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Abstract

Scholarship about politics and the body in conflicts has gained prominence in academic debates. This paper advances these conversations by arguing that bodily scars are potent ‘carriers’ of memories of mass atrocities committed during the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Using both semi-structured interviews and a wide range of secondary sources, this study found that bodily scars – as physical manifestations of wartime torture and pain – evidence past atrocities and survivor resilience. Similarly, they are avenues through which the past is communicated and transformed (in ways that complement and surpass other mediums of memory). Bodily scars play powerful and complex roles in memory conversations; they communicate trauma and keep memories of the mass violence vivid in public and private realms. This article empirically contributes to discussions on the politics of memory in post-genocide Rwanda, and body studies and memory scholarship more broadly.

Keywords: post-genocide, Rwanda, physical scars, dynamic memory, memory studies

Introduction

Machetes, clubs, sharpened wooden sticks, and sharp metal objects were among the many weapons used to inflict pain and death on victims during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda (Kimonyo, 2016:1). The number of people killed remains a point of contention, but sources generally estimate around 800,000 Tutsi victims (Kimonyo, 2016), and up to 1,000,000, according to the official Rwandan government statistics. The exact number is difficult to ascertain, given the context in which the genocide violence unfolded (Guichaoua, 2020:1). There are an estimated 400,000 genocide survivors and, of these, most (about 300,000) have deep bodily scars and approximately 26,000 are missing one or more limbs (Thomas, 2005: 18; Norridge, 2019: 54). This article goes beyond the numbers and politics to accentuate the cruelty of the killings and the long-lasting effects of bodily torture that shocked Rwandans and the world, and shaped international politics (Reggers et al., 2022).

Numerous empirical narratives detail the tools used by the *Interahamwe* – militia groups of Hutu extremists who carried out the 1994 genocide – to injure and kill Tutsis (Rutazibwa and Rutayisire, 2007; Fujii, 2013; Rutayisire, 2014; Mironko, 2004). The use of machetes and other cruel means has been documented in academic studies, journalism, and books on genocide survivors’ histories and witness accounts (Prunier, 1995:247; Hatzfeld, 2005; Gilbert, 2018;

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Révérien, 2006; Ilibagiza, 2014; Baines, 2002). These tools left physical marks on genocide survivors (Africa Rights, 1995; Des Forges, 1999:62; Verwimp, 2006), who must continue to live with both visible and invisible scars (Mukamana and Petra, 2008).

Mahmood Mamdani noted that ‘it required not one but many hacks of the machete to kill even one person. With a machete, killing was hard work, that is why there were often several killers for every single victim’ (Mamdani, 2001:6). Sometimes, this multiple hacking to inflict pain on victims’ bodies was immediately lethal. In other cases, victims escaped after the first blows or were left to die slowly and painfully. The act of bodily mutilation is motivated by the knowledge that physically cutting off a body part will mark a victim and signify their ‘attacked’ status, regardless of whether they survive (Maclure and Denov, 2006:127; Bah, 2011; Berghs, 2016). The bodies of those who died and those who survived with wounds and scars, including those who were raped (Norridge, 2002; 143), became sites of pain (Dawney and Huzar, 2019: 10; Scarry, 1985). In *Kinyarwanda*, the national language of Rwanda, a scar is called *inkovu*; the term captures both psychological scars and physical harm. These scars evidence merciless, embodied pain inflicted in 1994 that impact not only the bearers, but also onlookers and society at large.

In the book *Genocide Lives in Us*, Jennie Burnet conceptualizes scars as a ‘living memory’ of the embodied pain that shapes survivors’ everyday lives. Burnet explains that living memory has three components: ‘physical scars on bodies, physical scars on the landscape, and the metaphysical scars that connect peoples’ emotions or mind and memories to space and time’ (Burnet, 2012: 86). This paper further examines the multiple meanings of *inkovu* to further typologize Burnet’s first category (physical scars on bodies). First, there are physical scars from deep wounds that healed but left a variety of visible marks on survivors’ bodies (Norridge, 2019: 61). A second category comprises scars that were not as deep and, with time, have faded but nevertheless remind survivors of the pain they embody (Arthur, 1997). Third, there are deeply entrenched scars that leave a visible disability – for instance, a missing body part – and profoundly affect the survivor’s everyday experience.

This article engages the notion of ‘everyday’ embodied memory to explore how scars bridge the private and public realms of memory. In an analysis of the ‘everyday’ in societies recovering from war, Pilar Riano Alcala and Erin Baines explain that: ‘the everyday becomes a lively yet elusive space in which emotions, interactions, tensions, power struggles, tactics of domination and resistance and small, big, ceremonial or routine events occur’ (2012: 387). Survivors’ bodily scars ‘conjure images...which fall outside formal institutions, [they] involve day-to-day practices that are formalized in both private (as in intimate processes of mourning or family rituals) and public life’ (ibid).

Thus, this article explores how survivors’ bodily scars inform 1994 genocide memory discourses. It asks how meaning is attributed to bodily scars within the broader social memory landscape of post-genocide Rwanda. Bodily scars wield affective capacities. Visible scars are a moving memorial and, as we will show in the paper, can symbolize both stigma and resilience. The article empirically contributes to scholarship on social memory in post-genocide Rwanda and the body studies literature on embodied pain and the meanings of bodily harm in the aftermath of

violence (Blackman and Featherstone, 2012; Blackman, 2007; Shapiro, 2020; Carey, 2012). More broadly it shows the multi-level and multi-dimensional dynamics of bodily scars in the genocide memorialization.

Researching bodily scars in a postgenocide society

This qualitative study is informed by 25 semi-structured interviews (and acknowledges the limitations of this approach, especially when accessing painful memories (Miheli, 2013)). The interviewees included men and women from different social and economic class backgrounds and urban (Kicukiro District) and rural (Bugesera District) settings. The *Umurenge* leaders (local authorities) in each location approved our research, as required in ethical approvals for Rwandan researchers.

Interviews were conducted in three phases (2016, 2017, and 2018) as part of a wider project on social memory and post-genocide Rwanda. Respondents were identified during community meetings, such as commemoration events and other events that discussed reconciliation and peacebuilding. Participants included genocide survivors who bore bodily scars and community members who do not carry scars but live in proximity to scarred survivors. The former group was recruited using a snowballing technique. The latter were recruited based on having seen, lived, or worked with somebody whose body was physically hurt during the genocide. Participants in the second category offered valuable complexity in capturing what scars mean to individual *and* social memories in the aftermath of genocide. We also reference other interviews reported in secondary published works on the 1994 genocide and its aftermath. Participants' names have been concealed for confidentiality purposes.

Priority was given to individuals who had already shared testimonies during commemorative events and were comfortable talking about their scars and experiences. All the participants volunteered their stories and their emotional well-being was prioritized (e.g., by taking breaks whenever necessary and by withdrawing from the discussion if participants became uncomfortable (Mwambari, 2019)). Our respondents knew that the interview could be used in academic publications on the genocide and post-genocide Rwandan society. Our ability to speak and understand Kinyarwanda allowed us access to these sensitive stories without translators. We observed the language use norms regulated by the Rwanda Academy of Language and Culture (RALC),³ which is especially important when doing research on genocide and other sensitive topics in Rwanda (Bouka, 2013).

Memory written on the body

The bodily scars of genocide survivors play multiple roles in post-genocide Rwanda. They are often seen in photographs and on the human remains displayed in Rwandan genocide memorials and museums (e.g., the Kigali Genocide Museum, and Murambi, Ntarama, and Nyarubuye memorials) (Diop, 2006; Norridge, 2019). Scars, especially visible ones, are also part of everyday

³ Referring to people with disability-caused by genocide would need a euphemistic and officially appropriate language. Terms like *ikimuga*, meaning a person with impairment – still employed despite the fact that it is banned – was avoided because it sounds pejorative and psychologically harmful.

conversations amongst Rwandans: ‘survivors bear scars of wounds that testify better than words to the brutality with which they were attacked’ (Des Forges, 1999; 164).

Interdisciplinary scholarship has explored how torture and cruelty were major characteristics of the genocide in Rwanda (Fujii, 2013; Baines, 2003). These acts have informed the long-term trauma of genocide survivors, including those who were scarred (Bagilishya, 2000; Gishoma et al., 2014; Ingabire et al., 2017; Kimonyo, 2008; Sinalo, 2018; Viebach, 2020). Yet, most scholarly work on post-genocide memory politics tends to focus on the evolution and politicization of memorials and commemoration ceremonies (Ibreck, 2010; Bolin, 2012) or how genocide memory shapes politics and society in post-genocide Rwanda (Longman, 2017; Jessee, 2017; Mwambari, 2019; Mwambari, 2021; Jessee and Mwambari, 2022) and abroad (Reggers et al. 2022). Still other studies untangle the genocide’s legacies among survivor communities in Rwanda and the diaspora (Sinalo, 2018). While the multiple meanings and functions of scars feature in some of this work (Des Forges, 1999; Norridge, 2009; Friedrich & Johnston, 2013), few studies have directly exposed how bodily scars structure discourse around social memory. Torture and other means of inflicting pain on human bodies are central to violent injustices, both in war and peace (Winter, 2014; Young, 2010; Comaroff, 2013; Mugo, 2021: 10). Bodily injuries, deaths, and pain – not just sudden death in combat but also injuries that survivors continue to live with – feature prominently in political discourses on war (McSorley, 2019). Torture of the body serves political purposes: “primarily, it ‘unmakes’ the victims’ sensate world through such extreme pain (...)” (ibid. 2). Torture and scarring have long-term effects on survivors and their communities. Bodily scars are ‘carriers’ of past atrocities (Erl, 2011:11)—they help construct knowledge about what unfolded in these violent contexts (Dauphinée, 2007; Wilcox, 2015). Physical bodily scars also become part of a survivor’s reality and reshape how their bodies look and function.

Memory studies scholarship shows that survivors who live with scars “acquire, recall, recognise, and localise their memories” in their communities (Halbwachs, 1992: 40). Dealing with a violent past, individually or through collective memorialization, is a complex endeavor for violence-affected societies (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, 2011). Memory serves various purposes, including transmitting past experiences to future generations (Mwambari and Nxumalo, 2020) in the present. The past is retold through memory forms like narratives, physical reminders that construct social memory, and communicative memory (Assmann, 2011: 2006). Social memory construction transcends brick-and-mortar sites to include other agents of memory, such as the body which ‘convey[s] and sustain[s] memory’ (Connerton, 1989:104).

Debates on social memory construction in post-genocide Rwanda

Debates on the origins and impacts of the genocide have dominated most research on Rwanda (Newbury and Newbury, 1999; De Brouwer and Ruvebana, 2013; Lemarchand, 2011; Rothe et al., 2008). To a lesser extent, scholars have examined post-genocide politics, particularly the Rwandan Patriotic Front’s (RPF) governance of a divided post-genocide and post-civil war society (Reyntjens, 2016). There are sharp disagreements between those who outline deficiencies in the post-genocide government (Thomson, 2011) and those who argue that the RPF’s leadership

has been transformative (Kimonyo, 2016). Scholars also disagree on how and why political and military elites claiming ‘Hutu power’ mobilized local officials, militia, and civilians so effectively that they would systematically target and kill all Tutsis and anyone else who opposed their plans (in some cases, even killing their own neighbors and relatives) (Kimonyo, 2014; Fujii, 2011; Straus, 2013; McDoom, 2020).

After almost four years of fighting to capture power in Rwanda, the RPF’s victory in 1994 put an end to the genocide against the Tutsi. One of its first priorities was constructing an official memory of the genocide (Mwambari, 2021). This effort evolved into Rwanda’s own ‘memory boom,’ to borrow a term used in memory studies to denote an increase in collective memory (Winter, 2006). This ‘memory boom’ is evident in everyday practices and research, including the annual 100-day commemorations that start on 7 April and have done so since the first official ceremony in 1995.

Social memory in post-genocide Rwanda is also defined by physical reminders that evidence the genocide. Official memorials marking sites that contain material traces of violence and mass death are the most visible and most studied. They contain empirical evidence of the atrocities and narratives detailing who participated in the genocide killings, how it happened, and who stopped the genocide (Ibreck, 2013; Chrétien and Ubaldo, 2004). Some memorials also feature complex exhibitions of tortured bodies, how the torture happened, and life during the genocide. There are displays of physical materials victims held at the time of their death (e.g., personal belongings such as clothes, ID cards) and the weapons used to impart pain on their bodies (Sodaro, 2018). During the annual genocide commemoration period in April (and at other times during the year), different actors, including survivors, exhume bodies of genocide victims. These bodies may be displayed in memorials or buried in mass graves around the country. Tensions exist over how human remains have been exhumed, buried, or left on display as physical reminders of the past and evidence of what unfolded (Stone, 2004).

Over the past two decades, the official April commemorations have come to occupy an important place in Rwandan life, politics, reconstruction (Korman, 2013; Bolin, 2019), and post-genocide knowledge production. The state-sanctioned ‘ceremonies’ are held at memorial sites around the country. Their physical reminders help carry the past to younger Rwandans, who participate in these events to learn about a time they did not witness but which nevertheless shapes their everyday lives (Benda, 2017; Ataci, 2021; Grant, 2019; Purdeková and Mwambari, 2022). Physical reminders have also ‘travelled’ (Erl, 2011:11) beyond Rwanda—to diaspora communities and other visitors—through stories, exhibitions, and, especially during Covid-19 restrictions, online mediums (Sibomana, 2020).

Most official memory focuses on remembering Tutsi victims of the 1994 genocide⁴. However, victims of the civil wars that came before or after the genocide are not part of any official memory, a fact that remains controversial for many Rwandans and foreign actors. Those who disappeared during the genocide or were killed during the civil wars of the 1990s in Rwanda and the region are more often remembered through vernacular avenues (Mwambari, 2021). For

⁴ A few memorials like the Rebero memorial site is dedicated to pre-genocide government politicians who opposed the Hutu extremists and genocide violence.

some, the genocide memory has divided Rwandans into groups that support or oppose the official narrative (Roland & Rutayisire, 2015). Additionally, many Rwandans have ‘chosen amnesia’ to help move towards reconciliation (Buckley-Zistel, 2006), but this effectively traumatizes people in the northern regions who suffer from this silencing of the past (Otake, 2019).⁵

Bodily scars in post-genocide Rwanda

Like in other contexts of political violence, carrying out acts of cruelty was one of the ‘main purposes and outcomes’ (Scarry, 1985: 63) of the 1994 genocide. The killers murdered and inflicted extreme pain, purposefully torturing the bodies of their victims. They used sharp tools such as clubs, machetes, and knives – usually used to kill animals – to kill or injure their victims (Hatzfeld, 2005: 37). As a former gang member interviewed by Hatzfeld stated, ‘In the end; a man is like an animal: you give him a whack on the head or the neck, and down he goes’ (Hatzfeld, 2005).

Many survivors’ wounds did not heal properly and left dramatic, visible scars, since there were very few doctors left in Rwanda immediately after the genocide, as many had been killed or fled the country. The few who remained were overwhelmed and, in some cases, did not have the necessary skills to conduct surgeries. Additionally, many medical facilities had been destroyed or looted (Mbanjumucyo et al., 2015). In this context, even simple wounds could develop into deep scars, or even result in complications and death. The resultant scarring of victims makes survivors’ memories and experiences visible to the public through official and unofficial contexts. Scars have three prominent connotations for individuals and societies that have experienced atrocious political violence. They impact how people visualize themselves and how they are perceived by others. Scars also cause everyday challenges that impede social and political progress. Beyond these, scars act as reminders of a violent past.

Scars and one’s self perception and ability

Respondents to this study reported the difficulties of gazing into mirrors and seeing bodily scars, the reminders of a mass atrocity that affected themselves, their families, and their communities. Bodily scars are intertwined with an individual’s perception of themselves and the traumatic expressions that accompany that perception (Sinalo, 2018; Gishoma et al., 2014; Gilbert, 2018; Baldwin, 2019). One interlocutor reported that whenever they looked in a mirror, they saw another version of themselves. A woman whose husband rejected her due to her scars lamented: “putting on shorts and looking in a mirror immediately reminds me of the genocide that damaged me. I hate the mirror; the scars on my legs revive genocidal experiences” (Participant interview, Kigali, 2018). Looking into a mirror forces survivors to reflect on how others see them. One survivor, who has a deep, visible machete scar on her face, talks of her relationship with the mirror: “tell me beautiful mirror, am I always the ugliest person among Rwandans? Horrible mirror never responds! The silence says, yes ...” (Rurangwa, 2006:101).

⁵ Yuko Otake’s research, carried out in Rwanda at about the same period with this research, shows that Rwandans in the Northern region are silenced. They suffer from not being able to mourn their loved ones publicly, and they are not remembered officially. Their suffering includes mental health issues (invisible scars identified earlier in this paper) and other kinds of health related struggles.

The writer continues: “our memory is engraved in sword and machete scars which are like permanent tattoos and bells that ring tirelessly” (Rurangwa, 2006:101). In this sense, scars shape how survivors’ tortured bodies experience long-term pain and self-perception (Darling, 2013; Maclure and Denov, 2006; Berghs, 2008). The mirror becomes a metaphor through which to examine the violent collective past. A respondent, whose wife’s arm was cut off after her shoulder was pierced with a spear and whose jaw was severely damaged, testified:

My wife was exceedingly beautiful; one can’t believe. I grieve when I recall how beautiful she was. She was really gorgeous. Neighbours can tell you ... Genocide [flow of tears] ... It is hard to forget ... (Interview with unscarred genocide survivor whose wife was severely scarred, 2018).

This respondent’s comments emphasize how scars and the loss of beauty are a physical reminder of the violence that affected his wife, countless other families, and Rwandan society. The memory of his wife’s beauty also evokes a more beautiful world before the genocide—a world now spoiled and lost.

Beyond a sense of self, there are survivors with deep visible scars that affect their movement and ability to perform everyday tasks (Norridge, 2019:69). They are forced to depend on others, even for simple tasks like washing clothes. An interviewee whose arm was deeply scarred during an attack recounts her sense of helplessness after the scar became infected and required amputation:

I pay people to help me wash clothes and or clean my house. As you can see with this scar, I am not the kind of person who is able to perform that kind of work, especially tasks that require both hands. It becomes a problem when I need to wash my body and domestic workers (who are common in Rwanda) decline to serve me regardless of whether I pay them. That makes me angry. It happens often and constantly reminds me of the genocide that maimed me... I remember that fateful day, I was in hiding in a bush when someone found me abruptly and cut my arm with a machete. All the scenarios would come alive whenever the ‘helpers’ I used to pay refused to serve me for what I could not perform by myself. That contempt we face because of the genocide awakens our memories (Interview with a survivor, 2018).

This account illustrates the mnemonic function of bodily scars. Scarred survivors and those who serve them need not visit monuments, memorials, or museums to remember the past. Interaction between those with and without scars memorializes the genocide in a negative sense. The survivor’s use of “we” suggests some sense of a community among those scarred by the genocide. Scars distinguish victims from the wider community involved in memory-making. People with scarred bodies are “either impeded or facilitated by people who work with and care for them” (Kulick and Rydstrom, 2015: 3). Emery Kalema found that scars can render the bodies of survivors “useless, undesirable and revolting to others” (Kalema, 2018: 281). Scars may represent the pain felt or mark survivors as victims or even social outcasts.

Scars create everyday challenges that impede social and political progress. For example, survivors with visible scars struggle to find and maintain professional opportunities. Deep bodily

scars and disability from genocide-induced injuries left many unable to work or pushed them out of work due to their changed bodies or status. An interviewee explained:

Because of the fact that my forearm and back was cut off with a machete, I cannot ride a bicycle, which had previously helped me to satisfy my economic needs before the genocide. When I insist on it, I feel aches and sleep badly. Being short of financial means transports my heart back into the past when I was healthy and wealthy. If the genocide had not happened, I would not be struggling to get food and fulfill other needs (Interview with a scarred survivor of genocide, 2018).

Social rejection reminds survivors of the genocidal violence they survived. In most cases, these survivors also lost many family members and, therefore, do not have family networks to help them navigate such difficulties. This survivor's memory centers a transformation from ability to inability and its economic impacts. After his source of income was taken away, he had only memories of when his body could perform. Likewise, another survivor commented:

Recruiters deny us only because we are disabled persons. This happened to me when I was competing with others for the position of health facilitator. Because I am one-armed, recruiters, looking at me, wondered how I could give injections, for instance, using one arm. I was rejected because of that. When it happens, it reminds me that the genocide subjected me to situations that are beyond my control. I am not blaming the recruiters; they are right and need competent people. (Interview with a woman survivor with an amputated arm, 2018).

These everyday encounters with rejection remind genocide survivors of their past trauma. Some survivors lose professional opportunities due to physical appearance. Adult victims experience limited opportunities and changed personal and societal relationships. This is especially true for women, as one genocide survivor explained:

Big shops, hotels, bars and some private companies—mostly financial institutions like banks and travel agencies—do not employ people with a physical deformity, especially when it is facial. For those enumerated agencies, beauty, ability, and good looks are prerequisites. There are even positions in public institutions that cannot be occupied by disabled persons. Have you ever seen a receptionist or a customer care agent with a facial deformity? Those were some instances I wanted to mention to show how our fellow survivors with physical scars are suffering from all angles of life. It is so sad, but people do not care about it. They are still living the genocide though it ended 24 years ago (Interview with unscarred woman, 2018).

For women, everyday challenges lie at the intersection of identity, class, and gender. Women were targeted during the genocide and have faced cruelty stemming from scars and long-term injuries. Their stories of overcoming invisible scars and physical bodily scars in the rebuilding of Rwanda remain underexplored (Okech, 2019; Mukamana and Brysiewicz, 2008; Mwambari et al., 2021). Overcoming social rejection reveals both survivors' resilience and scars' enduring impacts on their bodies and lives. However, scars also allow bearers to construct narratives about their pasts, shape contemporary debates over history, use their bodies for justice-seeking endeavors, and demonstrate their resilience against a difficult past.

The meanings of scars in post-genocide Rwanda

In addition to these more individual effects of scarring, visible scars provoke public discussions about the past. Respondents explained that deep scars on visible upper body parts (i.e., the head or neck) often provoked questions and discussions. Scars are public expressions of memory found in everyday interactions (Norridge, 2019: 69). In Rwanda, as one researcher put it, ‘the physical marks that remain on bodies constitute an intrusion of the genocide into everyday experience’. Survivors ‘who bear the physical marks of the genocide in the form of scars from machetes, bullets, wounds, or missing limbs [have] the genocide’s empirical reality...inscribed on their bodies’ (Burnet, 2012:85-87). Such wounds also find their way into Rwandan memorials, such as the Bisesero memorial, where skulls and other bodily remains with marks from machetes, spears, arrows, and bullets are on display. These scars’ visibility powerfully stimulates memories of a horrendous past for those who experienced it and are passed on to those who visit these sites of remembering. One of our respondents, who works as a survivors’ counselor, explained how these distinctive scars become part of the public debate and discussion:

Genocide scars are either total amputations or shaped like the edge of the weapon used to hurt. Sometimes those scars are found on heads, arms, legs, and the neck. It can be the ear cut off, the nose or jawbone deeply damaged. They may be elsewhere, but I am saying this since we cannot see parts that are covered by the clothes we always put on. The genocide affected those body parts too. One cannot see those kinds of scars except when the victim takes off their clothes. When we meet scarred survivors, we murmur about those scars and what possibly caused them (Interview with a non-survivor, 2018).

Visible scars can also impose silence. Many onlookers who lived in Rwanda during the genocide tend to remain silent rather than directly engage with the scars as they understand the sensitivity of the matter. Scars provoke memories, so some people are uninterested in dwelling on the scar and what it represents. In this case, silence is a choice (Martin, 2021: 459).

Burnet tells a story of how this silence manifests in public places. During her research in 2001, some respondents used humor to refer to a scarred person: ‘His head is so hard, even the *interahamwe*’s machetes couldn’t break it.’ At that moment, she learned that the scar she assumed was from an accident was from the genocide. However, everyone fell silent when she asked more questions to find out what had really happened to this person. She concludes, ‘I felt ashamed that I had not recognised his silent suffering hidden behind a gregarious and gentle manner’ (Burnet, 2012: 87). Stories about these scars can in such cases ‘communicate something that was so radically individuated and rendered unsharable’ (Daniel, 1996: 143). Silence provides an avenue for survivors to distance themselves from violent and painful memories (Lifton, 1998 in Eastmond, 2007), especially when their stories may be unbearable to those with whom they interact (Eastmond, 2005). However, the material presence of scars is not silent; it shapes all a survivor’s interactions with others. These discussions can also be varied, especially when survivors are talking amongst themselves.

Remembering, forgetting, and bearing witness

Public attitudes towards visible scars clearly influence both the scarred and those who interact with scars. Some Rwandans, especially those who were not present during the genocide, and foreigners (especially tourists) ask questions. Therefore, survivors may prefer to hide their scars to avoid unwanted discussions. In other cases, scars are powerful platforms for transferring memories to younger people, and also to those who genuinely want to know how the genocide happened and how individuals were affected. One interviewee recalled how his scar led to a discussion amongst youth who were curious about the genocide:

I cannot dare take off my hat [...] except when I am at home the whole day. People raise questions about my head deformation. I don't like caps, but I wear them to hide scars. ... One day, I went to school on visiting day to see my daughter. Accidentally, my cap fell off, and her schoolmates saw my head and started murmuring. I saw them whispering to one another several times, arguing about my head. I heard one asking others: 'What do you think happened to her dad? Is it not the genocide?' 'It probably is', another replied. They came to agree that the shape of my head was as a result of the genocide. They were uncomfortable to see me. When my daughter came home for vacation, she told me that my deformation had become a topic of discussion that day. Can you imagine such a life? Our bodies have been rendered problematic [...]. We are embarrassed, and others around us are too, due to our experience (Interview with scarred man, a genocide survivor, 2018).

The Rwandan education curriculum has evolved to include discussions about the genocide and visits to museums. However, scars facilitate everyday discussions that make histories and complexities more accessible beyond the classrooms to a younger generation and the general public. Scars push both parties to discuss the genocide at unexpected times and in unexpected spaces, brokering memorialization and preventing silence. Visible physical scars represent the living memory and pain of tortured victims (Norridge, 2019:54). Suzannah Biernoff argues that our existence is a "cultural and aesthetic matter as much as a biological or medical one" (2017: 21), so bodily mutilations have a long-lasting, "dehumanizing" effect. Physical deformation and scars become the subject of others' actions and reactions in everyday life (Landrine and Klonoff, 1997). From our conversations, discussions about scars are tolerable to some survivors, but for others they are inconvenient and revive experiences of trauma, leading them to prefer silence.

While some people may avoid visiting physical sites like memorials, it is impossible to go a week in Rwanda without seeing a person with a visible mark or a scar. Ultimately, the attention paid to scars by the bearers or by unscarred survivors can be as jarring as a memorial site. Anyone, including genocide survivors or accused perpetrators, may ask about these survivors' scars. Thus, scars help forge relationships among survivors from different backgrounds and different political leanings. Scarring inevitably changes one's appearance and physical abilities. Disability accompanying deep scars can affect bearers' everyday public and private lives (Kulick and Rydstrom, 2015; McRuer and Mollow, 2012), often impacting close relationships the most. A scarred man and survivor from the Eastern Province said:

Of course, whenever I see people troubled by my presence, I feel overwhelmed with thoughts. Some thoughts take the form of questions asking why me, and not others, why

was I the one to face such horror? [...] others lead to ruminations which lead to recollections of why and when I was harmed and the perpetrators. My past is always close to me (Interview with scarred survivor, 2018).

Reactions to a survivors' scars can inevitably mobilize scarred bodies to create a memorialization process of the past. When a survivor 'lives the past in the present' (e.g., by remembering the attack on their bodies), remembering becomes part of their everyday life (Bringle, 1996).

Scars can also be used as evidence when seeking justice, as was the case during the Gacaca proceedings:

When I was summoned to appear before the *Gacaca* judges (*inyangamugayo* – people with integrity), my indictment included the case of a woman I had found murdered and thrown in a swamp. Surprisingly, before the court, a woman stood up and said: 'Here I am. I survived your machetes.' She proceeded to show the audience where her arm had been cut off. I had not intended to confess or plead guilty on her case, but with her presence and with tangible proof, I felt as though I had been caught red-handed. In the end, I accepted and confessed. (Interview with former perpetrator tried with the help of scars as indisputable proof, 2018)

In this instance, a scar proved the perpetrator's guilt. The survivor's body transcended a single violent act to become a spectacular living memorial to larger, gross injustices. The scars evidenced the survivor's truth and past (Frank, 2013) and resisted efforts to alter shared histories (Hitchcott, 2021:943).

Bodily scars signify a dynamic memorialisation of the genocide both individually and collectively. They keep the memories of the genocide vivid in public and private realms and influence the everyday lived experiences of scarred survivors and other members of society. Scars are not bound to official events only but rather are part of, and shape, everyday lived experiences. They symbolize spoken and unspoken fraught interactions.

Other scars are avoided or concealed in an effort to forget the past but this section has shown there are also many other reasons for the silence. These may include a strategy to survive on the part of the bearer; in other cases, silence is imposed by powerful actors. Both bearers and onlookers can try to ignore scars by refusing to question or interact (just as people ignore other physical reminders) (Burnet, 2012: 75). This facilitates a type of forgetting that allows communities to discard 'memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one's current identity and ongoing purposes' (Connerton, 2008:63). Genocide survivors exercise agency in displaying scars during trials for justice (although this is also limited, as they sometimes are compelled to do so). In any case, scars contribute to memorialization and demonstrate survival and resistance.

Conclusion

This article explored the dynamics of bodily scars in Rwanda's post-genocide memory landscape. It empirically contributed to post-genocide literature and memory and body studies by examining how scars have become vectors of genocide memory. They constitute empirical evidence of the genocide, intervene in memory, and contribute to memorialization among survivors and their

communities. Scars and the multiple meanings attributed to them are mobile, structuring the everyday conversations and interactions of their bearers. Scarred survivors are powerful physical expressions of genocide memory, trauma, and resilience. In Rwanda and beyond, scars become sites of memory politics struggles; they are present in the everyday and shape people's lives and memories.

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