

Promising Generations:

From Intergenerational guilt to *Ndi Umunyarwanda*

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Introduction

Dramatic change, the kind one witnesses in post-genocide Rwanda requires not only a synergy of well-coordinated action but more importantly, a powerful public narrative of national reconstruction to enable this action. Politics is, after all, the synergy between mighty words and mighty actions, if Arendt is to be believed (Arendt, 2005). This action and its underlying narrative have generally been attributed to the Rwandan state or more concretely to successive governments led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). For this reason, a disproportionate bulk of literature on post-genocide recovery has focused on the agency of the RPF as the main vehicle of change (Clark, 2014; Straus & Waldorf, 2011; Reyntjens, 2013; Pudreková, 2015; Thomson, 2013). On the timeline that gradually emerged out of this literature, there seems to be a loose consensus that until 2010, the RPF's performance and underpinning narrative were viewed positively in light of evident economic growth, political stability and public order. However, since 2010, these achievements have increasingly come under scrutiny and concerns have been voiced regarding the cost of this success, especially in human rights terms.

Phil Clark (2014) sees this emerging dichotomy as a debate between the 'developmentalists' and 'human rights activists'. The latter in particular represent post-genocide societal transformation as a top-down, Kigali elite-driven, donor-supported vision, which combines social engineering with sophisticated and transformative authoritarianism (Straus and Waldorf, 2011:13). Social engineering, Straus and Waldorf argue, happens in four specific arenas which encompass the totality of public life in post-genocide Rwanda, namely behavioural and social, spatial, economic and political (13-15). Authoritarianism is experienced, through, but not exclusively, the monopoly of control that state elites exert over the public narrative of national reconstruction (Thomson, 2011).

Keener students of Rwanda's post-genocide recovery process have been critical of these entrenched reductionist views. The narrative models they develop fail to account for the 'complex ways in which Rwandan citizens engage with the state and participate in government-initiated community level processes' (Clark, 2014: 193). Nicola Palmer refers to

dualistic diagnoses that run the risk of blurring the lines of historical contestation and subversion between the centre and the periphery (2015: 44), whilst Andrea Purdeková rejects the bi-polar nature of the debate and calls for a ‘complexification’ of the discourse on identity politics and identity-driven change (Purdeková, 2015).

This essay finds common cause with this later school of thought. It is based on field research on Youth Connect Dialogues (YCD). It offers a narrative analysis of the emergence of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* out of these dialogues. Research findings in the form of hundreds of young Rwandans’ life stories challenge a monistic top-bottom theory of post-genocide recovery. They point to a more complex phenomenon and a contested political space in which the national metanarrative is subtly shaped daily by a variety of agencies, factors and stakeholders. To support this argument, I will be using Edouard’s story which was the centrepiece of all YCD events; having been adopted by organisers as representative of the children of perpetrators’ life stories.

This essay centres around three key concepts that require a note of clarification. In this contribution, ‘children of perpetrators’ are young Hutu of the emerging and second generation who participated in YCD and identified themselves as such. ‘Emerging generation’ refers to young Rwandans who were aged between nought and 12 years in April-July 1994. The ‘Second generation’ are children born after the genocide against the Tutsi (from July 1994 onward). Youth Connect Dialogues (YCD) are the first phase of a series of public youth meetings which took place between 10 May and 30 June 2013 in fifteen of Rwanda’s thirty districts (Ngororero, Burera, Rubavu, Nyabihu, Gisagara, Nyamagabe, Nyaruguru, Kamonyi, Bugesera, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Nyarugenge, Kayonza, Gatsibo and Kirehe, as well as Iwawa Youth Rehabilitation centre). *Ndi Umunyarwanda* literally translates as I am a Rwandan. When the first phase of YCD officially closed on 30 June 2013, the political significance of the concerns raised by the dialogues as well as the strong reactions they generated in the Rwandan diaspora led to important decisions at the highest level of Rwandan national politics. The national leadership was sufficiently convinced that the spirit of change demonstrated by YCD should be the springboard for a national reflection

on identity. In July 2013, it was decided that this programme would be called *Ndi Umunyarwanda* (NURC, 2017).

It is beyond the scope of this contribution to provide an anatomy of *Ndi umunyarwanda*, as embryonic as the concept might be. The objective is rather to narrate the birth and beginnings of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* as the next milestone and most significant change in post-genocide discourse on identity that goes beyond mere de-ethnicization (Purdeková, 2008). At its inception, this prosaic phrase expressed in the present tense of the verb *kuba* (to be) was envisioned by YCD participant as the repository of hopes for a future where the oneness —*ubumwe* (unity)— of Rwandans is no longer an ideal but an ordinary state of being and living together.² Secondly, this essay aims to demonstrate that, in light of the currently predominant discourse on post-genocide Rwanda, *Ndi Umunyarwanda* could be perceived as a top-down process of social engineering if only considered from the perspective of the current stage of its political dissemination. Approached from its inception stage however, it is a bottom-up phenomenon that originates from the dialogues held between children of perpetrators, children (of) survivors and representatives of local and central governments.

In other words, the argument proposed here is that change in post-genocide Rwanda happens in different stages and at different levels. A comprehensive account of this change has to take this multilevel and multistage dimension if we are to avoid scholarship characterised by the misleading dualistic diagnoses alluded to previously. This approach applied to YCD and *Ndi Umunyarwanda* as sequentially related phenomena shows that individual and group-initiated changes at grassroots levels can and do shape the national metanarrative of post-genocide nation building. This, I argue, happens through a process of negotiation and subsequent incorporation, as points of convergence or alignment with governmental reconstruction interests are found.

² *Ubumwe* (unity/oneness) is semantically encoded in the use of the singular for both the verb —*ndi* (I am) instead of *turi* (we are)— and the attribute *Umunyarwanda* instead of *Abanyarwanda*

In my study of YCD and *Ndi Umunyarwanda* as stages of change, I follow in the footsteps of those who study nation building in post-genocide Rwanda as an enterprise of 'labour in production of a people' (Purdeková, 2015: 11). Much like Purdeková (2015:10), I observe actors like Edouard and Art for Peace as they nurture the idea of a generational pact and its message of a future of peace without machetes. I show how they transmit it to other children of perpetrators through YCD, how the idea transforms into policy practice and action and, finally, how it is performed in the form of *Ndi Umunyarwanda*.

This study of YCD looks at children of perpetrators as agents and their stories as catalysts of change. I trace their journey from privacy and isolation, vocalised during the dialogues as a stage of transgenerational shame and guilt and rendered eloquently by Edouard Bamporiki's book *Icyaha kuri bo, Ikimwaro kuri njiye* (Their sin, My shame) (2010). I suggest that YCD constituted an intermediary stage where disparate stories mutated into an in-group or generational story in the form of dialogues on shared life experiences. By bringing private stories into public space, children of perpetrators became political actors and their initiative a political enterprise. The labour of production which ultimately begat *Ndi Umunyarwanda* took place in this highly politicized arena, in the form of negotiations with state power.

Genealogy of a generational story

YCD was an initiative of Art for Peace, an association of Rwandan young artists whose mission is to promote truth and reconciliation, with a particular focus on younger generations (Art for Peace, 2013). Officially, YCD fell under the tutelage of the Ministry of Youth and ICT (MYICT) and fit within its broader Youth Connekt programme. Rwanda's First Lady's Imbuto Foundation financed the dialogues. The slogan of the event was 'Youth Connekt Dialogue: Promise of a post-genocide generation.' The Kinyarwanda word for 'promise' in this context is *umuhigo* (plural: *imihigo*). It carries the meaning of a binding promise for which one's honour and social status are at stake.

Organisers described the dialogues as a transition from a 'rear-view mirror' to a 'windshield' perspective (Marcel, YCD Gatsibo, June 2013), which shifts the focus from

exclusively survivor-centred accounts to alternative stories (Teta, YCD Kicukiro, May 2013). Such a conception of YCD might explain the noticeable focus on children of perpetrators. As the dialogues unfolded, it became increasingly clear that although officially all young Rwandans aged between 18 and 35 were invited;³ it was obvious that the primary target audience were children of perpetrators and their stories. To fully appreciate the significance of YCD, it is useful to analyse the dialogues in light of the place and role assigned to children and young people in the post-genocide recovery narrative.

Childhood, Youth and Nationhood Reconstruction

There is a healthy body of works on the positioning of children and young people in post-conflict nation-building (Burman, 2008; Pells, 2011; Cheney, 2007). Tradition and culture often dictate how children and young people are defined in post-conflict peacebuilding discourses (McEvoy-Levy, 2011). Researchers have established conceptual links between childhood and nationhood; highlighting the paradox between metaphors that romanticize children as ‘pillars of the nation’ and their persisting subservience to adult ideals of idyllic pasts (Cheney, 2007:10). McEvoy-Levy suggests that this dynamic of youth-to-adults subordination reflects the reluctance to incorporate children and young people’s knowledge in post-conflict peacebuilding (McEvoy-levy, 2001), even though there is sufficient evidence to suggest these demographic groups can and do play a variety of different, shifting roles in these contexts (UN IANYD, 2016:13).

In light of this literature, it is fair to say that post-genocide Rwanda has taken a different route. Children and young people in general figure prominently in post-genocide narratives of recovery. Representations of children and youth as the future of the nation — *U Rwanda rw’ejo*— are a mainstay in political discourse and the popular imaginary. More pertinently, there is factual relevance for this discursive overrepresentation in a country where the 2012 national census estimated that the children and youth represented 78.2% of the population (Republic of Rwanda, 2015). With regard to the impact of the genocide on children and young adults, the reality is sobering. The August 2002 general census showed

³ The 2006 Rwanda National Youth policy defines a ‘Youth’ as a person aged between 14- 35 Years. The National Youth Council website (2018) gives the age of 16-30.

that 64.67% had lost both parents, 22.80% lost their fathers and 4.84% lost their mothers (Ministry of Youth, 2005: 18).

In this context, one can but agree that to neglect this demographic would be 'short-sighted and counterproductive in terms of peace building particularly in the crucial post-accord phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention (...) and societal reconciliation and reconstruction' (McEvoy, 2001, 2-3). Post-genocide governments responded to this challenging reality with an array of institutions and policies. A National Commission for Children (NCC) was established by law N°22/2011 of 28/06/2011, as a consolidation of various outcomes of successive National Children's Summits organised since 2004 (Pells, 2011). A National Youth Council (NYC) was instituted in 2003 (Law n° 24/2003 of 14/08/2003) with the stated vision of having an empowered youth at the forefront of economic development (NYC, 2018). Overall, local and central governments have sought to capitalise on youth as a national asset by having youth representatives at every level of decision making. On the other hand, pupils and students are involved in a plethora of institutions (clubs, associations, etc) with missions varying from peace education, unity, reconciliation, and many more.

Scholarship in this area has been steadily growing around themes such as discourses on children rights and the political instrumentalization of children's agency (Pells, 2011). Some research has focused on gaps between promised development and perceived benefits in policies that seek to make children and young people central to post-genocide reconstruction (Pells et al., 2014). Other studies have centred around themes of youth and ethnic identity (Doná, 2012; Mclean Hilker, 2012) and young people's views on narratives of the past (Mclean Hilker, 2011). In these and other research, there is evidence that young Rwandans have creatively and subversively engaged with the official metanarrative on post-genocide recovery. Overall, through the lenses of local realities and lived experience, young people have sought to reframe the state's narrative and prove that change in post-genocide Rwanda is multi-layered and multidirectional in origin.

Children of perpetrators: legacy, identity and reconstruction

Although research into the Rwandan crisis has come a long way in the last two decades, scholarship on the legacy of the Rwandan genocide for subsequent generations has been dominated by victim-centred approaches (Sydor and Philippot, 1996; Rakita, 2003; Reider and Elbert, 2013). Despite bringing much needed insight on important themes such as young people's physical and mental health as well as their post-genocide socioeconomic adjustment, these studies have failed to attend to the experiences of the children of perpetrators in post-genocide Rwanda.

It has been argued above that more recent and better informed studies of Rwanda's transitional period have called for a "complexifying" of academic discourse (Purdeková, 2015). However, earlier studies still viewed Rwanda as a 'dualist' post-conflict society (Drumbl, 2008); one where surviving victims and perpetrators live side by side. It is estimated that after the genocide, close to 120,000 adult Hutu genocide suspects were detained. After the process of identifying all suspects, the number of genocidaires prosecuted by *Gacaca* reached 400,000; including a small number of Tutsi (Clark, 2012). After *Gacaca* and its focus on the "sins of the parents", very little attention has been given to the plight of children of the perpetrators; even though research has demonstrated that genocide could and did generate severe psychopathological reactions among all children who witnessed the massacres (Sydor and Philippot, 1996: 242-243).

For the category referred to aggregately as children of perpetrators, post-genocide recovery comes with a loaded legacy. YCD became the forum where for the first time the psycho-political ramifications of this legacy were made public. Attentive listening, display of raw emotions and intense discussions revealed a complex and traumatic relationship between this specific group and genocide. The dialogues also revealed a group characterised by diversity; uncovering the nomenclature of 'children of perpetrators' to be what it could only be, namely the kind of 'groupist' artifice Purdeková (2008, 2015) denounces. Concepts such as 'children of Hutu' or 'children of perpetrators' are the discursive embodiment of an 'extension fallacy' (Purdeková, 2008). They bestow collective identity and (hi)story to people

with disparate identities: children born of Hutu parents, Hutu children whose parents committed acts of genocide, 'Hutsi' or children of mixed parentage (Mclean Hilker, 2012), children born of the rape of Tutsi women by Hutu killers, to name but a few.

The stories told during the Youth Connekt Dialogues conveyed an undercurrent of frustration and exasperation that these specific identities are not well understood. However, deeper still was a feeling of inescapable guilt that they had to live with because of who had given birth to them. Gilbert (2002) and Forrest (2008) have shown that feelings of guilt are not uncommon within groups of children of perpetrators. Yet this was neither healthy innocent guilt (Christensen, 2013) nor the kind of transgenerational collective guilt that Arendt finds immoral, confused or wrong (2003:29). It was a deep-seated guilt born out of a *sui generis* post-genocide context where political socialisation and genealogical association are intricately connected. This situation, participants in YCD felt, had to change for theirs and the nation's sake.

A Narrative Shift

As mentioned previously, Art for Peace and its sponsors wanted the dialogues to help Rwandan young people face their past and move towards their future, using group discussions, personal testimonies, music and other forms of art (Art for Peace, 2013). In particular, Art for Peace envisioned the dialogues as a new paradigm for truth and reconciliation that shifts the focus from reaction to change (Teta, YCD Kicukiro, May 2013).⁴

Witnessing the first dialogue as a participant observer and listener left me with a strong sense of 'surrealism' which is not uncommon among researchers in post-genocide Rwanda. Moving from riotous music to heart-breaking testimonies and back to more raucous entertainment, one questioned whether this was a highly charged political event or an unconventional street concert. Yet, it is possible to follow Ganz's advice in viewing the dialogues as a generational celebration; a 'way that members of a community come together to honour who they are, what they have done, and where they are going' (Ganz, 2011, 288).

⁴ I discuss this temporal-directional metaphor extensively in a recent publication (Benda, 2018).

Once past the initial shock, it became quickly apparent that the format of the dialogues was designed to reaffirm the agency, actual and potential, of young people in the transformation and rebuilding of post-genocide Rwanda. The icebreaking or warmup entertainment started with this eloquent affirmation:

Leader : *Abajeni!* — Hey young people!

Audience: *Imbaraga z'igihugu kandi zubaka/* [We are] the building force of the nation

And the songs,

Jenga jenga taifa lako, jenga taifa lako (Swahili) —Build, build your nation (by Masamba)

Or

Rwanda itajengwa na sisi wenyewe, Rwanda itajengwa na sisi vijana (swahili)/ —
—Rwanda will be built by ourselves, Rwanda will be built by us the young people
(Gatsibo district music group)

Purdeková has made a robust case for the significance of ‘appearance’ and ‘characterization’ in Rwanda’s transitional politics. In a context of systematic ‘production of gaps’ between depiction of activities and their observable content, ‘...naming and descriptions can ...mask and perform political work...’ and ‘...formalities and formulations are substance in their own right...’ (Purdeková, 2015:6). The rousing words of self-affirmation at the beginning of the dialogues must be deciphered with this discursive political landscape in the background. This remark and the somewhat rigid format of the dialogues as well as the interventions by state officials might lead to the conclusion that YCD did not differ from other state-sanctioned forums such as *ingando*, *ubudehe*, *ubusabane*⁵ and should therefore be open to the same criticism as top-down mechanisms of social engineering (Thomson, 2011; 2013;

⁵ *Ingando* means camp. In post-genocide Rwanda, there are two kinds of *ingando*: *ingando solidarity* camps, which gather elite groups including judges, politicians and university students, and *ingando re-education* camps that host the more ‘problematic’ segments of society such as confessed *génocidaires*, released prisoners and ex-soldiers.

ubudehe refers to a practice and culture of collective action and mutual support to solve problems within a community.

Ubusabane are convivial gatherings in which communities come together to celebrate life through sharing food and other aspect of Rwandan culture.

Pells, 2011). Yet, this assimilation would be inaccurate. To understand what sets YCD apart, it is more appropriate to locate it within a narrative continuity that requires analysing its inception. Ganz suggests that it is particularly important to celebrate beginnings as a way of acknowledging the start of a new common identity (2011: 288). This going back to the beginning reveals layered stories of which YCD is but a new departure, a ‘resonance moment’ (Gilpin-Jackson, 2014) that is neither the beginning nor the end. At the origin of the dialogues, one discovers the birth of Art for Peace, itself a progeny of the public emergence of Edouard Bamporiki, a young man with a big story.

Edouard’s Journey, a Personal and Paradigmatic Story of Change

Narrative, Ganz suggests, should be understood as ‘the discursive means we use to access values that equip us with the courage to make choices under conditions of uncertainty, to exercise agency’ (2011:274). In this context, Edouard Bamporiki’s story carries great significance for any account of Rwanda’s recovery that takes the agency of the youth seriously. This story was adopted by organisers of the dialogues as the paradigm for children of perpetrators’ post-genocide condition.

Edouard’s story was the centrepiece of each YCD event and was repeated in all fifteen districts. The excerpts used below are taken mainly, but not exclusively, from the version delivered in Kicukiro (May 2013). Typical of inspirational accounts, the story was powerful and its narration was skilfully punctuated by key moments also known in narrative analysis as ‘critical junctures’ (Palmer, 2014) or ‘choice points’ (Ganz, 2011). It found the right balance between entertaining anecdotes and the overall serious biographical narrative (Cohen, 2011). The result was a story which clarified, compelled attention, persuaded or reinforced beliefs, inspired, and influenced the audience’s view of the speaker (Lehrman, 2010:102).

Edouard introduces his story genealogically and poetically; as ‘*Bamporiki wa ...*’ going back to the fifth generation and refers to himself as ‘*Umusizi w’Umusinga wo kwa Nyakayaga*’ —‘a Musinga poet from the lineage of Nyakayaga’ (Kicukiro, May 2013). The emphasis on clan —*umusinga*— and lineage — of *Nyakayaga*— is important for students of

Rwanda's post-genocide identity politics. Quesenbery and Brooks (2010) remind us that stories are created for a purpose and Edouard's sidestepping of ethnic belonging is more than a coincidence. It was a purposeful distancing from the past and the marker of alignment or convergence between individual politics and the official discourse on identity in which the terms 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' have been outlawed.

The first critical juncture in Edouard's story coincides with the start of the genocide:

When the genocide broke out in 1994, I was 9 years old and I was in the hospital of Kibogora. My mother was looking after me. There were three other people in the room (...). We heard noises of bullets outside and disturbances in the hospital. When I asked mum what was happening, she shushed me (...) when I insisted, she told me that she had heard that the Hutu were killing the Tutsi.

The story continues as Edouard invites the audience in his hospital room where a sick child—who has been reassured by his mother that he has nothing to worry about since he is *umuhutu udafunguye* or a pure *Muhutu* (Hutu)—witnesses the brutal murder of Tutsi patients by armed Hutu men. In the same tableau, an adult patient is quietly tucking into his dish of macaroni whilst a little Tutsi girl sits in a pool of blood; the severed head of her father resting in her lap.

This part of the story often generated a very strong emotional response from the audience. However, the narrative intention was not to re-traumatise participants but to highlight the traumatic effect of the genocide on Hutu children and the responsibility of adult Hutu using a brief but charged passage. It also serves as a transgenerational indictment which puts the responsibility for genocide squarely on the shoulders of adult Hutu. Finally, it juxtaposes the four elements that frame the genocide against the Tutsi: (1) Hutu killers, (2) Hutu bystanders, (3) Tutsi atrociously killed and (4) children witnesses/survivors.

The next stage of the narrative reiterates adult Hutu guilt and initiates an empathetic connection between the narrator and the 'victim' group. At the same time it keeps present the genealogical association between children and adult perpetrators.

When the genocide was over and schools reopened, I was saddened to see that there were no Tutsi kids and teachers in the classrooms. This is when I wrote my first poem '*iyo badatsembwa tuba dutwenga*'⁶, in which I question how our people —*bene wacu*— could kill teachers, children, women...I could never comprehend it.

From the perspective of the current literature on guilt and genocide, this segment of the story seems to render support to the presumed collective guilt of all adult Hutu and its transmission to their descendants (Eltringham, 2011; Blair and Stevenson, 2015). It also reinforces the suggestion that a perpetrator's guilt is often mediated by a sense of empathy toward the victim group as opposed to shame, which is mediated by self-pity (Brown and Cehajic, 2008). However, seen from the vantage point of a ten-year-old boy, the words should be read as a lament. The poetics of lament expressed in the poem reveals a working through grief that is rarely explored in post-genocide literature, especially among young Hutu.

The second key moment in Edouard's story relates to the socio-economic condition of a young Hutu in post-genocide Rwanda (McClean Hilker, 2011; Doná, 2012). Despite his mother's efforts to ensure the continuation of his studies, life got increasingly hard and Edouard dropped out of school in the third year of his secondary studies. He struggled to find a decent job, like many young Hutu in the same situation, and ended up serving as a houseboy. This part of the story crystallises an aspect of post-genocide reconstruction that is hardly broached in mainstream narratives, namely the feeling among young Hutu that in comparison with young Tutsi, they are excluded from vital social policies such as access to secondary and tertiary education (Meintjes, 2013; Pells, 2011). As voiced during the dialogue, this socio-economic exclusion is accepted either as a matter of fact or with stoic resignation since it is the inevitable consequence of the crimes committed by their adult relatives in 1994. In an apt paraphrase of the prophet Ezekiel (18:3), Bamporiki notes that the teeth of the children were being set on edge by the fruits off the tree planted by their parent (2010:1).

⁶ Lit. Had they not been exterminated we would be laughing together

These feelings further resonate with findings by studies in social psychology on perpetrators' emotional responses to collective guilt (Branscombe and Doosje, 2004, Brown and Cehajic, 2008; Imhoff et al., 2013; Lickel et al., 2005).

The third critical juncture in Edouard's story coincides with an upturn in his fortunes, which he attributes to his talent as a poet and to the current government's willingness to give opportunities to everyone, especially young people.

One day, I was cooking...when I heard an advert on the radio calling for poets and musicians to submit works on the importance of taxes! I composed a poem through the night and surprisingly I won the prize for best poem!

As a winner, Edouard had the privilege of reciting his poem as a prelude to President Kagame's speech during the tenth commemoration of genocide. It is clear that at this juncture Edouard's story had already entered a political stage. The next and last critical juncture propelled both the narrator and his story into Rwanda's most sensitive public arena and irreversibly paved the way to YCD. In April 2006, Edouard was invited by a group of survivors in Kimironko to recite poetry as part of their mourning and commemoration wake.

As is habitual in such occasions, survivors shared their testimonies and experiences of the genocide. I was so profoundly moved that when they asked me to perform, I felt unable to recite poetry. Instead, I asked the gathered survivors if I could give my own testimony.

Having received their permission, he proceeded to tell the story summarised above. The audience was so profoundly moved by his story that most cried with him and sought to comfort him. Subsequently, they shared the experience with other groups of survivors who invited him to speak during their wakes as well.

This episode had a cathartic and catalytic effect on young Edouard. It dawned on him that his story had the potential bring a new dimension to the process of post-genocide reconciliation and reconstruction. His initial intention was to encourage adult Hutu who committed atrocities in front of their children to own up to their crimes and seek forgiveness for the sake of the children of both groups. Unfortunately, he found most adult Hutu

unreceptive but the Hutu youth who had relatives in prison, as well as young Tutsi survivors of the genocide, mostly artists like him, responded positively to Edouard's message.⁷

Together they founded Art for Peace as a means of creating for themselves a future of peace without machetes. It was during Youth Week in 2013 that Art for Peace approached the First Lady's Imbuto Foundation and secured support to take this message into all the districts of Rwanda.⁸

Contours of a Generational Story of Change.

Ganz suggests that for a collection of individuals to become an "us", it requires a storyteller; an interpreter of shared experience (2011: 286). Edouard fulfilled this role in each of the fifteen districts, each time he told his story, and each time he invited young Hutu in the audience who identified with this story to come forth and share their experience. It is out of these dialogues that a generational story of guilt, shame and the pursuit of political redemption emerged. What are the most salient contours of this story? As already mentioned, it uses Edouard's personal account as the template for children of perpetrators' life stories. In it, the child of perpetrators is seen as an innocent and often traumatised witness wrestling with confusion and guilt, excluded from socio-political opportunities, needing the redemptive hearing of survivors' stories and the guiding hand of the state to find their place in society. The next step in our analysis is to examine the extent to which the stories of other children of perpetrators mirrored this template narrative.

The general observation was that these stories did not emerge easily or fluently. Ganz (2011) has pointed to the challenging nature of participating in events like YCD where the participants' criticality and hope are in dialectical relationship in their desire to bring about social changes. However, despite the reticence of a number of young people to speak in a big crowd, children of perpetrators told their stories in various ways. Some told their stories in the form of short autobiographical testimonies, like microscopic portals opening on to a

⁷These conversations were recently published by Edouard Bamporiki under the title *My Son, it is a long story*. Kigali. 2017.

⁸ Following the success of YCD, Eduard was elected as the RPF Member of Parliament. After a four-year term, he was appointed head of *Itorero*; a traditional institution reintroduced in 2009 as a way to rebuild the nation's social fabric and mobilise Rwandans to uphold important cultural values.

more complex life. Others did not offer a story but asked pertinent questions, revealing in their own way where they stood with regard to Edouard's paradigmatic account. Still others spoke briefly to thank Edouard for having the courage to say what they could not say, implicitly mirroring their lives into the main story. Others openly agreed with Edouard in blaming Hutu adults for the genocide against the Tutsi.

To understand these short, unstructured and at times incoherent narratives, Pamphilon (1999) suggests using the meso-zoom level of life stories analysis which makes it possible to evaluate the narrative process, themes and key phrases. This approach reveals intriguing but not unexpected differences between the main narrator's linear construction of self and the more fragmented experiences of young people who responded to his story. In addition, a macro-zoom analysis of the cohort effects – that is to say, the immediate or remote external and historical factors that shaped their experience (Gilpin-Jackson, 2014) – provided an extra dimension for understanding the distinctiveness of narratives coming from members of the audience.

For all these incoherencies, hesitations and fragmentations, very important themes emerged out of these dialogues and were debated with a measure of openness rarely associated with Rwandan public space. The most recurrent themes inevitably included the genocide and historical ambiguities, childhood, memory and trauma, intragenerational and intergenerational perception of responsibility and guilt, genealogical association and the transmission of liability in Rwandan culture, ethnic versus national identity and the socio-political condition of children of perpetrators. It is most revealing that these themes were discussed mostly in a questioning form. For instance, on the theme of genocide and its legacy on children of perpetrators, participants wondered how they could step out of the shadow cast by the genocidal criminality of their adult relatives in the context of annual commemoration—*icyunamo* (Kicukiro, May 2013). They worried that in the absence of their imprisoned or exiled adult relatives, the justifiable anger of survivors would be transferred to them. In Gisagara district for instance, a young woman told the story of how, in the absence of a brother sentenced in absentia, she took it upon herself to do the *travaux d'intérêt*

général –TIG— that went with his sentence so that shame on the family might be mitigated (Gisagara, May 2013).

On the issue of social and political identity, children of perpetrators voiced the anxiety of not knowing who they were since they could no longer be referred to as Hutu, children of Hutu or children of killers. ‘Are we to be called “ex-Hutu”, *abitwaga abahutu*’, one child asked in Gatsibo (June, 2013). More importantly, YCD participants were unsure about the feasibility of de-ethnicization after a genocide which has been officially reframed in ethnic terms as the ‘genocide against the Tutsi’. Finally, as far as history is concerned, YCD participants questioned the many contradictory versions of history and debated whether there was a single version of historical truth. In Nyabihu district, children of perpetrators expressed their frustration that leaders and scholars were unable to agree on and teach ‘real’ history.

These and other themes revealed a generation of young people in transition and in search of identity and self-understanding, within a context marked by a particular legacy of genocide, a constantly revised history, and complex identity politics. They also revealed a generation that is well attuned to the government’s policies and underpinning narratives. At the same time, they questioned where and how they fit into these policies, not as the ‘children of so and so’ but as individual selves who are aware of their connection to Rwanda’s tragic past yet remain committed to playing a positive role in its ongoing reconstruction. *Ndi Umunyarwanda* finds its origin in these embryonic narratives of ambiguous identities.

From YCD to *Ndi Umunyarwanda*: Narrative convergence and political incorporation

It is not easy to determine the transition moment when Edouard’s story became a paradigmatic narrative for a generation of children of perpetrators. It is clear, however, that the construction of the story followed the same trajectory as the emergence of the narrator’s identity. Concretely, one can surmise that both entered the public sphere between ‘critical juncture 3’ –winning the poetry competition— and ‘critical juncture 4’ –winning the hearts

of survivors. At this point, the poetic of reconstruction collided with the rhetoric of memory, lament and reconciliation; creating an inspiring public narrative that political authorities could not ignore. It is here that, arguably, real political change happened.

Therefore, it is useful to examine how this narrative converged with the official narratives of national recovery in such a way that the trajectory from Edouard's story to YCD and ultimately to *Ndi Umunyarwanda* appears seamless. Studying this narrative convergence achieves one of the aims of this essay, namely, to interrogate the orthodoxy of current scholarship that posits post-genocide reconstruction metanarrative as a top-down and RPF-driven discourse (Straus and Waldorf, 2011). Critical narrative analysis finds mitigated validity in positing a pre-existent and monistic official narrative. Instead it suggests that individual or group lives, experiences and stories from below have the required breadth, depth and quality to begin a social momentum towards effective action on policy change or what Ganz (2011) calls the agency to turn opportunity into purpose.

Further analysis indicates that official metanarratives that usher in major changes can and do emerge as a number of these bottom-up initiatives are carefully engaged with and points of convergence or alignment with national interests are found. These initiatives are subsequently – although not always – absorbed within the government's vision through various policy innovations. It is this formative process of convergence assessment and subsequent incorporation in national policy to which current scholarship has so far failed to attend. Instead, it has tended to focus exclusively on the political end product without attempting thorough analytical distinction between the whole and the parts, the process and the outcome.

This point also highlights the importance of YCD and similar state-sponsored public forums on the formulation of official narratives and policies. In this case, the transition from Edouard's story to *Ndi Umunyarwanda* was not a simple case of public performance as some critics, particularly the opposition from the Rwandan diaspora, have suggested (BBC, July 2013). Rather, YCD was the pivotal transitional point which acted both as a testing forum and a validation process. The meticulous planning between Art for Peace, MYICT and

Imbuto Foundation (Art for Peace, 2013) is evidence that Edouard's story, as important as it was, represented no more than the proverbial tree that does not make the forest. It had to receive public generational validation which, contrary to what critics suggest, was a contingent outcome rather than a foregone conclusion.

In this respect, YCD was the crucible in which potential turned into conviction on at least two levels. On one level, an individual story identified as a generational paradigm, was tested and ultimately—but not uncritically—validated by similar or complementary stories from the targeted generation. On a second level, the government was sufficiently convinced that this bottom-up generational narrative had enough political relevance to signal a new departure in the discourse on identity politics. In Ganz's terminology, YCD was the forum in which individual stories of children of perpetrators mutated into a generational story of 'us', leading ultimately to the emergence of a national story of now in the form of *Ndi Umunyarwanda*. However, this process also confirmed what keen students of power dynamics and state agency have long observed in post-genocide Rwanda; the fact that 'though multiple initiatives are initiated outside of the state framework, the search for the "truly grassroots" obscures the way in which actors at all levels have to negotiate power and the state in their daily lives' (Purdeková, 2015:13).

Ndi Umunyarwanda: Finding Identity in the Rwandan Spirit

Ndi Umunyarwanda, I pointed out, is a relatively new concept; having surfaced in post-genocide political narrative in July 2013 (NURC, 2017). There is little doubt however that this concept is set to dominate Rwandan politics in the foreseeable future. One way of simplifying *Ndi Umunyarwanda* is to say that it is envisioned as the answer to almost all the historical ills that have befallen and divided Rwanda. A concept paper prepared by the NURC (2017) has attempted to provide a more refined précis of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* both as concept and policy. It is both *icyomoro*—salve or balm for the Rwandan body politic—and *igihango*, the pact that binds Rwandans. It is a vision for the future, the embodiment of the Rwandan spirit and way of life, and a political programme (NURC, 2017, 53-57).

Ndi Umunyarwanda represents the absolute embodiment of *ubunyarwanda* or the Rwandan spirit, understood as the profound relational bond that unites all Rwandans. This bond is the eternal and unbreakable pact between all Rwandans, and between Rwandans and their country (NURC, 2017:58). *Ndi Umunyarwanda* involves the embracing of *ubunyarwanda* as well as the values and taboos that underpin this spirit. These values are i) patriotism geared toward a positive legacy for the future, ii) integrity, iii) a culture of critical dialogue for conflict resolution and iv) the promotion of national and individual progress. Genocide ideology, conspiring against Rwanda and Rwandans as a nation, and putting individual gain before national interests are proscribed by *ubunyarwanda* (59-66). The concept paper goes on to provide specific goals, results and the code of conduct during *Ndi Umunyarwanda* dialogues.

Scoping *Ndi Umunyarwanda* is currently a difficult task since it is still going through different stages of conceptual and substantive consolidation. Once this process is deemed satisfactorily complete, *Ndi Umunyarwanda* will become the narrative and strategic framework for the majority of policies, especially in all matters related to citizenship and identity politics. One of the most promising additions to the narrative of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* is the recently created institution of *Abarinzi b'igihango* or Keepers of the Pact (NURC, 2016). This initiative aims at identifying and telling the stories of special individuals who have demonstrated and upheld the highest values of *ubunyarwanda* during past instances of violence (p.3). In doing so, they preserved the traditional pact between Rwandans and were the precursor of the spirit that animates *Ndi Umunyarwanda* (4-6).

As of the time of writing, two cohorts of *Abarinzi b'igihango* have been commended and rewarded (Muhabura, 2015; NURC, 2017). What is immediately noticeable is the fact that most of these individuals were rescuers during the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. Even if not all of them are Rwandans or Hutu, it is impossible not to surmise that the *Ndi Umunyarwanda* narrative is attempting to incorporate Hutu stories that are not just accounts of murder, shame and guilt. It is also true that this change should be seen as the direct consequence of YCD; the dialogues having already introduced in public narrative the

idea that the Hutu group should not be seen as a homogeneous collective with a single story. In this sense, an initiative that was started by marginalised children of perpetrators continues to exercise positive and profound influence on changes that are likely to shape discourse on identity politics in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

This study set out to provide a narrative analysis of YCD and to show how narratives from below shape or contribute to the official metanarrative on post-genocide societal change. The findings suggest that YCD contributed directly to the official narrative of identity by giving it grounding and validation.

YCD showcased many poignant stories retracing individual journeys of children of perpetrators as they wrestled with the intergenerational legacy of genocide, as they developed awareness of identity politics and as they creatively engaged with governmental policies. The dialogues generated fascinating narratives of transformative transition from ambiguous ethnic identities and transgenerational guilt to constructive exchanges aiming at intragenerational integration and future-oriented political responsibility. However, YCD also became a story in its own right; a narrative with at least four axes of change. It was the story of a bottom-up initiative. Secondly, it was a story of change from ‘rear-view mirror’ to ‘windshield’ perspective in its shift of emphasis from survivors to perpetrators’ lives. It was also a narrative of political repositioning from private emotions to public visibility. Ultimately, it represented a redemptive narrative of moving from guilt to political agency.

For scholarship on post-genocide reconstruction, this analysis of YCD contributes a unique narrative insight into the condition of children of perpetrators in a *sui generis* post-conflict context. It draws the reader into the universe of political, socioeconomic, psychological, moral and legal dilemmas that these young people face daily. Concretely, the study shows how children of perpetrators understand and conceptualise genocide and its legacy from a transgenerational perspective. It highlights the impact of this legacy on the formation of a complex post-genocide identity, transgenerational tensions around the issues

of guilt, responsibility and accountability as well as the perceived and real handicaps of being children of perpetrators. It shows how this generation forges credible agency to position themselves as partakers in the reconstruction of a nation, the destruction of which weighs heavily on their conscience through a culturally entrenched notion of genealogical transmissibility.

The stories of Edouard and other children of perpetrators should be seen as a narrative journey from the 'dark side of the mind', a quest for hope during which denial and repression are worked through, so that knowledge and awareness are not shifted away from consciousness (Bar-On, 1991). When this consciousness is released from the confines of individuality and privacy, it becomes public and political; a public generational narrative. In this respect, the progression from Edouard's individual story to YCD is as an intentional construction of in-group political identity. This in turn makes YCD events genuine sites of political transformative learning. The public nature of these stories should not be underestimated. They are in contradistinction to what Schlant (1999) calls the 'language of silence', a form of political mutism that characterises different generations of perpetrators (Oxenbergh, 2003; Imhoff et al., 2012; Brown and Cehajic, 2008; Münyas, 2008). They offer a challenging and dialectic narrative in which the strong desire to reject the past is in tension with the political necessity to connect this past with the future (Berger and Berger, 2001). Children of perpetrators used YCD to challenge ethnic identity narratives (Eltringham, 2011; Mclean Hilker, 2011) and offered narratives that should begin to lay foundations for a genuine national Rwandan identity. Discussions around the issue of transgenerational guilt point to a desire to convert guilt as a handicap into political responsibility. *Ndi Umunyarwanda* is their stated political intentionality to rebuild a nation for all Rwandans in which *amahoro* —peace— not *imihoro* —machetes, should have the last word.

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