As Eltringham underlines:

The principle of individual criminal responsibility is intrinsic to the recognition and prosecution of the crime of genocide. Any statement or insinuation that detracts from or dilutes that principle not only weakens the objective of ending impunity, but brings into question the ontological nature of what we recognise as genocide.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, adopting such a simplistic ethnic dichotomy is dangerous as it suggests that there is no basis for individual responsibility or agency. Indeed, Annick Kayitesi claims that, for some of the perpetrators, the collective responsibility assigned to the Hutu population actually works in their favour:

Le crime de génocide porte en lui-même les fondements de son déni puisqu’il est trop ‘extraordinaire’ pour être imputé à une simple personne sur le mode de la responsabilité pénale traditionnelle. Les assassins cherchent à se cacher toute responsabilité individuelle derrière une supposée responsabilité collective. (NE 228)

Mujawayo highlights a similar evasion of individual responsibility in the letters sent by perpetrators to survivors asking for forgiveness: ‘Jusqu’à ce jour, je n’ai jamais entendu parler d’un courrier où l’auteur s’accusait personnellement. L’utilisation du ‘je’ ne sert qu’à minimiser sa responsabilité en se fondant dans

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<sup>75</sup> Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*, p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*, p. 75.

le groupe' (FS 129). If perpetrators do not admit their individual responsibility and tell the truth about what they have done, it makes it impossible for survivors to achieve a sense of justice and also greatly affects not only survivors' ability to forgive but also their ability to heal.

As Leigh Payne observes in *Unsettling Accounts*, perpetrator confessions 'do not necessarily disclose truths about the past. [...] Rather than apologize for their acts, perpetrators tend to rationalize them and minimize their own responsibility, thus heightening, rather than lessening, tension over the past'.<sup>77</sup> Payne's extensive study focuses on confessions of state violence in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and South Africa, and looks at how certain judicial systems permit conditional amnesty based on confessions. The confession procedure is central to the Rwandan *gacaca* system, as Uvin underlines: 'Prisoners who confess and ask for forgiveness can receive dramatic reductions in penalties'.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, as my discussion in the remainder of this chapter will show, these incentives do not necessarily invite the perpetrators to tell the whole truth. Survivors need to find out the truth and achieve a sense of justice, without which they are often unable to move forward and gain mastery over their traumatic memories. As Mukagasana clearly states: 'Je ne demande que ceci: vérité et justice. Pour les miens et pour mon peuple' (NP 13). Mujawayo also underlines the importance of truth, describing her search for her sister's remains as 'la quête de la vérité' (FS 19). It is important to examine the impact of this painful quest for truth on the survivor's ability to move towards *living*.

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<sup>77</sup> Leigh A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Uvin, 'The *Gacaca* Tribunals in Rwanda', p. 117.



### *Partial Truths*

Many scholars have underlined the importance of truth telling in postconflict reconciliation processes, both at the individual and collective levels. As Herman remarks on the opening page of *Trauma and Recovery*: ‘Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims’.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Brounéus observes that truth telling ‘has come to play a pivotal role in postconflict reconciliation processes around the world’, and serves ‘a crucial function for peace building’.<sup>80</sup> In post-genocide Rwanda, as Bert Ingelaere highlights, ‘speaking, revealing or hearing the truth is the cornerstone of the [gacaca] court system’.<sup>81</sup> However, these notions of speaking, revealing and hearing the truth are highly problematic and impact on individuals in different ways. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, speaking out about a traumatic event can be extremely painful for the survivor and even lead to retraumatisation. For the perpetrator who is charged with revealing what happened, varying incentives to tell the truth (such as the prospect of a reduced sentence) or pressure to remain silent both determine which ‘truths’ will actually be spoken. As Mujawayo concludes in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*: ‘le gacaca, somme toute, ne marche que partiellement. Il y a des vérités qui sortent, pas la vérité’ (FS 100). The partial emergence of truth is detrimental to successful reconciliation in Rwanda and serves to undermine this central aim of the *gacaca* system. Moreover, hearing the truth can be equally painful for

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<sup>79</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Brounéus, ‘The Trauma of Truth Telling’, pp. 408–9.

<sup>81</sup> Bert Ingelaere, “Does the truth pass across the fire without burning?” Locating the short circuit in Rwanda’s Gacaca courts’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47.4 (2009), 507–28 (p. 515).

the survivor, who must listen to the killers describing their crimes; knowing the awful truth can be as great a burden as not knowing.

Telling the truth and hearing the truth clearly have very different effects. As a convicted perpetrator states in *Une saison de machettes*: ‘Dire la vérité à un éprouvé, c’est risquant mais pas blessant. Recevoir la vérité d’un tueur, c’est blessant mais pas risquant’.<sup>82</sup> However, many perpetrators decide not to tell the whole truth in order to reduce the risk to themselves. For survivors, hearing only part of the truth – or truths – can be even more painful. Indeed, for survivors, reliance on the perpetrators to reveal what they know, but also having to confront the full horror of what happened to their loved ones, proves to be a painful challenge. This is exemplified in Hayner’s discussion of participants in South Africa’s TRC, in which Hayner tells the story of a woman whose son was killed. The woman gave testimony at a hearing and initially claimed to feel a sense of ‘relief’. However, in the hearing she learned some of the circumstances of her son’s death, and this new knowledge ‘seemed too much for her to bear’, and she died just over a year later.<sup>83</sup> Hayner writes: ‘Although she had been a strong proponent of the right to know the truth, [...] in the end it was the stress of [her son’s] death and the partial truths about him being killed by his fellow comrades that was too much for her’.<sup>84</sup> As such, partial knowledge of the truth can be more unbearable for survivors than knowing everything. This echoes the discussion in Chapter 1 of the tension between the survivor’s desire to know what happened to their loved ones and the pain of that knowledge, a pain which is compounded by only partial knowledge of the truth.

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<sup>82</sup> Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes*, p. 228.

<sup>83</sup> See Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, pp. 138–39.

<sup>84</sup> Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, p. 139.

In Rwanda, this notion of ‘partial truths’ is central to survivors’ experiences of the *gacaca* court, and has greatly hindered the *gacaca* system in its aim of reconciling conflicting parties and restoring justice. Given that *gacaca* relies entirely on witness testimony and that the judges are primarily lay persons rather than trained jurists, the trials have fostered the proliferation of lies and what Max Rettig describes as ‘half-truths’.<sup>85</sup> According to Rettig, these ‘lies and half-truths pose a particularly grave threat to the success of *gacaca*, especially because lies erode the very goal – of social trust – that *gacaca* is intended to bolster’.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, many perpetrators are acutely aware of how they can use truth telling to their advantage. For example, one convicted perpetrator interviewed by Hatzfeld admits that he will have more truths to reveal if he is released: ‘Moi, si je suis pardonné par les autorités et si je sors de prison ma peine terminée, je pourrai dire sur la colline encore plus de vérité qu’au procès. Je pourrais ajouter des aveux, et des souvenirs, que j’ai gardé en cachette pour mes avoisinants’.<sup>87</sup> The fact that perpetrators are deliberately concealing some – if not all – of the truth about the events of 1994, and have retained control over these truths in the years following the genocide, places survivors in a position of dependence on the perpetrators. This control of information ultimately prevents survivors from regaining control over their personal history, and that of their families and loved ones, and from reconstructing their lives. According to one of the women interviewed by Mujawayo and whose testimony is recorded in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, ‘[r]évéler la vérité, c’est le début d’une construction’ (FS 138). This suggests that truth is the essential starting point for rebuilding Rwandan society.

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<sup>85</sup> See Rettig, ‘Gacaca’, p. 40.

<sup>86</sup> Rettig, ‘Gacaca’, p. 40.

<sup>87</sup> Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes*, p. 229.

However, with only partial truths emerging about the genocide, reconciliation and reconstruction can only ever be partial.

Nevertheless, some survivors do obtain enough information to gain a sense of closure, particularly if they are able to find the bodies of their loved ones who were killed during the genocide. Kayitare underlines the importance of finding bodies:

Quant à moi, je me demande si Gasarabwe, notre voisin à Rukaragata, au cas où ce serait lui qui aurait tué ma mère, mes frères et mes sœurs, serait capable d'avouer. J'en doute. Et de toute façon, ce n'est pas la justice qui m'importe, mais de retrouver les corps de maman et des miens, pour les enterrer dignement. (TLD 123)

In her postface to Dauge-Roth's article, 'Testimonial Encounter', Mujawayo underlines not only 'cette nécessité de trouver les corps des nôtres pour leur donner une sépulture digne' but also the 'soulagement du rescapé qui enfin peut tirer les siens des toilettes, des excréments. Leur rendre leur humanité au moins dans la mort. Mais aussi libérer nos corps qui sont devenus les cimetières de tous ceux non enterrés. La paix, le relâchement, la possibilité enfin de faire son deuil'.<sup>88</sup> In her own search for her sister's remains, Mujawayo experiences the perpetrators' inability to tell the truth firsthand when she questions a witness, Thomas, about the whereabouts of her sister's body and he continues to deny any knowledge:

S'il avait été tueur, j'aurais compris son déni, mais là, je le questionnais seulement sur ce qu'il avait vu, je ne l'accusais de rien, quelle était donc sa motivation pour se taire? Que risquait-il à me confirmer cette information? Cela ne changerait rien à sa vie, tout à la mienne. (FS 66)

Both Kayitare and Mujawayo underline the importance for survivors of finding the bodies of their loved ones, and express frustration at having to rely on the killers for this knowledge. Mujawayo tells the story of Théophila, a survivor

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<sup>88</sup> Dauge-Roth, 'Testimonial Encounter', p. 178.

who works in one of the TIG work camps where she encountered one of the men who had murdered several members of her family:

Lui doit savoir où on a jeté les corps de mes parents, et il ne l'avoue toujours pas... Quand je dis que nous vivons avec la mort, c'est qu'on n'arrive pas à en sortir. Ils savent et ne disent rien. Aujourd'hui, j'ai pu enterrer mes frères et quand je me rends sur leur tombe, je sens que je suis proche d'eux. Mais tant que je rechercherai mes neveux, mes belles-sœurs, je ne peux pas être en paix. (FS 145)

Even when appealed to on an emotional level, without threat of punishment, the perpetrators are still not willing to tell the truth, which means that finding peace remains impossible for the survivor. For Théophila, while the *gacaca* courts were first presented as a way of obtaining truth and justice, the lack of information offered compounds her suffering and inability to mourn their dead. She exclaims: 'Que les tueurs disent donc où sont toutes les dépouilles. Et qu'ils reconnaissent aussi ce qu'ils ont fait! Car si le *gacaca* est l'espace de la vérité, il faut que toutes les histoires soient révélées de bout en bout' (FS 146). For certain survivors, then, *gacaca* has not been able to achieve its promised aims and has not incited the perpetrators to tell the truth. Indeed, Théophila claims that, amongst the perpetrators, '[i]l existe une solidarité incroyable' (FS 146), and that the truth will take years to come out, if it comes out at all.

### *An Impossible Forgiveness?*

Forgiveness and reconciliation are closely linked to notions of truth telling and justice. Many women survivors express a need for justice and truth, which are prerequisites for the processes of reconciliation and forgiveness. For example, as the leaders of the Association Duhozanye have underlined:

La réhabilitation qui reste encore à faire pour ces veuves est celle en rapport avec la justice. [...] Tout ce qu'elles demandent de la part des bourreaux, c'est qu'ils avouent leurs forfaits, qu'ils fassent connaître

toute la vérité. Alors un processus de pardon et de réconciliation pourrait commencer.<sup>89</sup>

In the words of a former perpetrator, ‘on ne peut pardonner que si l’on entend une grande vérité sans détour’.<sup>90</sup> The question of forgiveness haunts the narratives of Rwandan women survivors, and the women show a range of personal and complex reactions to this issue. Many women express a desire to forgive, but are unable to do so unless they know who to forgive and what they are forgiving them for. For Annick Kayitesi, it is impossible to pardon the perpetrators if they do not ask for forgiveness: ‘Avec qui devrais-je me réconcilier? Avec ceux qui ont tué ma famille, massacré ceux que j’aimais... Qui faut-il absoudre? Moi, personne ne me demande pardon’ (NE 230).

Similarly, Mukagasana is emphatic about the impossibility of forgiving without justice and repentance:

Le pardon à mes ennemis, oui, mais c’est une affaire entre Dieu et moi. Le pardon en tant que citoyenne, non. Justice! Justice! Justice! Et puis, à qui pardonner? Qu’on vienne d’abord me demander pardon! Que les assassins de mes enfants viennent me demander pardon. Mais jusqu’à cette heure, je n’ai encore rien vu venir dans ce sens. (NP 292–93)

Even when survivors participate in national reconciliation processes such as *gacaca* in a spirit of goodwill, the lack of remorse on the part of the perpetrators poses an obstacle to forgiveness. As Annick Kayitesi remarks:

Longtemps j’ai espéré qu’ils demanderaient pardon ou qu’ils reconnaîtraient avoir été trompés. Mais ces individus ressemblent davantage à des animaux qu’à des êtres humains. Et alors que je cherchais une quelconque raison de faire preuve de mansuétude, leur inhumanité m’a de nouveau agressée. (NE 230)<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Association Duhozanye, *Les Témoignages des veuves de Save*, p. 119.

<sup>90</sup> Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes*, p. 226.

<sup>91</sup> Imagery portraying the killers as animals is common across a number of the testimonies in my corpus, serving to dehumanise them, just as they had dehumanised their victims. For example, in *La Fleur de Stéphanie*, Mujawayo uses the verb ‘dresser’ to describe the task of reintegrating the former *génocidaires* back into society: ‘J’emploie ce verbe parce qu’après ce qu’ils ont fait, pour moi, ce sont des animaux, donc, je parle de dressage’ (FS 135–36).

Mukasonga also states that she cannot forgive the killers who took pleasure in torturing their victims and prolonging their suffering:

[O]n a pris plaisir à notre agonie. On l'a prolongée par d'insoutenables supplices, pour le plaisir. On a pris plaisir à découper vivantes les victimes, à éventrer les femmes, à arracher le fœtus. Et ce plaisir, il m'est impossible de le pardonner, il est toujours devant moi comme un ricanement immonde. (IC 117)

Mukasonga's description not only highlights the killers' inhumane treatment of their victims but also the extent to which the Tutsi had internalised their own dehumanisation and accepted their death. Kayitare also observes this 'plaisir sadique de faire souffrir leurs proies' (TLD 55) exhibited by the killers. In the face of such deliberate cruelty, forgiveness is shown to be impossible.<sup>92</sup>

Although former perpetrators are encouraged to ask for forgiveness in the framework of national unity and reconciliation, for survivors it is not simply a question of being asked for forgiveness but also of the sincerity of the person asking to be forgiven. As rape survivor Adela Mukamusonera explains:

After his release, Damascene came to my house and demanded forgiveness. I think it's because he learned about unity and reconciliation when he was in jail. The government had already forgiven him by releasing him, he said, and now it was my turn to do the same. He asked me if I would forgive him in exchange for a cow. That really upset me. This man who reduced my life to nothing thinks he can make amends by giving me a cow? How can a human life be exchanged for a cow? [...] I don't want to be corrupted for forgiveness' sake. I can forgive, but not in exchange for money or a cow. I just want sincerity.<sup>93</sup>

It is interesting to note that, in this case, the perpetrator in question seemed to think that forgiveness was his 'right', and the way he asked for her forgiveness caused the survivor a great deal of pain. Similarly, Mujawayo's testimony

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<sup>92</sup> Vidal employs the expression 'cruauté délibérée' in an article reflecting on the nature of the violence and hatred in Rwanda: see Vidal, 'Le génocide des Rwandais tutsi: cruauté délibérée et logiques de haine', in Françoise Héritier, ed., *De la violence*, tome 1 (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996), pp. 325–66.

<sup>93</sup> De Brouwer and Ka Hon Chu, eds, *The Men Who Killed Me*, p. 63.

shows how survivors are placed in a difficult position when perpetrators ask for forgiveness without sincerity. For example, she mentions a letter that a friend received from one of her mother's killers asking for forgiveness:

Des centaines de Rwandais ont reçu ce type de lettre. Le texte ne varie jamais. Même type de pardon, même objectif visé, même détachement. [...] Et puis, il y a autre chose frappant dans ces courriers: jamais ne sont mentionnés le moindre regret, ni la moindre repentance des crimes commis. Je devrais donc pardonner à quelqu'un ce qu'il ne regrette pas? (FS 129)

Here, the lack of regret and sincerity on the part of the perpetrators means that the forgiveness envisaged by the government's policy of unity and reconciliation is necessarily limited, for both survivors and perpetrators. In this manner, the testimonies of Rwandan women survivors – both individual published testimonies and collections – bring to light information and personal experiences that complicate the official narrative of forgiveness and healing.

While forgiveness is presented as necessary for keeping the social peace in Rwanda, in many cases it has a harmful effect on the individual survivor, proving to be a great hindrance in her move from surviving to living. In her prologue to Mujawayo's *SurVivantes*, Belhaddad claims that the survivor is caught 'entre le fantasme d'une impossible vengeance et le fantasme d'un impossible pardon' (SV 11). For many survivors, real forgiveness is shown to be impossible, or at best a compromise:

C'est là qu'il m'arrive de penser que, peut-être, pardonner, ça aide. [...] Mais c'est purement égoïste. C'est pour avoir la paix. Et après que j'ai essayé de pardonner, en sachant que c'est juste pour avoir la paix, je demeure abattue... Car au fond, au fond, je ne peux pas pardonner, je veux que les exterminateurs de ma famille soit punis, bien puis. Mais pour tenir, pour gagner et, je le répète, par pur égoïsme, pour ma paix mentale, je me dis qu'il faut que je pardonne. (SV 71)

In her second testimony, Mujawayo also reflects at length on the question of forgiveness, particularly the effect it has on survivors:



Fondamentalement, il ne s'agit pas du même pardon pour chacun. Pour le génocidaire, il est d'une certaine façon salvateur car il représente une éventuelle remise de peine; pour la victime, il ne relève que de l'impossibilité ou du sacrifice. [...] Nous, rescapés, sentons souvent que le tueur a le sentiment de s'abaisser en demandant pardon, le dire est donc moins investissant pour lui. Or il ne peut être question d'inverser les rôles: le tueur ne me rend pas service en me formulant une telle demande, il ne m'accorde rien. (FS 125–26)

Even though the government is pushing survivors to forgive, Mujawayo explains that forgiveness is not in fact a priority for survivors, despite the official government policy of unity and reconciliation: 'Et puis le pardon, tu sais, ce n'est pas l'obsession d'un rescapé. Un pardon en échange de 274 vies. Rien qu'à cette phrase, tu réalises l'absurdité de la mise en balance' (FS 127).

It seems that only the perpetrators gain from being forgiven, for what compensation can there be for a survivor who has lost everything? In *Une saison de machettes*, one of the convicted *génocidaires* interviewed by Hatzfeld elaborates on the benefits of forgiveness for former perpetrators: 'Le pardon est une grande chance, il peut adoucir la punition et soulager les regrets, il facilite l'oubli. C'est gagnant pour celui qui le reçoit. [...] Je crois que pour celui qui pardonne, ça dépend s'il est remercié par une compensation convenable'.<sup>94</sup> Another perpetrator acknowledges the difference between asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness, and admits that being pardoned by survivors is very unlikely: 'Demander pardon, c'est une chose naturelle. Accorder pardon, c'est grand-chose. [...] Moi, je vois trop de difficultés à ce que nous échangions des pardons sur les collines. [...] Moi, je n'entrevois aucun pardon capable de sécher tout ce sang coulé'.<sup>95</sup>

We must therefore question whether it is possible for survivors to find a way to eventually reconcile without forgiveness. Mujawayo states: 'parlons de

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<sup>94</sup> Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes*, p. 227.

<sup>95</sup> Hatzfeld, *Une saison de machettes*, p. 231.

réconciliation, éventuellement, mais laissons tomber le pardon. [...] Parce que se réconcilier, ce n'est pas pardonner' (FS 129–30). For Mujawayo, the question of forgiveness is again linked to one of choice: 'Parlons de réconciliation puisque, tu l'as vu, il n'y a pas d'autre choix possible. Laissons tomber le pardon puisque le décliner reste le seul choix que je peux encore m'offrir. Pardonner ou ne pas pardonner dépend encore de mon libre arbitre' (FS 130). Again, the notions of choice, empowerment and individual agency emerge as crucial elements in the survivor's ability to move forward with their lives. While forgiveness is presented by the government as a necessary aspect of social healing, choosing *not* to forgive – and retaining control over this choice – may in fact be more beneficial for the individual survivor.

Nonetheless, Rwandan women's testimonies show that a certain level of forgiveness does seem to be possible under certain circumstances. For example, Kayitare describes her father's decision to remarry with a Hutu woman (whose previous husband was a known killer), a decision that Kayitare herself initially found very hard to understand:

Ne plus rester seul. Bien sûr, je le comprends. Mais pourquoi une Hutue? Et à peine quelques mois après le génocide? Avons-nous été décimés au point que l'on ne puisse plus trouver de femme tutsie? Je sais bien que ma réaction est intolérante, mais imagine-t-on un Juif rescapé d'Auschwitz épouser en 1947 une Allemande et adopter les enfants qu'elle aurait eus avec un nazi? Car c'est un peu ce qui s'est passé.<sup>96</sup> (TLD 108)

However, Kayitare explains how she later came to recognise the generosity of her father's gesture in marrying a Hutu woman and see it as an exemplary act of tolerance and reconciliation:

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<sup>96</sup> It is important to note the comparison with the Holocaust here, which again serves to underline the extremity of the situation in which survivors find themselves and also makes this situation comprehensible to a Western audience.

Avec le recul, je me dis que, si c'est de cette façon que mon père a pu surmonter, au moins un peu, son désespoir et reprendre pied dans la vie, il a eu tout à fait raison. Et même si la volonté d'échapper à la solitude a été déterminante dans sa conduite, il l'a fait (quoi qu'il ait dit) de manière vraiment généreuse. [...] En ce qui me concerne, c'est une vraie leçon de tolérance qu'il m'a donnée. Par là, il m'a empêchée de verser dans la haine et la rancœur, et pour cela je ne le remercierai jamais assez. (TLD 110)

Kayitare's change in attitude provides the reader with a more positive outlook for the future of Rwanda, for it is through rebuilding relationships such as these that conflicting parties can begin to be reconciled and society reconstructed.

Many of the women described by Mujawayo in *La Fleur de Stéphanie* have made similar attempts to reconcile with former perpetrators and have achieved a certain level of forgiveness. In the second part of the book, 'Paroles de "réconciliateurs"', Mujawayo tells of her encounter with a number of survivors who have taken the decision to enter into dialogue with the perpetrators, working towards their reintegration and 'sensibilisation' in the prisons and TIG camps. However, Mujawayo sees their decision to work with perpetrators as a necessity rather than a free choice: 'Cette alternative surhumaine, ils l'ont prise parce qu'ils n'en ont pas d'autre. Moi, je dispose désormais du privilège de décamper au bout du monde lorsque je sens que le réel ne m'offre aucune option entre ma folie de rescapée et ma folie de pas tout à fait vivante' (FS 58). Here again, exile is shown to be a relatively secure place for the survivor to distance herself from the horrors of the genocide and its aftermath, whereas for survivors who remain in Rwanda, reconciliation is a much more urgent and immediate concern.

*Finding One's Place, Finding One's Truth*

Many critics have questioned whether peace has really been restored in post-genocide Rwanda and whether reconciliation is in fact being 'forced'.<sup>97</sup> Women's testimonial narratives suggest that the Rwandan government's policy of national unity and reconciliation is being imposed on survivors and is, in many cases, unsuccessful. Many survivors still live in fear and isolation, while many Hutu returning from exile fear revenge attacks. This mutual distrust creates a deep-seated tension that prevents people from moving on with their lives and impedes the emergence of the truth about what happened in 1994. According to Laub and Allard, '[t]rauma is about having lost one's place', and 'it is only in the retrieval of memory and in the creation of testimonies that the place can be reclaimed. Without this witnessing there is a repeated and continuous wandering from place to place, and no place can be home without truth being established'.<sup>98</sup> As this chapter has shown, for many Rwandan genocide survivors, being able to reconstruct and regain control over their story at least partially depends on learning the truth about what happened from the perpetrators. As the Rwandan women highlight in their personal accounts, the emergence of only partial truths about what happened, insufficient justice and some perpetrators' lack of genuine remorse continue to be obstacles to their transition from surviving to living. Without learning the full truth about what happened, forgiveness and reconciliation are impossible realities for many survivors.

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<sup>97</sup> See Thomson, 'Whispering Truth to Power', p. 441. Lemarchand has also articulated this in terms of 'enforced memory': see Lemarchand, 'The Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda', in Phil Clark and Zachary D. Kaufman, eds, *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond* (London: Hurst, 2008), pp. 65–76 (p. 72).

<sup>98</sup> Laub with Allard, 'History, Memory, Truth', pp. 799–800.

As Herman observes, the wider community plays a crucial role in the restoration of justice for traumatized individuals:

Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgement of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses – recognition and restitution – are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice.<sup>99</sup>

In the case of Rwanda, this public recognition of survivors' suffering and assigning responsibility primarily occurs in the *gacaca* court system, which is designed to establish the truth about the events and facilitate healing. As Clark's research shows: 'When survivors openly discuss healing through *gacaca*, they describe it primarily as healing as belonging. Many survivors argue that they have experienced, or expect to experience, healing through *gacaca* when the community acknowledges their suffering'.<sup>100</sup> However, the testimonies of Rwandan women show that, while survivors may receive recognition of their suffering through *gacaca*, in many cases *gacaca* has had limited success in inciting truth telling and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Nevertheless, as Clark argues, 'Gacaca should be viewed as the beginning of a protracted process of healing that will continue long after *gacaca* is over'.<sup>101</sup> If, like Clark, we consider healing as an ongoing process and observe the positive changes that survivors have made in their individual lives despite the obstacles, then reconciliation in Rwanda appears to have a brighter future. According to Das and Kleinman, reconciliation involves not only truth telling, but the reconstructing of everyday life: 'Reconciliation is not a matter of a confession offered once and for all, but rather the building of relationships

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<sup>99</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 70.

<sup>100</sup> Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 262.

<sup>101</sup> Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 259.

by performing the work of the everyday'.<sup>102</sup> Thus, while it is necessary to speak and hear the truth about what happened during the genocide, it is through an ongoing process of rebuilding relationships within the community that reconciliation may eventually be achieved. The conclusion will point to the long-term implications of the reconciliation process on survivors, and to the wider ethical role of testimony in helping survivors find a renewed sense of self and in reconstructing the community in post-genocide Rwanda.

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<sup>102</sup> Das and Kleinman, 'Introduction', in *Remaking a World*, p. 14.

## Conclusion

Despite the growing number of published testimonies bearing witness to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Rwandan women's testimonies in French remain noticeably under-examined and under-valued. This thesis set out to foreground the voices of Rwandan women survivors, providing an exploration of Rwandan women's testimonial literature in order to demonstrate the complexities of individual lived experiences of genocide and the importance of listening to the marginalised voices of ordinary people in order to gain a deeper understanding of such catastrophic historical events. Drawing on trauma theory, I have sought to show how Rwandan women communicate their experiences of trauma, and how the genocide is remembered in both individual and collective memory.

The central questions driving this thesis have been: how do survivors speak or write about their traumatic memories? Who are they addressing? And what is the influence of this intended audience on how survivors tell their stories? In order to respond to these questions, the framework of trauma theory has proved undeniably useful for engaging with the corpus of testimonies, enabling me to distinguish the typical features and characteristics of these narratives. Recurring features such as the notions of the imperative of memory, the figure of the 'moral' witness, survivor guilt, and the paradox between the 'unsayability' of trauma and the need to tell the story in order to begin working through the trauma are all central to Rwandan women's writing. Nevertheless, this thesis has also sought to highlight the specificity of individual experiences that is often overlooked in trauma theory. Close readings of the texts have revealed that Rwandan women's testimonies go beyond expected narrative

conventions, challenging the Western model of trauma and bringing to light its limitations. In this conclusion, I will point to the problems, complexities and contradictions emerging from my analysis of the corpus of Rwandan women's testimonies, and suggest further questions that need to be explored in order to gain a greater understanding of how traumatised individuals respond to and express the experience of genocide.

Chapter 1 raised questions around who can be considered a witness and who has the right to speak about an event. Rwandan women survivors adopt a number of different witness positions, ranging from the direct survivor-witness to the indirect secondary witness. Yet, even among survivor-witnesses, there are those who question their right to give testimony, as demonstrated in Annick Kayitesi's *Nous existons encore*: 'Et moi, qui suis-je pour me lancer ainsi dans de pareilles diatribes? Une gamine à qui l'on a volé son enfance, ou un être humain concerné par ce qui l'entoure?' (NE 25) Nevertheless, whatever their feelings about their own survival, survivors feel compelled to bear witness *on behalf of* the victims, both in order to honour the memory of the dead and to raise awareness for the ongoing plight of the living survivors. This chapter also underlined the importance of a dialogic setting, creating what Dauge-Roth has termed a 'dialogic encounter' between the survivor-witness and her reader. Within this space of encounter, the reader also bears responsibility as a witness. Just as readers of autobiography enter into what Lejeune terms a 'pacte autobiographique', readers of testimony must enter into a 'testimonial pact' with the survivor-witness.<sup>1</sup> As Linda Anderson observes, 'The listener takes on, as it were, the ethical responsibility of bearing witness to what testimonial writing cannot directly represent, and breaking down the isolation imposed by

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<sup>1</sup> See Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).



the nature of the event'.<sup>2</sup> It is through the engaged and empathic response of the reader-witness that the survivor's experiences are validated and her identity affirmed.

Rather than being emblematic of a collective experience (as Beverley claims to be the case for the subjects of Latin-American *testimonio*), Rwandan women's testimonies show the experience of trauma to be deeply individual. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, these women adopt a range of narrative strategies to communicate and 'translate' their experiences to a Western audience, and highlight a range of complex personal responses to the trauma of genocide. Perhaps one of the most striking features of these testimonies is the way in which the women construct their own personal chronologies of the genocide, which is shown to be a crucial step towards reintegrating the 'traumatic memory' into 'narrative memory'. The women then go on to make sense of their experiences by sharing their stories with other survivors and draw strength through forging new links within a community of 'proches', thus emphasising a shift from the individual to the collective. Through these communities of survivors, Rwandan women's stories become part of what Greenspan calls a 'gathering' of voices, voices which remain deeply personal whilst simultaneously locating themselves within the collective of their close community.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the tension within the testimonies between the survivors' need to resort to Western modes of discourse in order to be heard and the difficulty of making their experiences comprehensible to a Western reading audience. For Rwandan women, the act

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> See Greenspan, *Beyond Testimony*, p. 77.

of writing is further complicated by the use of a Western collaborator. While a third party may facilitate the telling of the story for the traumatised individual, there are numerous power struggles and ethical dilemmas involved in collaboration, as my discussion in Chapter 3 has shown. According to Claudia Ingram, in collaborative testimony, ‘the process of bearing witness is precisely a process in which two speakers must collaborate in order to produce a single voice: the voice in which the subject in crisis can articulate what was previously unsayable’.<sup>4</sup> And yet, as my analysis of Rwandan women’s collaborative testimonies has demonstrated, the resulting ‘voice’ is not necessarily that of the survivor. Indeed, the process of collaboration entails a strong element of risk for the survivor, raising important questions about where control over the narrative ultimately lies and whether the survivor’s voice is being manipulated or appropriated. As readers, we must be aware that what we are reading is not necessarily a ‘transparent’ narrative, and must be attentive to how the text is presented and framed through the use of paratextual material. Such material may serve to minimise the ‘otherness’ of Rwandan women’s voices, presenting the reader with a more comfortable and familiar narrative. Nevertheless, for many women, collaboration is one of the only ways of ensuring the publication of their testimony and of reaching a Western readership.

In addressing a Western audience, the testimonies of Rwandan women simultaneously unsettle, challenge and appeal to the Western reader, calling for an engaged and empathic response to the encounter with atrocity. Their narratives force the reader to acknowledge the continued silencing of survivors,

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<sup>4</sup> Claudia Ingram, ‘Sappho’s Legacy: The Collaborative Testimony of Olga Broumas and T Begley’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 19.1 (2000), 105–20 (p. 117).

whether it be through the ‘cultural silencing’ in Rwanda or the ignorance of the international community.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, for the Western audience which has no direct knowledge of the genocide, the experiences related by the survivor are often simply unimaginable. As Mujawayo notes in *SurVivantes*, ‘si je raconte en détail l’horreur vécue, je ne serai pas entendue puisque c’est “trop”, comme on nous dit toujours...’ (SV 95). In this case, the trauma is not unsayable, as trauma theory suggests, but *unhearable*. The testimonies of Rwandan women thus constitute an act of defiance, with survivors reclaiming their voice in the face of numerous silencing factors. Chapter 4 considered the silences both surrounding and within the testimonies themselves, again emphasising how these silences add to the women’s individual experience of genocide and trauma. As Passerini reminds us, ‘memory is gendered, and women’s memories and silences offer different continuities and repetitions, through the specificities of their experiences in different times and spaces’.<sup>6</sup>

Just as the experience of and responses to violence are specific to gender, there are also cultural specificities which must be taken into account when considering how individuals and social groups deal with trauma. In the Rwandan context, rebuilding social networks and developing a sense of belonging within a community is a crucial part of working through the trauma of genocide. The final chapter of this thesis underlined the importance of the role of community organisations in facilitating the healing process for Rwandan women survivors, allowing them to forge new social bonds and re-engage with the present. It is also through the community of survivors that women are able to share their stories and make sense of their experiences in a

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<sup>5</sup> Like Gourevitch, I use the term ‘ignorance’ here to mean both ‘ignoring’ and ‘not knowing’: Gourevitch is quoted in Dawes, *That the World May Know*, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Passerini, ‘Memories Between Silence and Oblivion’, p. 248.

safe environment of trust and reciprocity, which is indispensable for making the transition from *surviving* to *living*.

The presence of a community of ‘proches’ is also essential for rebuilding social trust, even more so given that the political structures of commemoration, justice and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda are not providing the necessary support for survivors. The final chapter thus raised important questions relating to truth and justice, which are shown to be prerequisites for the survivor’s passage from surviving to living. In their Introduction to *Les Blessures du silence*, Mukagasana and Kazinierakis write:

Parce qu’ils se sentent coupables de n’avoir pu sauver les leurs, les survivants ont besoin de vérité. Tant qu’elle ne sera pas mise au jour, les victimes s’éprouvent doublement victimes: victimes d’avoir été la cible du génocide, ils sont aujourd’hui victimes d’avoir été victimes, quand les grandes puissances voudraient qu’ils se contentent d’une réconciliation amnésique.<sup>7</sup>

For the Rwandan women authors of my corpus, the pain caused by the lack of truth and justice is particularly apparent through their participation in the *gacaca* justice system. With the frequent emergence of only partial truths in the *gacaca* trials, it becomes very difficult for these survivors to find out what happened to their loved ones and regain control over their own stories. As Clark notes: ‘The uncertainty of the details of a person’s death can hamper a survivor’s ability to reconstruct that event in his or her mind and to shape it in such a way as to move beyond grief to a less stricken state of being’.<sup>8</sup> The Rwandan women’s testimonies thus raise questions about the limitations of *gacaca* in dealing with the crime of genocide and show that participation in *gacaca* can, at times, be detrimental to the recovery of individual survivors.

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<sup>7</sup> Mukagasana and Kazinierakis, *Les Blessures du silence*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>8</sup> Clark, *The Gacaca Courts*, p. 197.

The testimonies of Rwandan women survivors also raise important questions about the nature of national structures of mourning and reconciliation, pointing towards certain discrepancies between the government's official narrative and Rwandan women's lived experiences. In this respect, the published testimonies function as an act of solidarity with survivors in Rwanda, bringing to light not only the women's personal trajectories of suffering, narrative and recovery, but also highlight the ongoing difficulties faced by those who are unable to leave Rwanda. I would suggest that the women authors are promoting what I will refer to as a 'community of testimony', seeking to create a space within which women's voices can be heard and their experiences acknowledged. However, the relationship of the position of the Rwandan women authors within this community is problematic, not least because of the geographical location of the authors and their intended audience. While the corpus of published testimonies offers many reflections on the process of surviving trauma and the importance of the community in the act of bearing witness, it nevertheless remains separate from this community and engages with a non-Rwandan public.

#### *Towards a Community of Testimony?*

In his study of testimonial narratives bearing witness to political violence, Weine proposes 'an alternative view of testimony as a heterogeneous space, a space containing many particular, distinct universes of testimony that are in multidimensional relationship with one another'.<sup>9</sup> Holocaust testimony is just one of many universes of testimony; Weine also looks at the 'universes' of torture testimony, testimony from wartime Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovar

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<sup>9</sup> Weine, *Testimony After Catastrophe*, p. xxi.

testimony. Although he acknowledges the risks inherent in thinking of testimony as many different fragments, Weiner's approach allows for a recognition of the complex political, historical, and social context specific to each traumatic historical event. It is certainly useful to consider my corpus as belonging to the 'universe' of Rwandan testimony, distinct from, but in constant dialogue with, other universes of testimony. However, I would suggest that, in the Rwandan context, it is more pertinent to speak of a 'community of testimony', a term which takes into account the specific nature of Rwandan women's narratives and the specific circumstances under which their act of testimony takes place.

My understanding of a 'community of testimony' is akin to Margalit's conception of a 'community of memory'. In his preface to *The Ethics of Memory*, Margalit evokes his parents' ongoing debate about the duty of the Jews to remember those who died during the Holocaust. According to his mother: 'The only honorable role for the Jews that remain is to form communities of memory – to serve as "soul candles" like the candles that are ritually kindled in memory of the dead'.<sup>10</sup> Yet his father contradicts his mother, stating: 'It is a horrible prospect for anyone to live just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead. [...] Better to create a community that thinks predominantly about the future and reacts to the present, not a community that is governed from mass graves'.<sup>11</sup> These arguments clearly resonate deeply within any traumatised society searching for appropriate ways to remember the past. Both schools of thought are certainly present in post-genocide Rwandan

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<sup>10</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, p. viii.

<sup>11</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, pp. viii–ix.

society, with both the government and survivors themselves attempting to find a balance between memorialisation of the past and looking towards the future.

As explained in Chapter 5, through its policy of national unity and reconciliation, the Rwandan government is involved in a selective memorialisation of the past, where the category of ‘victim’ is heavily politicised and is exclusively Tutsi. Writing on the TRC in South Africa, Marc Nichanian insists on ‘the specifically political character of reconciliation’, which necessarily entails a ‘manipulation of mourning’.<sup>12</sup> A similar manipulation of mourning and memory is taking place in post-genocide Rwandan society, through government-led structures of remembrance and commemoration. While this culture of remembrance allows certain survivors to come together and have their suffering officially recognised, many survivors wish to combat this politicised structure of mourning and reconciliation, and have begun to group together to create new communities of memory, communities which provide survivors with a safe space to share their stories about the past and also to help each other move towards the future. As demonstrated by the testimonies of Mujawayo and Berthe Kayitesi in particular, in the aftermath of the genocide, survivors came together naturally at the local level to form communities of memory, sharing their experiences with one another and remembering those who died.

By targeting family and social networks, the *génocidaires* attempted to destroy any sense of community and thus preclude any act of memory which would shed light on their horrific acts of violence. For, as we have seen in this thesis, it is the community to which the survivor belongs that allows the

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<sup>12</sup> Marc Nichanian, ‘Mourning and Reconciliation’, in Elisabeth Weber, ed., *Living Together: Jacques Derrida’s Communities of Violence and Peace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 191–210 (p. 198; p. 192).

individual to remember and bear witness on her own terms. As Waintrater observes:

Le groupe, familial ou d'appartenance, remplit une fonction essentielle dans l'assignation des emplacements psychiques, mais aussi dans le travail de mémoire et de la pensée, dont il est le dépositaire et le gestionnaire: c'est pourquoi il a toujours été la cible de prédilection des systèmes totalitaires, attachés à détruire toute idée de pacte inter-subjectif.<sup>13</sup>

In post-genocide Rwanda, the community emerges as essential for rebuilding a sense of self and engaging in a shared remembering of the past. Manz observes a similar phenomenon amongst survivors of trauma in Guatemala. For these survivors, key to the process of healing is 'the public nature of their grieving: sharing the grief, hearing each other, receiving responses and reactions to their deep pain. This open grief allows for reciprocity and that, in turn, links the individual to the collective process of coping with fear, stress, and recovery'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in her examination of Mayan women's *testimonio*, Brabeck underlines the importance of collective identity and community organisation, which have long been tools of resistance against repression: 'Like other persons in less powerful groups, such as women, the working class and people of colour, Mayans are more likely to experience solidarity and survival through relationships and to construct a self that is embedded in and indistinguishable from social relations'.<sup>15</sup> For Rwandan women, re-forging links within a community becomes a means of reconstruction, remembrance, resistance and solidarity.

Thinking of testimony in terms of community nevertheless raises questions about the problematic position of the published testimonies within

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<sup>13</sup> Waintrater, 'Le pacte testimonial', p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Manz, 'Terror, Grief, and Recovery', p. 301.

<sup>15</sup> Brabeck, 'Testimonio', p. 254.



this community and the complex relationship between Rwandan women authors living in exile and survivors in Rwanda. While the testimonies of Rwandan women published in the West bear witness on behalf of the community of survivors in Rwanda, the act of giving testimony remains an essentially individual act. Many survivors in the diaspora are still living in a relatively isolated position, without the daily support of the community the women seek to promote in their testimonies. As Pauline Kayitare notes in the ‘Remerciements’ at the end of her testimony: ‘J’ai écrit ce livre pour pouvoir me libérer d’un poids que je portais depuis plus de seize ans, et surtout pour honorer la mémoire des miens’ (TLD 189). The fact that Kayitare had to carry the burden of her trauma alone for so many years suggests that she did not feel she belonged to a community in the diaspora and had been unable to share her memories with other survivors. However, the desire expressed by Kayitare and a number of the other women authors to transmit the memory of the dead to a Western audience suggests that the published testimonies have a broader scope than those shared in the supportive environment of the community, echoing Belhaddad’s vision of a ‘portée universelle’ discussed in Chapter 3. In other words, the women authors are separated from the local community in Rwanda, both in terms of physical distance and in terms of what their writing projects aim to achieve. Whereas the narratives shared within the community serve to validate the survivors’ lived experiences and create a sense of belonging, the testimonies published in the West appear to fulfil a more humanitarian function. In addressing a Western readership, Rwandan women authors are drawing attention to the inaction of the international community and raising awareness of the ongoing plight of survivors.

Despite being physically distanced from Rwanda, the women authors studied in this thesis continue to work with survivors in Rwanda, and resort to a number of methods to reflect on the effects of the genocide and bring this knowledge to the attention of diverse audiences.<sup>16</sup> This is further demonstrated through their ongoing role as public witnesses. Beyond their published narratives, many of the women participate in public events and conferences, transmitting their memory of the genocide to as wide a range of audiences as possible. For example, Annick Kayitesi states: ‘Depuis plusieurs années, en effet, je participe à des réunions, à des conférences pour parler de ce que j’ai vécu lors du génocide des Tutsis’ (NE 9). Similarly, Mujawayo participates in numerous public events and sees the transmission of the memory of the genocide as part of her responsibility as a survivor: ‘Malgré moi, le génocide m’a désormais imposé d’endosser un rôle de “transmetteur” dans ma vie’ (SV 259). She concludes: ‘Je suis certaine que, toute ma vie, je vais continuer à témoigner – ne serait-ce que parce que tout le monde ne demande qu’à oublier...’ (SV 265).

As such, the Rwandan women are positioning themselves as mediators between Rwanda and the West. Yet the notion of mediation is in itself problematic, especially when we consider that the majority of the testimonies were written in collaboration with a Western collaborator. Cross-cultural collaboration can often lead to what Holly Laird describes as ‘asymmetric

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Annick Kayitesi has written a university *mémoire* on genocide survivors and another about the case of the *enfants génocidaires*. She has also made a film about *enfants génocidaires* with two French colleagues. As well as her involvement with the organisation *Tubeho*, Berthe Kayitesi is also conducting doctoral research on factors of resilience amongst genocide orphans. Esther Mujawayo continues her involvement with AVEGA, and Chantal Umuraza has created an association, *Semavenir*, which aims to train young Rwandans from her region of origin, Nyaruguru, in local development. This association does not appear to have its own website, but more information can be found on the following blog: <http://lesbonstuyauxdonatiens.blogspot.co.uk/2009/04/semavenir.html>.

writing relationships', and a distortion of the speaking subject's voice.<sup>17</sup> Laird argues that this is particularly the case when the collaboration is also cross-gender, whereas for women collaborators the collaboration is more likely to create a space of reciprocity: 'what is notable about collaborative writing is the room it creates for them to talk together'.<sup>18</sup> This notion of 'talking together' echoes the safe space of reciprocity and dialogue that Rwandan women seek in their communities. However, there is a vast difference between sharing their stories with other survivors, who understand what the individual has been through, and sharing the story with someone from a different culture. The published testimonies are constructed under very different circumstances, in a very different type of dialogic setting, and we must take into account the specificity of the collaborative experience when approaching such a corpus.

The Rwandan women authors are faced with unique challenges as they try to negotiate a path between survivors in Rwanda and the Western readership they are addressing, and it is important to be aware of these challenges in our response to their narratives. We must therefore also consider the position of the reader within this community of testimony. Indeed, one of the key questions that emerges from reading Rwandan women's testimonies is how 'we' (the Western readers) should respond to these narratives. Dauge-Roth proposes a 'listening community', which can be useful when working with survivors directly.<sup>19</sup> However, in relation to written testimonies, our position as readers needs critically rethinking to allow for an engaged response

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<sup>17</sup> Holly Laird, *Women Coauthors* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 5. The gender dimension of women's collaborative testimony is an aspect which certainly requires further investigation.

<sup>19</sup> Alexandre Dauge-Roth, 'Fostering a Listening Community Through Testimony: Learning with Orphans of the Genocide in Rwanda', *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 5.2 (2012), <http://jces.ua.edu/fostering-a-listening-community-through-testimony-learning-with-orphans-of-the-genocide-in-rwanda/>.

that is attentive to the individual voices of survivors and receptive to the challenges they pose.

Beyond the corpus of published testimonies, many survivors in Rwanda and across the diaspora continue to exhibit a strong desire to speak out about their experiences. The stories gathered and presented by published authors (both Rwandan and foreign) as well as the growing number of recorded oral testimonies (such as those housed in the Genocide Archive for Rwanda at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre) testify to this desire.<sup>20</sup> There is still a great deal of research to be conducted into the relationship between oral and written testimonies, and between the testimonies originating in Rwanda and abroad. Further investigation is also needed into the specificity of the experiences of Rwandan genocide survivors across the diaspora. One oral history project that aimed to explore this aspect was the Canadian Montreal Life Stories Project at Concordia University, which gathered testimonies from survivors not only about what they lived through in Rwanda but also about their often painful experience of a life in exile.<sup>21</sup> All these testimonies form part of the wider community of testimony proposed in this thesis, and further critical engagement with these emerging testimonial voices is required in order to better understand the range of experiences and responses to trauma provoked by the genocide.

This thesis provides a critical investigation of a particular type of testimonial narrative as a contribution to the memory work that needs to be

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<sup>20</sup> For further information about the Genocide Archive of Rwanda see the website [www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw](http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw). For information about the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre see [www.kigalimemorialcentre.org](http://www.kigalimemorialcentre.org).

<sup>21</sup> This project officially ended in July 2012, although the subject deserves further critical attention. Information about this project can be obtained from the website [www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca](http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca).

done concerning the genocide in Rwanda. It underscores the importance of listening to women's individual voices and validating the experience of survivors. The corpus of women's testimonies provides crucial insight into how women make sense of their own survival and convey the traumatic experience, thus combating the isolation of trauma and regaining a sense of mastery over their narratives. Attentiveness to and engagement with these testimonies ensures the transmission of the memory of the genocide, allowing survivors to have their voices heard and fulfil their responsibility as witnesses. It also forces us to reassess our understanding of how traumatised individuals and communities remember, leading towards a deeper knowledge of the repercussions of the genocide and the ongoing process of survival.

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