Assessing the impact of the genocide on Rwandan women's self-perception and identity: A discursive analysis of posttraumatic growth in survivors' testimonies

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Abstract

Using discourse analysis, this article examines representations of self-perception in women's testimonies from the 1994 Rwanda genocide. An analysis of changes in self-perception resulting from the genocide is presented through the testimonies of three female Rwandan survivors. The article demonstrates how the observed individual expressions of posttraumatic growth reflect changes in Rwandan women's identities at the broader, societal level. Specifically, the targeting of women and disproportionate suffering imposed upon them are highlighted as contributory factors to the positive transformations observed. Such positive transformations resulted in significant changes in women's roles, spurred a women's movement within civil society and created opportunities for women in politics. The article concludes that discourse analysis is a useful methodological tool for examining posttraumatic growth. Although its intensive nature has limited the focus of this paper, a discourse analysis approach has enabled the researcher to gain a rich understanding of the nature of the changes experienced by Rwandan women since the genocide, both at an individual and collective level.

Introduction

It would be difficult to overstate the scale and impact of the 1994 Rwanda genocide. In a period of just three months around 800,000 people were killed and millions were displaced[1]. With the infrastructure of civil society shattered and the social fabric of the nation ruptured, the genocide ultimately left Rwanda devastated. Other than its scale, one of the main differences between the 1994 genocide and previous incidents of mass violence in Rwanda was the targeting of women. As Taylor argues, the genocide was

[1]Some two million Hutu, perpetrators and others, fled to neighbouring countries in fear of retribution while around 600,000 Tutsi refugees who had fled previous outbreaks of violence returned from neighbouring Uganda and Tanzania (Hilhorst and van Leeuwen, 2000, p. 265; Human Rights Watch, 1996, p. 14).

more than a battle for political supremacy between groups of men: 'it was about reconfiguring gender' (1999, p. 43). The genocide, according to Taylor, was an attempt to re-establish the ideal Hutu state as imagined through the idealised image of the 1959 Hutu Revolution. In part, the aim of the genocide was to reclaim patriarchy and male dominance in rejection of the political and social advances made by women in the preceding decade. In Taylor's opinion, Hutu extremists held ambivalent attitudes towards Tutsi women. On the one hand, Tutsi women were loathed for their 'potential subversive capacity to undermine the category boundary between Tutsi and Hutu' (1999, p. 50)[2]. On the other hand, Taylor suggests that as a result of old colonial stereotypes, Tutsi women were also considered more intelligent and beautiful than Hutu women and were thus irresistible to Hutu men (Taylor, 1999). This cognitive dissonance harboured by Hutu men in combination with the desire to restore patriarchy resulted in a form of 'sexual terrorism' (Taylor, 1999, p. 50). Thus, Tutsi women were targeted during the genocide not only on the basis of their ethnic identity, but also on the basis of their gender. The campaign of killing and sexual violence left many women with poor physical and psychological health. An ensuing demographic imbalance meant that women were also predominantly responsible for rebuilding the country in the aftermath of the genocide. Traditional gender inequalities in law and economics resulted in women facing even greater hardship in the post-genocide period. Overall, although the genocide had unspeakable consequences for all those involved, the suffering inflicted on Rwanda's women was particularly devastating.

Using examples from Rwandan women survivors' testimonies, the present article aims to explore how their traumatic life experiences have impacted upon these women's sense of self. By first explaining how the cognitive-emotional impact of trauma may result in *schematic change*[3] with respect to self-perception, the article will go on to discuss how such changes are reflected in narrative accounts of trauma. The article will provide some examples from Rwandan women survivors' testimonies to demonstrate how

[2]Taylor observes how Tutsi women were seen as the permeable boundary between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. In pre-genocide Rwanda, it was more common for Tutsi women to marry Hutu men than for Hutu women to marry Tutsi men. The father's ethnicity determined a child's official identity (as marked on the identity card), so the children of a Hutu man married to a Tutsi woman would be considered Hutu and would thus benefit from having Hutu citizenship despite being considered racially impure by Hutu extremists.

[3]A schema is a mental structure that consists of pre-existing theories about some aspect of the world and may 'vary in level of abstraction and inclusiveness' (Janoff-Bulman, 1992 p. 28). Although schemas may change gradually with the acquisition of new knowledge, the theory-driven, rather than data-driven nature of our cognitive processes means that schemas have a tendency to remain relatively unchanged (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). As discussed below, however, traumatic life experiences have the power to dramatically alter people's self-schemas.

cognitive changes are reflected in the narrative accounts of Rwandan women. Finally, discussions will be presented of how individual expressions of identity reflect changes in women's identity at a broader, societal level. Particular attention will be given to how the specific targeting and disproportionate suffering imposed on Rwanda's women has paradoxically resulted in a number of positive transformations in women's individual and collective identities.

The Cognitive-Emotional Impact of Trauma: Theories of Posttraumatic Growth

The genocide could be considered a 'seismic event' for the women who survived it. Calhoun and Tedeschi (1999, p. 2) describe devastating events such as genocide as 'seismic' because they have the destructive power to produce a severe shaking, and in some cases shattering, of an individual's internal world. The authors base their 'seismic event' theory on the earlier work of Janoff-Bulman (1992; Janoff-Bulman and McPherson Frantz, 1997), according to which, the foundation of people's cognitive-emotional system is made up of basic assumptions about themselves, the external world and the relationship between the two. At the core of these assumptions, people believe that the world is just, benevolent, safe, and meaningful. According to Calhoun and Tedeschi (1999; 2006), just as earthquakes produce a significant threat to physical structures, so-called 'seismic events' pose a threat to these cognitive-emotional structures. In the absence of the individual's usual modes of belief about the self and the world, typical means of coping are overwhelmed and the aftermath of such a disaster is frequently marked by distressing emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses.

These responses have in the past been thought to be symptomatic of psychopathology or posttraumatic stress disorder. More recently, however, some scholars suggest that the symptoms commonly thought to indicate posttraumatic stress are in fact indicative of the need for cognitive-emotional processing of the trauma-related information. These 'symptoms' are thus 'normal, natural cognitive processes that have the potential to generate *positive* change' (Joseph and Butler 2010, p. 2 - emphasis added). In order to account for both positive and negative psychological responses to trauma, Joseph and Linley (2006; 2008) present a model known as *Organismic Valuing Theory*. According to this model, in the wake of a traumatic event, a person moves through a cycle of appraisals, emotional states and coping. Within the framework of traditional clinical psychology, the factors involved in this cycle would be seen as indicative of disorder. For Joseph and Linley however, the cycle serves as a way of processing trauma-related information.

Organismic Valuing Theory proposes that trauma-related information may thus either be assimilated within existing models of the world, or that existing models of the world may accommodate the trauma-related information.

In the case of assimilation, a traumatic event may have shaken an individual's belief system, yet in order to maintain their pre-trauma assumptions of a just and benevolent world (see Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman and McPherson Frantz, 1997; Lerner, 1980), the individual applies a cognitive strategy such as self-blame. If, however, the individual accepts that the trauma-related information is incongruent with their pre-existing beliefs, then the individual must modify their perceptions of the world, thus no longer viewing the world as just and benevolent. Accommodation of trauma-related information (that is, that random events happen and that bad things can happen to good people) can be made in either a positive or negative direction (Joseph and Linley 2008). *Negative accommodation* refers to the *depressogenic reaction* of hopelessness and helplessness which is the acquired belief that the world is entirely random and that individuals are powerless to influence their environment (Joseph and Linley, 2008). In contrast, *positive accommodation* involves the recognition that although negative and random events are possible, there is reason to believe that life is to be lived for the here and now and it is possible to regain some control over one's life (Joseph and Linley, 2008). It is only when individuals are able to positively accommodate their world view to trauma-related information that positive changes and posttraumatic growth become possible. Broadly speaking, posttraumatic growth may be defined as 'the tendency on the part of some individuals to report important changes in perception of self, philosophy of life, and relationships with others in the aftermath of events that are considered traumatic in the extreme' (Tedeschi, 1999, p. 312). The present article will focus primarily on the impact of the trauma caused by the genocide on Rwandan women's perception of self.

Assessment of Posttraumatic Growth

Researchers frequently use self-report questionnaires, such as Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), to measure posttraumatic growth processes. Pals and McAdams (2004), however, suggest that narrative accounts 'may constitute the most valid way of assessing posttraumatic growth' because growth itself is 'an identity-making narrative process' (2004, pp. 65 and 68). Specifically, Pals and McAdams (2004, p. 65) assert that:

> *Posttraumatic growth may be best understood as a process of constructing a narrative understanding of how the self*

has been positively transformed by the traumatic event and then integrating this transformed sense of self into the identity-defining life story.

Indeed, in an earlier discussion on the interaction between personality and posttraumatic growth, Tennen and Affleck (1998) also draw on McAdams' (1993; 1994) life story theory of identity to explain how identity may reflect processes of posttraumatic growth. According to McAdams' life story theory, personal identity consists of psychosocially constructed life stories based on empirical fact as well as 'imaginative renderings of past, present, and future, to make one's life in time into a meaningful and followable narrative' (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield, 1997, p. 679). This unfolding narrative is internalised and revised to give life a sense of direction, meaning and continuity. Similarly to Pals and McAdams, Tennen and Affleck (1998) suggest that traumatic events provide individuals with the opportunity to integrate their experience into the form and tone of their narrative and even to affirm personal transformation. In particular, the authors highlight the four different narrative forms, namely; comedy, romance, tragedy and irony, distinguished by McAdams (1993). Narratives characterised by comedy or romance are typically hopeful and optimistic in tone. Comedy narratives are based on the notion that happy endings are possible while romantic narratives are characterised by a romantic hero who emerges wiser, more virtuous and overcomes challenges. In contrast, tragic and ironic narratives are generally pessimistic in tone. Tragic narratives typically include an awareness that happiness and pleasure are never unalloyed while ironic narratives are characterised by confusion and sadness as well as an awareness that it is never possible to understand life's complexities.

In a similar vein, Gergen (1997; 1998) also emphasises the link between narrative, identity and life events but rejects the notion that there could be just four narrative forms. Gergen (1997; 1998) suggests that at the most fundamental level, there are only three options for explaining the direction of movement within a narrative but that these may be considered the basic components of more complex narrative forms. The present author agrees with Gergen's rejection of a limited number of narrative forms and further suggests that the three narrative options described by Gergen can be seen as analogous to the three psychological outcomes described by Joseph and Linley (2008) following traumatic life events. The first option proposed by Gergen is the *stability narrative* which links events in such a way that the trajectory remains unchanged in relation to a specific goal and that life becomes neither better nor worse. This trajectory is comparable to Joseph and Linley's description of assimilation. The second option that Gergen refers

to is *regressive narrative* in which the movement of events on an evaluative dimension is decremental. Similar to Joseph and Linley's concept of negative accommodation, according to Gergen, 'the regressive narrative depicts a continued downward slide. The individual may confess, "I can't seem to control events in my life anymore"' (1998, p. 5). The third option described by Gergen is *progressive narrative* in which the movement of events is incremental along an evaluative dimension. Progressive accounts are similar to Joseph and Linley's concept of positive accommodation, described by Gergen as 'the Panglossian account of life, ever better in every way' (1998, p. 5). Just as Gergen (1997; 1998) suggests that narrative may include an infinite number of variations of these fundamental narrative forms, Joseph and Linley (2008) highlight the multifaceted nature of the self-structure and suggest that different facets of this structure may be affected by trauma in any combination of assimilation, negative accommodation and positive accommodation.

Methodology

In order to illustrate how psychological outcomes following traumatic events relate to narrative form, this article will present a discursive analysis of extracts from the testimonies of three female survivors of the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Focusing on examples of negative and positive accommodation through their manifestations as regressive and progressive narrative forms, the article will attempt to demonstrate how narrative direction reflects these cognitive outcomes following trauma. Given that the focus of this article is on self-perception and identity, discourse analysis is a particularly useful methodological tool as it enables the analyst to look for linguistic signs which connect verbal utterances to extra-linguistic reality to create and recreate identities (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, 2006). With respect to self-perception, negative accommodation and regressive narrative refer to a perceived loss of agency and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness while positive accommodation and progressive narrative refer to an enhanced sense of personal agency, perceived control and strength. The present analysis thus focuses on the discursive features used by these women to represent their self-perceptions; of agency or lack thereof, including their use of pronouns, extreme case formulations, verbal patterns, and referring terms, including noun phrases that evoke a person, place or thing.

The testimonies were taken from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda which was established by the Aegis Trust in association with Rwanda's National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG) and were originally recorded in Kinyarwanda. Members of staff at the Kigali Genocide Memorial

have transcribed and translated the testimonies into French and English. My analysis relies on the original Kinyarwanda transcript (with the assistance of a native Kinyarwanda speaker); however, the English translations are presented below. The testimonies presented in this article were collected in 2004 and were selected on the basis that they were among the first to become available on the digital archive (Genocide Archive of Rwanda), launched in December 2010. For ethical reasons and anonymity, names have been abbreviated; however, all of the women signed consent forms to allow their testimonies to be used in the public archive. Given their status as survivors, the women whose testimonies are discussed in this article are presumably Tutsi. However, due to the strict laws on divisionism in Rwanda, the open discussion of ethnicity has become constrained; thus the women do not overtly state their ethnic identities.

Data Analysis

The first extract comes from the testimony of OM which is dominated by a regressive narrative tone and provides evidence for the learnt hopelessness and helplessness associated with negative accommodation (Joseph and Linley, 2008). OM was hacked with machetes and shot in the face during the genocide which left her with a lasting disfigurement as well as other chronic medical problems. As can be seen in the following extract, OM believes that her life has changed for the worse as a consequence of her experiences during the genocide and the injuries she incurred:

> *I stopped studying. I used to wish that I would be so and so, I would work in such or such a place, I thought that one day I would be independent; taking control of my life, making money like others but all those dreams changed. Now I am a home person who is always sick. I am leading a painful life, too painful in all possible ways; be it psychologically or physically, I am leading a painful and miserable life, that is all there is.*

OMs feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are manifested particularly through her abundant use of extreme case formulations, that is, formulations that take evaluative dimensions to extreme limits (Pomerantz, 1986). Extreme case formulations accentuate the negative changes that have taken place in OM's life since the genocide, demonstrating that OM is powerless to alter her situation of physical and emotional pain ('all those dreams changed'; 'always sick'; 'too painful in all possible ways'; 'that is all

there is'). This extract and, indeed, the overall tone of her testimony demonstrate both the perceived lack of control that Gergen (1997; 1998) associates with regressive narrative and the sense of helplessness that characterises negative accommodation (Joseph and Linley 2008). For example, the fact that her dreams of 'taking control of her life' have changed indicates that she believes she has lost the ability to take control; thus, in accordance with Joseph and Linley's model, she has negatively accommodated the traumatic event.

The next example provides a more mixed picture with sections of both regressive and progressive narrative suggesting both negative and positive accommodation. Initially after the genocide, AU's narrative declines to the point at which she decides to take her own life. The first extract from AU's testimony is the apex of the regressive narrative that follows her experience of the genocide. The extract has been organised below into stanzas in order to demonstrate that through her attempted suicide, AU is in fact attempting to gain a sense of control even though she apparently remains in a state of helplessness:

1. Decisive Action

   Then I said to myself; 'I am going to throw myself into this river.'

   I threw myself in the river and swallowed some water

2. Failure of Actions

   But the water threw me to the other side.

3. Conclusion

   When I was young, I used to hear that when you commit suicide and you have money, you can never die. I had 1000 Rfw in my pocket.

   I thought 'Maybe this is why I didn't die.'

4. Decisive Action

   Then I threw the money away and went back into the river. I threw myself in again.

5. Failure of Actions

   I still did not die.

This extract demonstrates a recurrent pattern of AU's assertive action

followed by the failure of these actions. Her efforts to reclaim control are particularly discernible through a string of verbs in the first person with which she establishes assertive action in stanza 1, ('I said to myself', 'I am going to throw myself ', 'I threw myself ') and again in stanza 4 ('I threw the money away' and 'I threw myself'). On both occasions, however, these actions are overridden by external forces ('the water threw me to the other side', 'when you commit suicide and you have money, you can never die'). Thus, not only is AU's despair demonstrated by the fact that she is attempting to take her own life, but also her sense of helplessness and hopelessness is apparent in the recurring pattern of her own assertive actions being overruled by the actions of inanimate entities. After her life descends to the point at which she decides to attempt suicide, however, AU's perceptions of her life begin to improve. She continues to suffer hardship in her post-genocide life as she is responsible for her only two remaining family members who are both younger than her and she does not possess the means to provide for them. In spite of this hardship, however, AU appears to develop an increased optimism for the future as well as a sense of her own self-worth:

> *As the eldest, the first thing I do is tell them [her younger cousins] that things will not stay the same. I promise them that our future will be much better; I tell them that after this life, another, better one will come. [...] I believe that we will have a better future.*

Not only is this extract notably more optimistic, as demonstrated by her belief in a 'better future', AU positions herself as a figure of authority by referring to herself as 'the eldest' who is able to advise and comfort those younger than herself. The repetition of verbs in the first person establishes personal agency ('the first thing I do is tell them', 'I promise them', 'I tell them', 'I believe'), suggesting that she has regained a sense of control over her life. Overall, the observed variation of AU's tone reflects the assertions of Joseph and Linley (2008) that changes following a traumatic life event are processes that may vary across the life span rather than outcomes. Moreover, given the complex and multifaceted nature of the self-structure, different facets of this structure may process the trauma in different ways (Joseph and Linley, 2008).

The final extract comes from a testimony that is dominated by a progressive tone and includes many of the factors associated with positive accommodation. Despite experiencing great adversity during and after the genocide, BNs testimony describes her transformation from a dependent wife to an independent head of household. In her descriptions of life before the genocide, BN anchors her identity in her role as wife. For example, in her pre-

genocide life descriptions, BN discusses her marriage, the number of children she had with her husband as well as her husband's occupation. Meanwhile, she makes no reference to her own professional activities or to any other aspect of her life outside her marriage. After the death of her husband, BN instead talks at length about how she managed to find work and a place to live in order to support her child. She even states explicitly that she has no intention to remarry, thus demonstrating a notable transformation in her self-perception. In the extract below, BN demonstrates personal agency and independence through the abundant use of first person singular pronouns. Furthermore, she applies a verbal format known as *contrastive pairs*. A contrastive pair consists of two consecutive items of discourse which contrast with each other in some way (Lee and Beattie, 1998). BN uses active verbs in the first person in lines 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10, in contrast to more generalised statements (including neutral statements such as 'my child was with me', passive statements such as 'we were treated' and statements describing setbacks such as 'My leg still had bullets and fragments in it') in lines 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9. The extract has been arranged below so as to demonstrate these contrastive pairs:

Pair 1:

1. Therefore, I changed my life
2. yet I still hadn't healed.

Pair 2:

3. I kept on going for treatment.
4. My leg still had bullets and fragments in it.

Pair 3:

5. I continued going to King Fayçal hospital
6. because we were treated for free.

Pair 4:

7. I went to get an operation once again
8. and my child was with me.

Pair 5:

9. Later after I was healed,
10. I decided to look for a house.

The difficulty and setbacks in lines 2 and 4 ('I still hadn't healed'; 'My leg

still had bullets and fragments in it') are juxtaposed with active verbs in the first person in lines 1, 3 and 5 ('I changed my life'; 'I kept on going'; 'I continued going'), highlighting BNs relentless pursuit for a solution to these challenges. Furthermore, the repetition of her active search for treatment in lines 3, 5 and 7 ('I kept on going for treatment'; 'I continued going to King Fayçal hospital' and 'I went to get an operation') culminates in success in line 9 ('I was healed'), suggesting that she manages to overcome the challenges posed by her injuries. It is at this point that the pattern of first person verb followed by generalised statement is reversed (in contrastive pair 9, 10). This reversal at the end results in the extract both starting and finishing with assertive first person actions ('I changed my life' and 'I decided to look'), emphasising BN's personal agency and her ability to overcome adversity to achieve success. Moreover, BN successfully puts this last statement ('I decided to look for a house') into action as she goes on to find a job which enables her to rent a property. She is subsequently provided with her own house by the Association des Veuves du Génocide d'Avril (Association for Widows of the April Genocide, AVEGA).

Discussion

Overall, while the testimonies of OM and initially AU exhibit the sense of hopelessness associated with negative accommodation, demonstrated by the regressive tone of their accounts, positive changes were later observed in AUs testimony as well as in the testimony of BN, demonstrated by the progressive narrative tone of their accounts. These positive changes are striking because although, according to Organismic Valuing Theory, people are intrinsically motivated towards positive accommodation, circumstances and environments play a significant role in this process and may restrict, impede or distort this intrinsic motivation (Joseph and Linley, 2008). Furthermore, as Morland, Butler and Leskin (2008) point out, excessive levels of distress are likely to 'overwhelm natural tendencies to find or identify meaning and benefits' (p. 51). Given that the genocide in Rwanda devastated the country as well as the lives of those who survived it, it seems remarkable that these women have managed to rebuild their lives and view the future with optimism.

There are a number of factors that could explain the observed posttraumatic growth, such as individual differences, gender, stage of life, or even that these women have benefitted from the therapeutic effects of developing their experience into a coherent narrative. None of these factors alone however, is likely to be solely responsible for the growth observed[4]. For example, although individual differences (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 1999) and

gender (Vicshnevsky, Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, and Demakis, 2010) have both been found to yield significant differences in growth patterns, these differences are relatively small. Stage of life is also unlikely to be a causal factor given that the women come from a range of different age groups (at the time of giving their testimonies in 2004, the women discussed in this article were 20 (AU), 29 (OM) and 37 (BN) years old). While the fact that these women have developed their experience into a coherent narrative is a more plausible explanation, this article will expand on another factor.

According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), the 'restorative efforts of survivors to rebuild a valid and comfortable assumptive world are always embedded within the larger context of social relationships' (p. 143). In a similar vein, Bloom (1998) argues that, 'our individual identity is closely tied to our "group self" and [...], in fact, our group self may be the core component of our sense of personal identity' (p. 180). For this reason, the remainder of this article will examine how changes in these women's individual self-perception reflect changes in women's identities in Rwanda at the societal level.

Several authors have noted that it is not only at the individual level that growth may take place but also at the collective, societal level (Bloom, 1998; Joseph and Linley, 2006; Vázquez, Pérez-Sales and Hervás, 2008). Scholars who have addressed the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth at the collective level have highlighted a number of factors thought to promote this growth including effective leadership, mutual self-help and sharing emotions, rescuing and altruism, political action, as well as forms of self-expression such as art, humour and storytelling. By examining the transformation of the position of women since the genocide, it becomes clear that many of the factors considered important for promoting growth at the collective level are present with respect to women in post-genocide Rwandan society. As mentioned in the introduction, the genocide had a significant gendered component as women became the targets of a specific programme of gender-based violence. Furthermore, the genocide had a disproportionate effect on women because it highlighted the deep-seated gender inequalities within Rwandan society. However, as a result of the overwhelming burdens that were placed on Rwanda's women after the genocide, their position in society has rapidly changed and the post-conflict situation has paradoxically resulted in a situation not only of great challenge but also of great opportunity (Hamilton, 2000). This has led to huge transformations of women's positions within post-genocide Rwandan society.

[4]Unfortunately because of space restrictions, the testimonies of only three women are presented in this article but similar observations of posttraumatic growth in the domain of self-perception are present in the testimonies of many other female survivors, suggesting that posttraumatic growth in this domain is highly prevalent.

The devastation caused by the genocide made it impossible, particularly for women, to continue with traditional ways of life (Burnet, 2008). With their husbands either dead, in exile, or in prison, women were forced to think of themselves differently and to develop skills that they would not have otherwise acquired. In order to meet the needs of their families and communities, women had to take on roles which had previously been considered taboo for them, such as putting roofs on houses, constructing enclosures around houses, milking cows, heading households as well as taking on roles in public life and decision making (Burnet, 2008; Powley, 2005). Thus, the post-conflict climate forced Rwandan women to challenge customary perceptions of gender. These changes are directly reflected in the individual changes observed in the self-perception of both BN and AU. BN, for example, was previously reliant on her husband for economic support but became financially independent after the genocide by working to support her family. She also became head of her own household, a position which would have been culturally unacceptable prior to the genocide. Similarly, as the oldest surviving member of her family, AU was forced to take responsibility for her younger cousins as a matter of necessity. In both cases, these roles of responsibility are closely tied to the positive changes in self-perception observed in these women's testimonies.

Another great transformation taking place following the genocide was women's increased representation in civil society as the work of existing women's groups expanded and several new organisations were founded. Women's organisations stepped in to fill the void left by the genocide by providing services to meet women's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, as well as other services such as counselling, social support, vocational training and assistance with economic activities (Burnet, 2008; Longman, 2006). The women's movement in Rwanda has been so successful since the genocide that women's civil society groups have become the backbone of Rwandan society, providing a wide range of essential services. Moreover, the work of women in civil society is directly implicated in the individual changes in self-perception observed in BN. For example, AVEGA provided BN with a house, as well as emotional support, both of which are noted in her testimony as essential elements in her path to stability as they enabled her to rebuild her life and gain a sense of control:

> *AVEGA continued to help me; widows would visit me regularly and they would talk about different things, some would talk about trauma and they would console me. I also started visiting them. Up to now, I am living in that house and life is going well.*

One of the primary achievements of the women's civil society movement has been its role in the expansion of women's representation in politics as it gave women the skills necessary for entering politics and promoted the legitimacy and importance of women holding office (Longman, 2006). The increased representation of women in the Rwandan parliament since the genocide has been described as 'revolutionary' (Boseley, 2010). In 2003, Rwanda made history by becoming the country with the highest number of women elected to parliament in the world, with 48.8 per cent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament won by women (Powley, 2005). In the 2008 election this record was broken yet again as women won 56 per cent of the seats (UNIFEM, 2008). Thus, in addition to taking on new roles within the community and spurring a movement within civil society, women have also made significant gains in Rwandan politics.

While the number of women in power is not explicitly mentioned in the women's testimonies, this change undoubtedly provides individual women with important female role models. Moreover, since the genocide, there have been significant changes in law that have favoured women such as the achievement of Category One status for rape or sexual torture in the post-genocide prosecution guidelines, a law extending the rights of pregnant and breast-feeding mothers in the workplace, a law on the protection of children from violence, the inheritance act guaranteeing that women have the same rights as men to inherit property and a law on the prevention, protection, and punishment of any gender based violence (Devlin and Elgie, 2008). It has also become illegal to discriminate against women, including discrimination on the basis of sex or HIV status (Mibenge, 2008). Unfortunately, the changes in law do not necessarily reflect what happens in practice as many women survivors and their families continue to face stigmatisation and discrimination which can lead to loss of employment, difficulty in asserting property rights and a loss of civil and political rights (Amnesty International, 2004). However, these changes have had a direct influence on the individual self-perception of survivors. The political changes have allowed BN, for example, to become an independent, property-owning head of household who is no longer dependent on her husband. Thus, BNs newfound independence would not have been a possibility prior to the genocide, as it would not have been possible for her to head her own household and all her property, including her children, would have belonged to her husband.

Conclusion

The method of discourse analysis has provided a useful tool in the study of the effects of trauma on self-perception, allowing insights into linguistic

representations of identity and posttraumatic growth. A possible limitation of this methodological tool, however, is its intensive rather than extensive nature (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001). Discourse analysis limits the analyst in terms of time and space and thus this article has focused exclusively on changes in self-perception rather than of additional domains thought to have been affected by posttraumatic growth processes, such as interpersonal relationships and philosophy of life (Calhoun and Tedeschi, 1999; Tedeschi, 1999). Whilst self-report measures of posttraumatic growth, such as the PTGI, enable researchers to examine large sample sizes and to investigate changes in all three of these domains, unlike discourse analysis, they are unable to provide detailed accounts of individual experiences. Discourse analysis in contrast requires a more narrowly focused analysis. By concentrating exclusively on one area of posttraumatic growth amongst a small sample of Rwandan women, the discursive approach, as demonstrated in this article, has allowed a richer, more in-depth understanding of the changes in women's self-perceptions which, in turn, reflect important historical and political changes in women's identity at the societal level. A suggestion for further research would be to apply the same method to investigate posttraumatic growth and changes in other domains of life (relationships and life philosophy) so as to achieve a more comprehensive and rounded understanding of the consequences of the 1994 genocide on the identities of Rwandan women.

In summary, this article has firstly demonstrated that cognitive changes and posttraumatic growth following a traumatic event are discernible in narrative accounts because, posttraumatic growth is itself, a narrative making process. Secondly, the article has shown how individual expressions of self-perception and identity reflect broader societal, political and historical trends as many of the changes observed in their individual changes in self-perception would not have taken place without the political and historical changes that have occurred at the societal level.

Overall, the changes in roles, civil society and government observed in this article provide many examples of the kinds of transformative activities which turn adversity into strength at both the societal and the individual level. Although Rwandan women still face difficulties, they have experienced a transformation in their collective identity. In a discussion on the effects of violence on communities, Vázquez et al. (2008) observe that when violence is committed by members external to one's social group, this can lead to feelings of enhanced social cohesion and self-esteem. In Rwanda, although the violence was committed by Rwandans against other Rwandans, it was largely committed by men and the specific targeting of women during the genocide appears to have resulted in enhanced feelings of solidarity, group

cohesion and self-esteem among Rwandan women. Both Longman (2006) and Burnet (2008) suggest that the changes in women's roles and their increased representation in parliament has resulted in the normalisation of women in power which in turn has transformed women's 'identities, subjectivities and agencies' (Burnet, 2008, p. 386). Thus, although the genocide had a disproportionate impact on Rwanda's women, it seems that the specific targeting of women has resulted in the transformation of women's identities both individually and collectively. With respect to women, then, perhaps the genocide reflects the Hegelian Principle that every negation contains within itself the seeds of the next positive development and, thus, even the worst aspects of human history might be seen to have played a role in the progressive course of world affairs.

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