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Papaoutai? Family Memory, Parental Loss and Rwandan Artists Today

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Abstract

This article explores how family framings of childhood experiences of violence shape Rwandan artistic responses to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. It examines work by both child survivors of genocide and Rwandans who grew up in exile. This enables consideration of the longer legacies of violence that began against the Tutsi nearly sixty years ago, alongside the more recent aftermath of genocide. Whilst child survivor narratives frame memory as fragile, an ongoing challenge negotiated alongside the demands of daily life and remaining family relationships; returnee narratives demonstrate a stronger intergenerational historical thread, which is nevertheless complicated by the overlaying of parental memories with the younger generation's personal contact with violence. Drawing on specific examples of artistic testimony – two memoirs, two solo performances, a feature film and a novel – this analysis links different genres with particular framings of family memory and examines complex identities in post-genocide Rwanda.

Keywords

Rwanda, genocide, family, postmemory, testimony, fiction



On Saturday October 17th 2015, legendary Belgian-Rwandan singer Stromae played in Kigali for the first time to rapturous applause. Rwandan facebook feeds were filled with photographs of twenty and thirty-somethings dressed in outfits emulating his signature style – a colourful short-sleeved shirt and bow tie. Born to a Belgian mother, Stromae’s father Pierre Rutare, a Rwandan architect, was killed during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, just weeks after his son’s ninth birthday. The 2013 song the Rwandan audiences were so eagerly awaiting is entitled “Papaoutai”, loosely translated as Dad, where are you? As Stephen Kalimba commented in *The New Times*, “A night out in Kigali is not complete if you don’t dance to this hit” (2015). Set to a cheerful melody with coursing beat, Stromae’s lyrics examine the darker edges of paternal absence. The accompanying video shows a pastel 1950s American-style residential close (2013). Parent-child pairs dressed in identical clothing, dance in synchrony. But Stromae, playing the song’s eponymous father, has become an inert and caricatured dummy. His “son” dances around him in the front garden and various rooms of the house, failing to establish any sense of connection until, finally, he too settles into rigidity on the sofa. What is it about this song that appeals to Rwandans to such an extent today? Is it connected to a wider sense of intergenerational loss? And can this tell us anything about how Rwandan artists are negotiating complex family memories through their work?

Two decades after the genocide against the Tutsi, Rwandans born between 1976 and 1994 who were children at the time have now reached adulthood. All Rwandans are marked by the horrific violence of this period and the majority of those present in Rwanda in 1994 witnessed killings first hand. As many as a million Rwandan Tutsis of all ages were killed: around one in ten people lost their lives, at least 77% of the Tutsi population were killed and thousands of survivors were left with physical and emotional disabilities (Eltringham, 2004:63). A UNICEF survey conducted 13 months after genocide, with 3,030 children of all ethnicities from across Rwanda, found that 95.5% had seen or witnessed violence personally, 78.3% had experienced death in their family and 90.3% believed they themselves would die (Dyregrov et al., 2000:6). One of the most devastating consequences of the genocide has been children left to grow up without parents or extended family. In 2003 Human Rights Watch estimated 400,000 children (10% of all Rwandan children) were living without one or both parents as a result of the

genocide, war, HIV or prison (2003:1). Researchers have studied trauma and other psychological effects of genocide experienced by Rwandan children (Dyregrov et al., 2000; Neugebauer et al., 2009; Gasanabo, 2013; Kaplan, 2013); the transgenerational consequences of genocidal violence in Rwanda (Roth et al., 2014); and interventions to address children's mental health needs and promote resilience in Rwanda (Sezibera et al., 2009; Dushimirimana et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2014).

Whilst the violence perpetrated against the Tutsis and Hutu sympathizers in 1994 was the most brutal and extensive the country had seen, it was not without precursors. Many parents of Rwandans who were children in 1994, at home and in the diaspora, had already witnessed mass violence. This began in 1959 when, with anti-colonial tensions running high, an attack on a PARMEHUTU¹ activist led to the burning of Tutsi houses and the murder of between 200 and a thousand people (Eltringham, 2004: 34-41; Prunier, 2010: 47-49). Attacks escalated over the following years and by 1964 a UN census estimated there were 336,000 Tutsi refugees outside of the country, two thirds of them in Burundi. That is to say 40-70% of the pre-1959 Tutsi population were now in exile (Eltringham, 2004: 41). In just two months between December 1963 and January 1964 10-14,000 people were murdered (Lemarchand, 1970: 225). This violence was horrific for those involved: Yolande Mukagasana describes her husband aged 13 losing his entire family, his mother burnt alive in the family home (1995: 73-5). Bertrand Russell, writing in *Le Monde*, called it "the most systematic massacre since the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis" (my translation, 1964). Despite regional variations, it seems reasonable to suggest that most of the Tutsi population fleeing into exile had either witnessed violence first-hand or had friends and relatives who had done so.

By the 1990s, violence between 1959-64 and 1972-3 had created a diaspora of as many as 700,000 refugees, in addition to other Banyarwanda² who had earlier settled outside Rwanda's borders (Prunier, 2010: 63). Academic analysis of the experiences of this group of Rwandans (which includes many influential figures in current Rwandan politics) tends to focus on the historical and political framing of the past (Eltringham, 2004; Long, 2012) and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) soldiers (Clark, 2014; Mgbako, 2005; Waldorf, 2009; Verwimp and Verpoorten, 2014). Erin Jesse has written anthropologically about

this group's relationship with politics and history after 1994. She argues that whilst social status, wealth, and country of refuge affected both their experiences of exile and of return to Rwanda, they are united in their "nostalgic sentiments regarding the benefits of the Rwandan monarchy" and the "idyllic" pre-colonial past (2017: 190-191). But the way in which returnees who grew up outside of Rwanda navigate their parents' experiences of past violence has yet to be fully explored.

Rwandan researchers in the social sciences are beginning to study how young people today engage with their parents' actions and experiences of genocide (Dushimimana, 2017; Benda, 2017; Rutayisire and Richters, 2017). However, this work hasn't examined how young Rwandans navigate their own memories of 1994 in dialogue with (absent) parents, nor how the experiences of Rwandans who grew up as refugees in the diaspora might be considered alongside the experiences of Rwandans who lived through the genocide. As such, the familial memory frameworks for the generation born in the late 1970s and early 1980s remain under-theorised. This gap is echoed in the research exploring cultural responses to genocide where studies have tended to focus on work by Rwandans who were adults in 1994. In their foundational books Catherine Cocquio (2004), Josias Semujanga (2007) and Alexandre Dauge Roth (2010), for example, all explore the work of the visiting Fest' Africa writers alongside early testimony by adult Rwandan survivors and, in the case of Dauge Roth, feature films made by outsiders between 2001 and 2007 (Dauge Roth goes on to write about Kivu Ruhorahoza in 2017). More recently, Nicki Hitchcott's expansive work on genocide fiction again explores writing by an older generation (2015) and Catherine Gilbert's monograph about testimonial narratives (2018) focuses mostly on adult survivors although she does discuss work by Berthe Kayitesi (also examined here). Ananda Breed's study of theatre, justice and reconciliation (2014) includes the work of theatre practitioners growing up in the diaspora, but her emphasis on wider communities and social identities means the exploration of family dynamics remains beyond her scope.

This article is therefore one of the first to examine how Rwandan artists reflect on childhood experiences of violence in their work. It brings together work produced between 2009 and 2014 by six Rwandan artists who were children (under 18 and still residing in the family home) in 1994. All were from Tutsi or partially Tutsi families

targeted by genocide. There are two reasons for this focus. Firstly, whilst I acknowledge that all Rwandan children were negatively affected by genocide, in particular children whose parents were subsequently imprisoned (Doná and Veale, 2011: 1276), in comparing across different geographical and generational contexts I wish to focus on the group targeted by genocide in Rwanda, bearing in mind that the ideological framing for that violence (to kill a whole people) has particular significance for family dynamics. Secondly, very few artistic works examining other identities are in circulation (with the exception of Edouard Bamporiki's film *Long Coat* and subsequent publishing projects). Through this work I explore how artists represent the direct and indirect sharing of family memories. Often, as in Stromae's *Papaoutai?*, these family relationships are characterised by absent or interrupted communication between parents and children. Here, artists both depict these challenges and use the artistic process as a means to renegotiate and reimagine familial relationships. Intuitive connections and revealing differences emerge between the work of those who survived genocide and those who grew up in exile. The study of the second generation reception of the violent past in relation to the latter, may inform the ways in which the former child survivor experiences evolve, particularly given ongoing engagement and artistic exchanges between contemporary Rwandan artists from a range of backgrounds.

Structured according to both genre and different forms of memory, this discussion is divided into four sections. The first two examine the defining characteristics of experiences grounded in Rwanda and in the diaspora, the third and fourth bring these experiences together for comparative analysis of aesthetic strategies deployed in performance and fiction. I consider both vertical transmission of memories (between children, parents and their grandparents), which I relate to the field of intergenerational memory; and horizontal memory, the sharing of contemporary memories between family members, that I in turn explore through Hirsch's concept of affiliative postmemory. If the material discussed is unusual, the framing, for readers of *Memory Studies*, is not, drawing on theories about family memory from Holocaust Studies and Diaspora research. In bringing these fields together I hope to begin a conversation about this kind of memory work in Rwanda and extend the conversation within Memory Studies by connecting diaspora and first-hand experiences of recent violence through the arts.³

Testimony and Parental Loss

Child survivors of genocide, Tutsis living in Rwanda in 1994, lost many immediate and extended family members. This resulted in the sometimes near total loss of living family memory with devastating emotional, economic and cultural consequences for survivor communities. Because of the lack of family support structures, many have been disproportionately affected by poverty and interrupted schooling (HRW, 2003: 44). Despite these disadvantages, some child survivors have also become highly visible through their participation in commemoration, transitional justice (UNICEF, 2010) and documentation (Genocide Archive Rwanda, 2018). Child survivor testimony, evoking as it does the senselessness of violence and the innocence of those attacked, is culturally and politically valuable (Hron, 2013: 28-30). Its strong symbolic resonance means visiting journalists, writers and filmmakers have paid great attention to child narrators of violence and international audiences remain fascinated by the plight of Rwandan orphans (a fascination notably complicated by Monémbo in his novel *The Oldest Orphan*). But whilst child survivors (and victims) feature repeatedly in narratives about genocide most have had few opportunities to tell their stories on their own terms, to create their own extended explorations of their experiences of living through genocide and its aftermath.

Out of this context of hypervisibility mixed with systemic economic disadvantage, emerged two testimonies written by young Rwandan women who survived the genocide against the Tutsi as children and published their books in French, against all odds.⁴ Both authors were thirty by the time their work appeared, both required relative financial stability and the passage of time to be able to recall and shape their experiences into an extended narrative. Berthe Kayitesi's *Demain ma vie (Tomorrow My Life)*, appeared in 2009, coinciding with the fifteenth anniversary of genocide. Aged fifteen in 1994, the memoir recalls the loss of her parents and extended family, the violence she witnessed during genocide, her own survival, being reunited with her younger siblings and their subsequent struggle to remain together and gain an education. Élise Rida Musomandera's testimony *Le Livre d'Élise (The Book of Élise)* appeared five years later, around the twentieth anniversary of genocide. Rida was just ten years old in 1994 and

lost both her parents and all of her siblings. As with Kayitesi's testimony, most of her book explores the struggle to survive in the aftermath of genocide. Her account of the violence itself is brief, precise and overwhelming in content, describing how the killers thought they had clubbed her to death and she awoke under the bodies of her mother and two brothers.

Both testimonies refer to memory work as a process. That is to say, the way in which they engage with the past has changed and is substantially changing over time. Initially, in keeping with many adult survivor narratives (Norridge, 2013: 149-151) they suggest fear was the dominant emotion during the genocide, staying alive and fighting to build a future took precedence in the aftermath and it was only later that their memories of the violence began to resurface. Suzanne Kaplan sees this as a traumatic symptom: "the individual feels an intense, urgent need to regain control over life" (2013: 94), whilst other mental health professionals might read it as normal adaptive behaviour (Summerfield, 2000: 243-4). Kayitesi and Rida dwell on the enormity of their daily challenges and the new social systems and institutional peculiarities they must learn to navigate to feed themselves and their families. Rida comments, "I spent months and even years without ever thinking about my past, understanding nothing about the genocide, nothing" (2014: 36).⁵ Similarly, Kayitesi asserts that between 1994 and 2004 "the force of life consumed all my being" (2009: 258) and during this period she didn't experience flashbacks or nightmares.

However, when Rida and Kayitesi found some measure of safety their memories began to return. Rida links this to the point when she began to feel loved again. Experiencing conflicting feelings about whether or not she could trust her carers at the orphanage, her memories returned as dreams and nightmares (2014: 38). To this day she cannot sleep well, and her participation in commemoration and visits to memorials remains painful even if she also sees it as personally important (2014: 85). For Kayitesi, it was only when she moved to Canada for her studies that her memories returned. She writes: "Everything rose to the surface, my past streamed past endlessly" (2009: 264). She describes this period as being "too full of memory", a time in which she had difficulty navigating how she could bear witness to genocide suffering (264).

Rwandan survivor testimony often asserts that life in Rwanda can be divided into a before and after genocide (Hatzfeld, 2008: 83). For Rwandans who survived as children their lives before genocide were much shorter than adult survivors, their memories necessarily incomplete and unformed. This can be seen in the structure of the testimonies. For example, only the first fifth of *Demain ma vie* is dedicated to life before 1994, the majority focuses on violence and its aftermath. The weight of the genocide tends to displace memories of before, the overwhelming legacy of loss is much greater than the memory of parental presence. Rida comments that “the memory of that time is too present” (2014: 32). She explains: “One day, I had a family, one day I had a country, one day I had friends, one day I was a happy child surrounded by people” (2014: 32). The repeated French phrase she uses here is “*un jour...*”. My translation, “one day”, doesn’t quite capture the fairytale, story-like quality of the original. Very swiftly the formulation transforms into an account of genocide violence: “One day I saw everything disappear violently, horribly; one day my ears heard the cries of my younger brother being killed; one day my ears heard the last words of my father before I took flight because they’d come to kill us; one day I heard the genocide perpetrators speaking about the way in which they’d killed my father; one day...” (2014: 32-3). The one sentence of pre-genocide memories is eclipsed by a long paragraph of similarly formulated accounts of horror. The displacement of the language of childhood is made clear through both content and form.

If the weight of genocide displaces memories of before, the violent nature of these memories also contaminates and reframes happier images from childhood. For example, Rida finds herself unable to reminisce with other children because: “we can’t remember the good times when we played hide and seek without bringing to mind how our friends were found in their hiding places” (2014: 57). Considering this loss, she continues: “It makes me so unwell, I tell myself that I’ve lost everything, that I’ve even lost my generation” (2014: 58). Such bereavement is compounded by the lack of mnemonic objects which might maintain any enduring sense of the presence of the pre-genocide childhood past. Kayitesi speaks movingly about the loss of family photographs during the genocide. She explains that when she discovered they were deliberately destroyed she

felt “betrayed and broken all over again” (2009: 151). Violence obliterates memories both physically and emotionally.

Genocide also robs Kayitesi and Rida of the chance to build relationships with their parents over time. Kayitesi explains she suffers from not having been able to get to know her parents well (2009: 107-8) and from the familial responsibilities she had to assume caring for her younger brothers and sisters when she was still a child herself. She is also sad that her remaining family members have had to separate to survive (staying with host families and institutions), meaning they’ve lived different experiences (2009: 282). Early in *Demain ma vie*, she cites a letter from another survivor, who writes, with words echoing Stromae’s plaintive plea for fatherly direction: “I hope you know how to pause for a moment on this day in your life. To look behind and in front of you. Do you know where you’re coming from? Do you know where you’re going?” (2009: 58). Kayitesi repeatedly asserts that the genocide functioned as a “total uprooting”, that losing her parents and witnessing that level of violence destroyed her “land of childhood” (2009:59). Now she seeks out occasions when, talking to remaining family members, she has the impression of being born again, of getting to know her origins, of “being able to build a sense of family for those who remain” (2009: 93, 172). Both writers are concerned about having their own children: Kayitesi is fearful of taking on additional familial responsibility (2009: 284) whilst Rida expresses anxiety about how to talk about the lack of other family members (2014: 64). But neither writer explores how they themselves might transmit memories of genocide to their children: the focus in these early child survivor testimonies is on the enduring challenges they face in the present.

Exile and a Different Loss

At the heart of Rida and Kayitesi’s memoirs is a pervasive sense of parental loss, a loss that goes to the heart of their identity and to how they locate and perceive themselves within Rwanda. By contrast, the stories of child returnees often feature both physical parental presence and the loss of land and family members those refugee parents experienced. As a result these parents are often invested in transmitting a sense of location and connection to their children living in exile. This is a feature of diaspora

experiences that has received increasing attention over the past seven years. Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann's field-defining collection *Memory and Migration* argued that whilst "contemporary theories of memory have mostly considered memory *in situ*, and place itself as a stable, unchanging environment," in practice memory is often out of place, stimulated precisely by movement and migration (2011: 3-10). In Creet's words, "migration rather than location is the condition of memory" and "displacement intensifies our investments in memory" (2011: 9-10). Monika Palmberger and Jelena Tomic, similarly argue for an intrinsic connection between memory and movement, suggest that "in diasporic contexts, mnemonic images of 'home' prove to be especially pervasive, often implying a longing for – possibly never visited and virtual – faraway places" (2016: 1-2). We will see that this emphasis is only intensified by the transmission of violent memories of place across generations.

I am unaware of any written testimonies by Rwandan child returnees so to begin exploring their particular perspective I turn to Nigerian photographer Andrew Esiebo's series *Returnees*. This work was developed for the exhibition *Rwanda in Photographs: Death Then, Life Now*, which marked the twentieth anniversary of genocide in the Inigo Rooms, Somerset House, London. It consists of portraits of nine Rwandan returnees working in the Arts, accompanied by edited interviews about their childhood experiences of displacement, often centering on their parents' longing for home. The photographs were mounted on aluminum and displayed unframed, as a group, creating a sense of community and coherence. Each portrait showed the subject in their place of work in Kigali, standing or semi-standing, looking straight at the camera. They exude a mixture of strength and apprehension, apparent in the physical language of the body, square to the camera in some shots, more angled with face tilted in others. Throughout there is a sense of Rwandan identity: from the intore dancers on Eric Kabera's film set to the typically Rwandan designs in the background of Teta Isibo, Matthew Rugamba and Injonge Karangwa's portraits.

The timescale and intensity of these returnee experiences are very different to those of survivors. Born outside of Rwanda or displaced at an early age to Uganda, Burundi, Zaire, Belgium and Canada, their family stories nevertheless centre on the country of their parents' birth. Their sense of identity is tugged between multiple

locations: the dreamed for Rwanda of their parents and the country they experience for themselves as children. In these accounts it is the parents who are living with the traumatic aftermath of mass violence and the children who are affected by their emotional wounds, a profound sense of geographical and cultural dislocation, and concern about present and future familial connections. When recounting the events of 1994, instead of being overrun by their own vivid memories, these former child exiles, now adult creative leaders, often focus on the sense of being at a distance, powerless, unable to help family members still present in Rwanda, witness to their parents mounting distress at the return and escalation of violence they had earlier experienced.

In *Rites of Return*, Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K Miller argue that “the very definition of diaspora depends on attachments to a former home and, typically, on a fantasy of return” (2011: 3). The children of Rwandan refugees position this longing for return as central to their parents’ identities. Recalling her childhood in exile, fashion designer Injonge Karangwa comments “my father was always talking about Rwanda, this legendary wonderful place” (Esiebo 2014). Dancer and choreographer Wesley Ruzibiza, who grew up in then Zaire, similarly recollects his father’s desire to return as “this dream of having a home again” (Esiebo 2014). Such a home was seen as not solely geographical but also as cultural. Actress and theatre director Carole Karemera explains: “[My mother] used to translate poetry and traditional songs for me to understand the meaning. She tried to teach us where we were coming from in a cultural way. It was a way for her not to disappear completely as a refugee. She was using culture as resistance” (Esiebo 2014). Here movement, place, culture and identity are intricately intertwined.

Whilst Esiebo’s interviews don’t dwell on parental experiences of violence, the underlying reason for a childhood in exile, they do describe the extent to which returnee artists felt their childhood identities were formed in dialogue with their parent’s longing for somewhere else and their desire to transmit an emplaced sense of identity. This sense of being defined by parental memories and loss of place and people, has been explored by Hirsch in relation to the children of Holocaust survivors, themselves mostly in locations other than where their parents grew up, using her term “postmemory”:

To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. (2012: 107)

The children of Rwandan refugees also find their identities shaped by the memories of the previous generation, memories that grew out of extreme violence and are often hard to grasp.

This sense of displaced identity is clearly visible in these artists' relationship to the place they call home. Even though many had never visited the parental home they talk about "returning" or "coming *back* to Rwanda". Rwanda is "home" when it has never been home, Rwandan culture learnt and embodied through daily interactions with family and friends in exile. Aaron Hass in his work on second generation Holocaust survivors recalls that when he was asked where he was from he would reply Lublin, even though he had never been there: "I *felt* as though that were my home" (1996: 2). Similar longing for a missing home, a point of origin, and the related sense of childhood dislocation, played a fundamental role in most of the returnees' desire to settle in Rwanda. As Anne Mazimhaka explains: "When you see your parents and your family without a home, forced to live without a home, there is something that grows in you, that makes you want to be a part of their return journey" (Esiebo 2014). The second generation "return" to a place they have visited only through their parental interactions.

A question that emerges but is not answered by Esiebo's photographs and interviews is whether these artists feel their family-inflected experiences of diaspora and "return" are marked by other forms of loss. The loss of the chance to form an identity on their own terms growing up in a country other than Rwanda, the loss of their own childhood memories, displaced by the parent-child interactions. We'll find rich material to explore in relation to these questions as we turn to performance and fiction. We'll also look further at the ways in which this generation's relationship with the past is changed

by their own memories of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, albeit often experienced at a distance, and how this affects their relationship with their parents' earlier experiences of violence. This will give us a sense of how this form of diasporic postmemory might transform over time. As Maria Rice Bellamy explores in her study of "contemporary ethnic American" memory, postmemory involves not only identification, but also translation – taking ownership and imagining the past through your own lens, and differentiation – "the process through which the protagonist *rearticulates* or represents her traumatic inheritance in a form different from the one which she receives it" (2015: 7). Performance, connected with both the transmission of culture and family genealogies, offers an excellent starting point for examining the evolution of these memory processes.

Performance: Embodied Memory

Oral poetry and by extension performance have a long history in Rwanda. In her memoir, *Rwanda means the Universe*, Louise Mushikiwabo, former Foreign Minister and current Secretary General of the Organisation Internationale de la francophonie (OIF), connects the great tradition of oral poetry, rendered accessible to international audiences by her uncle Alexis Kagame, with the performing arts, recalling how Cyprien Rugamba's National Ballet performed at her brother Lando Ndasingwa's wedding (2006: 129). Lando himself worked tirelessly to bring francophone African theatre to new audiences in Rwanda (137) before he became a politician and was subsequently killed during the genocide against the Tutsi (as was Rugamba). Outside of Rwanda, Ananda Breed has argued that plays by Jean-Marie Kayishema and Jean-Marie Rurangwa, amongst others, built a sense of national identity for Tutsis in exile (2014: 49). Since 1994 theatre has been one of the most responsive art forms. For example, Groupov's *Rwanda 94* (co-written by Rugamba's son, Dorcy Rugamba), first performed at the 1999 festival d'Avignon featured live testimony by survivor Yolande Mukagasana only five years after the genocide that killed her husband and three children. Over the past two decades performance in Rwanda has flourished, despite the lack of theatres, in part due to the leadership of skilled returnees, notably Carole Karemera and Hope Azeda.

Amongst post-genocide theatre that explores family memories, work by two internationally-recognized artists stands out. Diogène Ntarindwa and Ery Nzaramba are both Rwandan actors and writers. Born in 1977, they were seventeen and rising seventeen respectively when genocide began in Rwanda. Whilst Nzaramba was living in Kigali at the time, Ntarindwa was with his family in Burundi. Many years later, having participated in other testimonial projects – Ntarindwa in Groupov’s *Rwanda 94*, Nzaramba in Ice and Fire’s verbatim theatre *Asylum Monologues* – each went on to devise his own solo performance about genocide in Rwanda. Their identities and the experiences they recount are very different. But the manner in which their autobiographical plays unfold and the layers of memory they explore have striking similarities. Although nearly adults, both depict characters dependent on parents and politically naïve, perceived as children by their older selves, children whose childhoods are overtaken by political violence. In both plays memory is framed in terms of resistance: resistance to the erasures of exile, resistance to the loss of childhood.

Ntarindwa’s *Carte d’identité*, first performed in Belgium in 2007, is an autobiographical account of his childhood in Burundi and subsequent “return” to Rwanda as a soldier with the RPF. In the first production, the version laid down for posterity in the script from which I’m working, Ntarindwa performed all of the roles himself, playing his father, his teacher, a radio journalist, European historians, an army instructor and unnamed soldiers. The narrative of the play is predominantly focalized through the figure of the father, who establishes the historical context for the work and recounts both Ntarindwa’s childhood and his later return to Rwanda with the family. He initially explains his reluctance to talk about the trauma of the past with his children, stressing instead: “You’re Rwandan, that’s enough” (2009: 7). But although the father wants to focus on maintaining “Rwandan values”, Ntarindwa pushes him to talk more about politics and the past, catalyzed by his experiences of discrimination at school. The audience’s first insights into this past are offered by non-family members, a radio journalist, the history teacher, Western historians. Diogène then performs a comic sketch about colonial divide and rule policies before, finally, the father’s voice returns to tell his own story. After these grand narratives, told by politically invested narrators, this

interjection comes as a relief. The father speaks with seemingly transparent sincerity about what he himself experienced.

Janet Jacobs, interviewing the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, comments:

The way in which the respondent told her mother's story, bringing the history and imagery of Auschwitz into sharp relief, created a slippage in time and place while I listened intently as she narrated her parent's traumatic past. This initial experience was repeated time and again over my many years of research. (2016: 9)

Whilst this is not my experience when interviewing returnee or survivor artists about their parents' experiences, such "slippage in time and place" is clearly apparent in their artistic practice. Ntarindwa, embodying his father's voice, lucidly describes Tutsi persecution and being imprisoned for nine months (2009:18). As he recounts coming out of prison the tense shifts from past to present as he climbs the family hill and sees something shocking. The physicality of climbing places the actor and audience firmly in Rwanda. "What did I see?" he asks himself – as if prompted by another interlocutor (2009:18). Returning to the past tense, he describes finding his herd of cows violated and dying on the hillside, their udders cut off, milk and blood mixing with the earth. Cows, associated with the Tutsi minority, were a symbol of ethnicity and wealth in Rwanda. The reproductive and cultural resonance of milk mixed with the horror of blood on the hillside is a powerful precursor to the later violence of genocide. Describing himself as traumatised, he left the country that evening (2009:18).

In performing as his father, Ntwarindwa literally embodies his memories of violence and exile. We might suggest, returning to Hirsch that his "stories and experiences [are] displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation". Here, this displacement is desired. By inhabiting his father's narrative voice, Ntarindwa works to recapture a family history rooted in Rwanda. Although he didn't spend his childhood on the family hill, a sense of located family lineage is transmitted through his father's memories that have become his own. In embodying his father he memorializes the family that was lost and the years away from Rwanda. Hirsch remarks, in *The*

Generation of Postmemory, that “postmemory is *not* an *identity* position but a *generational* structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation” (2012: 35). But in the case of Rwandan refugee memory moving between generations, postmemory seems to function as both transmission and identity.

The Rwandan identity for the child growing up in exile is located in the parental past, to be a Rwandan, when you are no longer living in Rwanda, is to construct present identities through that past. This is both a condition of the diaspora and culturally inflected. Many features of Rwandan identity that persisted in exile were informed by intergenerational cultural transmission that requires the persistence of the complex past in the present. For example, Ntarindwa explains that rather than having family names that pass automatically between generations, Rwandan names are each chosen individually, charged with history, particularly in times of violence and exile (2009:8). This is also seen in contemporary Rwanda where children born after 1994 are sometimes given the names of those who died, reinforcing cultural connections between generations.⁶ Similarly, the songs in Kinyarwanda that appear at particularly emotional family moments throughout Ntarindwa’s play, have complex historical resonance and are both intergenerationally transmitted and embodied.

Ntarindwa’s memories are not solely characterized by the parental past – they are also overlaid with his own personal experiences. From early in the play he offers reflections on his childhood and highly sensual memories of Bujumbura. Many of these reflections are gathered in a section entitled “Hymne au Burundi”. Recounted in his own voice, this “hymn” features the repeated phrase “Je me souviens” or “I remember” (2009: 19). What he remembers is above all the physicality of Burundi, the colours and sounds of his childhood surroundings. There is a level of detail here in these personal memories that we don’t find in the father’s descriptions of the past. Similarly, Ntarindwa’s own arrival in Rwanda is told through a resolutely independent voice. He begins the description by entering into dialogue with his father, clarifying the reasons why he joined the army. Then he describes his experiences with the armed forces of the RPF, opening with an evocation of death, the corpses he smells but cannot see when he arrives in Rwanda at night (2009: 24). He describes specific encounters with death: deaths of his fellow soldiers, the bodies of those killed during genocide. A 2009 article in *Jeune*

Afrique claimed that half of Diogène's comrades fell during the war. Ntarindwa served for another two years before being demobilized in 1996. *Carte d'identité* offers a layering of memory: the embodied memory of the father with its emphasis on past violence and bloodlines, overlaid with the personal memory of the son, witness to the horrors of genocide and the overlooked wounds of the soldier.

This sense of multiple overlaid memories is also present in Ery Nzaramba's play *Split/Mixed*. But here the nature of memory work is further complicated by the semi-fictional nature of the project. Whilst the play recognizably follows Nzaramba's own life trajectory, in addition to changing names of the immediate family members, Nzaramba also varies the episodes he shows, how he presents them and the identities of some of the peripheral characters (powerful uncle becoming the godfather for example) so that each production, and the more recently published script, functions as a reworking of history. The core though remains the same. The play examines how Eddy (Ery) is born in Belgium to Rwandan parents, returns to Rwanda in the mid-eighties whilst still young, adjusts to life at the Belgium school in Kigali (complete with friendships, annoying siblings and teenage band stories) and then lives through the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi before seeking refuge in Belgium with his mother and sisters. Whilst the narrative is focalized through Eddy/Ery, Nzaramba nevertheless embodies the characters of his parents, wider family and friends. He also animates two voices that appear to be located in Eddy's head, voices he refers to as "vanity" and "shame" (or more recently in print "conscience"). This multivocality is key to the psychological coherence of the piece as Nzaramba explores his own complex identity. Born to a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother who grew up with a Hutu family, he questions how to identify himself, in particular whether he can call himself a "survivor". This is further complicated by the loss of his father, mother and youngest sister to HIV during and shortly after the genocide. Almost his entire family died in 1994. They were partly Tutsi but they were able to escape because his father was Hutu and the deaths weren't directly caused by the genocide. How can he explain his story when the people he meets have such restricted expectations about Rwandan identities? The play is framed by an encounter in a nightclub. At the beginning the girl he's dancing with asks where he's from. At the end of the play he returns to the scene and answers: "Belgium".

However, the evolution of the play in Nzaramba's own life traces the reverse pathway. In an interview in November 2016 he explained to me that when he started working in theatre he tried to position himself as Belgian but, as black actor, was continually asked about his "African" identity. Through a series of encounters, including meeting me in May 2009, he says "Rwanda started dripping into my life and at some point I couldn't escape from it". Eventually in 2013 a friend encouraged him to write something for a festival of solo performances in New York. Whilst he initially started a piece about the Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera, he eventually realized he needed to explore his own story. He then wrote "like a stream of consciousness", seeking to relieve the "burden" of his past, a burden he identifies as his own hatred of Rwanda at the time and the difficulty of having AIDS in the family. Echoing the earlier testimonies, he recalls "all these things that I had never talked to anyone about because of shame or because of not wanting to dig in that thing, or because for years I'd been just looking forward and never never looking back, refusing to look back, and Rwanda was part of the back, of the past."

If Ntarindwa's theatre practice is a form of memory work driven by a desire for a located history he never experienced, Nzaramba's forms a longing for life, for parents no longer with him, for adult relationships he never knew. It is only now, in his late thirties and early forties, that he has begun to imagine what was going through his mother's mind as the genocide unfolded and she watched her husband dying from HIV before her eyes. However, his artistic decision to embody his parents stems not only from a longing for an imaginative adult connection, it also forms a concrete ideological choice, given his parents' different identities and their own decision not to talk about ethnicity in the family home when he was growing up. As he explains: "We were in blissful ignorance, and we grew up like that, and I still want to stay like that, I want to stay in this blissful ignorance about Hutus and Tutsis. [...] As in, I don't want to know or I don't want to admit it, or I don't accept it." Recalling his mother's decision to tell him about her own identity only after the genocide had started, a scene he re-enacts in the play, he reflects "so if there's links between my parents' memory and my memory of my parents, I would say there's that – like them I don't want to buy into this whole thing". He demonstrates

his family's united Rwandan identity by inhabiting each character in turn and dwelling on their emotional connections.

Nzaramba depicts Rwanda's history of violence much less than Ntarindwa, focusing instead on happier childhood memories. Performing in Europe and the US, in some versions of the play (for example the show at the Soho Theatre in 2015), he offers a historical timeline. But in the published script for the play no such condensed history is given. The only moment of parent-child communication about the past occurs after the start of genocide when his mother tells her children that she was adopted as a child due to earlier ethnic violence (2017:22). She explains her experiences as if the family was back in 1994, as if she was sharing them for the first time. But her story is interspersed with Eddy's young self narrating what is happening. Nzaramba performs both characters as if they are in the past, but his child self dissociates from his "in scene" self, in order to associate with his mother. So the child's voice narrates not as if he is talking to his mother but as if he is watching or remembering the scene. A similar strategy is adopted in the later crucial conversation between the mother and her children when she reveals she and Jenny are HIV positive (2017:41-2). Young Eddy's narrative role seems almost distancing – Nzaramba animates his mother's words but does not seem to fully reinhabit his own self at the moment of those revelations. This division between narration and presence though softens after her HIV revelation as Eddy breaks into questions "Why? How?" – questions that, although interspersed with narration that locates them in the past, could as easily be asked today.

The scene in which Eddy/Ery's mother reveals her HIV status is titled "The Unburied Memory". It is unburied perhaps in the sense that it is still raw, his questions remaining resonant today. Ntarindwa's play evokes similar desperation when he asks, after arriving in Rwanda for the first time: "Why these mutilated bodies on such beautiful hills?" (2009: 25). All these questions remain unanswered, connected to memory and to a loss central to the character's identity: the loss of family, the loss of the idealized homeland. Ultimately both writers leave us with missed and missing connections. Nzaramba describes not being present in photographs taken of his mother and sisters during a trip around Brussels just before his mother died. Not wanting to engage with her approaching death he refused to join his family. Now he looks at the photographs and

comments: “Her last days. And I’m not there” (2017: 45). At the end of *Carte d’identité* there is a stage direction for Ntarindwa’s father (played by Ntarindwa): “He leaves, moved” (2009: 35). Ntarindwa, as himself, remains on stage calling his father back: “Come Papa, don’t let yourself be carried away by emotion. Come sing, Papa” (2009: 35).

Both plays are about the ways in which family relationships change through political upheaval and violence. Both offer a chance for the writers to engage in dialogue with their younger selves and to embody family members who in Nzaramaba’s case are no longer alive. Nzaramaba’s and Ntarindwa’s relationships with their parents are crucial for their identities as Rwandans. Performance offers the potential to reconnect what has been torn apart: For Ntarindwa this is a sense of long lost home tied to place; for Nzaramaba it is a more recent sense of lost home tied to his late parents.

Fiction: Affiliative Memory

The sense of connected yet disrupted family memories we’ve seen in these autobiographical narratives, grounded in a shifting sense of home, is also found in the growing body of literary and film fiction authored by the new generation of Rwandan artists. Under the leadership of returnee producer/director Eric Kabera, the Rwandan film industry has flourished over the past decade with numerous shorts by young Rwandan directors including Jean Luc Habyarimana, Marie Clementine Dusabekambo, Amelia Umuhire and Kayambi Musafiri showing both in Rwanda and at international film festivals. The still predominantly francophone literary scene has been slower to evolve and whilst Scholastique Mukasonga, who went into exile as an adult two years before the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, has received international acclaim, voices from the younger generation have been slower to appear. This changed in 2016 when singer-songwriter Gael Faye published an extraordinary first novel *Petit Pays* (translated into English as *Small Country* in 2018). I will discuss it here alongside Kivu Ruhorahoza’s similarly structurally and conceptually innovative feature film *Matière grise* (*Grey Matter*, 2011). Both contain autobiographical elements and both can be read as

reflections on childhood experiences of genocide. They also pose questions about how families negotiate the different experiences of their members during and after genocide.

Faye's novel's title is taken from his song of the same name, a song that evokes his distant childhood memories, Bujumbura (Burundi) as a guiding light during his European exile, and a dream of one day living in Gisenyi – a lakeside Rwandan town on the border with DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). From the outset then we have a sense of multiple identities, of longing for one place whilst living in another. He comments in an interview: "I spent my childhood in Burundi and twenty years in France. Along with Rwanda, there's the triptych of my origins" (*L'Est Républicain* 2017). Both Faye and his fictional character are born to a Rwandan mother and French father, and grew up in Burundi before being evacuated to France. The affectionately phrased "petit pays" of the novel's title is the Burundi of his character Gabriel's childhood but the book is also suffused with Rwanda: the Rwanda of Gabriel's mother and mother's family, living in exile and longing to return, the Rwanda of the genocide that unfolds as Burundi sinks into civil war, the open graveyard of Rwanda in July 1994 that his mother returns to looking for her relatives and never really returns from to the family home. If Rwanda forms one of three points of origin for Faye and Gabriel, it is a Rwanda primarily constructed through the sharing of family memories.

Ruhorahoza's film *Matière grise* is similarly concerned with the formation of family memories but the framing is different. Set in Kigali, the film is structured through three storylines: a young filmmaker trying to raise funds to make a film about genocide in Kigali; an allegorical exploration of a young man being radicalized to hate cockroaches in a prison cell; and the story of a brother and sister in their early twenties, whose parents were killed during the genocide. Ruhorahoza uses technology (pay phones, mobile phones and computers) to give indications of the time periods: contemporary in the first narrative, ambiguous in the allegorical section and immediately after the genocide for the last. The suggestion is made, mostly through family photographs, that the film-maker character has lost his own family and been adopted by an older white couple. The two subsequent narratives appear to belong to the film he has been seeking to fund: we see the actress who plays the sister in rehearsals in the first section. This film explores how

stories, and in particular memories of genocide and its aftermath, are transmitted between people and through art.

Faye's novel opens with two interludes before we enter into the action. First, in the child's voice, we hear the French father's explanation of the reasons why there is conflict between Hutus and Tutsis: they have different noses. With brilliant comic timing, the children realize that the parental explanation doesn't hold water – noses don't seem to be a reliable predictor of anything. After this prologue, in italics, we're given the narrator's adult voice talking about his sense of displacement in France and his longing to return to the country of his childhood. Strangely, as we return in time to childhood for the first chapter, we also journey into the future: "I'll never know the real reasons why my parents separated" (2016: 17). From the outset then we have the impression that this is a novel that moves across time, that explores the family from adult and child perspectives, that it is about the unreliability of parental explanations, the impossibility of full intergenerational understanding. Faye introduces a double plot line – the breakdown of his parents' marriage and the growing violence in Rwanda and Burundi. Both will destroy the family. But whilst marriage troubles are witnessed with relative first-hand intimacy, the violence playing out in the wider context is mostly recounted at a distance, then rendered palpable by its effect on family members.

As we've seen with other returnee narratives, there is a sense of intergenerational transmission of memory between the mother, her wider family, and the children. At times this is indicated as transmission that occurred in the past – as a postmemorial condition that is already established. For example, visiting a family friend for lunch in then Zaire, young Gabriel, empathizing with his mother, comments: "Rwanda, the country she left in 1963 during a night of massacres, by the light of the flames engulfing her family home, the country she had never returned to since the age of four, was there, a few hundred fathoms away, almost within reach" (2016: 23). However, we also witness the formation of cultural intergenerational connections. In a later scene the great grandmother, grandmother and uncle – all refugees – gather after lunch with the mother and her children to share stories. We're told an older uncle, an internationally educated engineer, has already joined the RPF and died in Rwanda. Now Pacifique, the mother's younger brother is keen to leave for the front. The great-grandmother, nearly a hundred years old,

talks of ancient Rwanda, Kingdom poetry, Intore dance, the genealogy of clans. The uncle soaks up his grandmother's nostalgia (2016: 69). Faye interweaves the violence of exile with the hardships of refugee life, nostalgia for Rwanda's past with the desire to fight for the right to return. In these family settings, where intimacy is generated through sharing food and singing together, memories are passed from one member to another, across three generations. Memories at times desired, at others humorously dismissed, just as the Rwandan identity is both cherished and ridiculed by the mother refusing to talk Kinyarwanda with her "white" children.

This sense of the familial sharing of memory and identity is starkly absent in Ruhorahoza's film about fractured lives and missed encounters in post-genocide Rwanda. The section of the film exploring the brother-sister relationship opens with a scene of isolation. Music played on an Inanga, a Rwandan traditional instrument, mixes with the sound of water running. The handheld camera moves through a bedroom towards the bathroom before finally showing Yvan, the brother, standing in the shower. The actor's slender body seems vulnerable, on his head he wears a red motorcycle helmet. It transpires, but we are never told, that he wears this helmet as protection, as a screen between himself and the external world. Deprived of facial expressions by the glass visor, his moods and responses are communicated through his expressive range of postures – mostly slumped, dejected or afraid. After his sister Justine goes out, Yvan sits in the shadows on a chair, outside the house, shot in profile. He begins to breathe heavily and as he looks up towards the drive we see and hear two prostate bodies being consumed by flames. The bodies disappear and the burning sounds fade to nothing as he stands and walks towards them. It becomes clear he is hallucinating. There follows a sequence of seeming traumatic recall during which he "reverts" to behaviours associated with the genocide: cooking unripe avocados on a small stove, hiding in the roof.

When his sister returns they have a difficult conversation as she attempts to ask him questions to relocate him in the present. It emerges their father was burnt alive and mother was raped multiple times. It also becomes clear that Yvan was in Belgium studying during the genocide and didn't witness any of the scenes he has been "reliving". A sharing of memories has clearly occurred in some form here: memories that Yvan has subsequently taken on as his own. This transmission of memories is not across

generations, between parent and child, but instead between siblings who both lived through contemporary events, but had very different experiences. In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch extends her conception of postmemory, to include not only the vertical, intergenerational identifications between parent and child, but also “the intragenerational horizontal identification that makes the child’s position more broadly available to other contemporaries (2012: 36). This she terms affiliative postmemory. In *Matière grise* we appear to be witnessing affiliative memory as the older generation remain entirely absent, evoked only as distant figures in the past. But the striking resemblance with definitions of postmemory here is in the way in which the sister’s memories, or what the brother imagines to be the sister’s memories, evacuate his own memories of what happened. What Ruhorahoza doesn’t depict is *how* the memories have been transmitted between the two siblings, the mechanisms by which this form of shared traumatising occurred. At the end of the film, the filmmaker character comments: “This is a story about the porous borders between reality and parallel realities. Just like in the movies. Just like in real life. My life”. This porosity is seen in the sharing of memories between family members who were and weren’t present during the genocide.

Ruhorahoza has spoken to me and others about how this sense of both distant and intimate knowledge forms the semi-autobiographical grounding for his work. Usually resident in Kigali, he happened to be visiting his grandmother in the South West of the country when the killing started. He was able to reach safety and was spared the worst of the violence. However, news reached him that his family had been found dead, his mother and sister raped before being killed. It was only at the end of genocide that he discovered this was a fabricated story designed to keep them safe. He observes: “To this moment, I still have a hard time talking to my siblings and my mother about the genocide. I didn’t live the same experiences as they did” (Naimasiah 2015). Returning to Kigali in August 1994, he realized how lucky they were, so many people he knew had been killed. Meeting the few remaining deeply wounded survivors he asked himself “What would it have been like to return to nothing?” (Ruhorahoza 2015). It was only much later, and mostly through books, that he began to make sense of what had happened to him as a child. Faye describes a similar process, coming to terms with his past through books and theatre, explaining “I understood after the event” (Dialogues musiques 2016).

Both the brother-sister section of *Matière grise* and the entirety of *Petit Pays* are predominantly located inside and in the immediate surroundings of the family home. This is the setting for family conversations: it is where both Gabriel and Yvan's most intimate revelations and exchanges occur. However, the home also symbolizes the utter destruction of the genocide, the dissolution of ideas of physical safety and family unity. Faye offers a foretaste of this as the parent's marriage unravels in the build up to April 1994: Gabriel listens to his mother's violent arguments with his father, worrying at the fraying edge of a hole in the mosquito net he points out had up to that day always protected him from bites. The secure boundaries of the world are changing, violence arriving with shocking brutality. In *Matière grise* it is intimated that Yvan's parents were killed inside the compound during the genocide and that the sister was perhaps raped. In *Petit pays*, Gabriel's mother travels to her sister's home in Rwanda immediately after the RPF gain control and finds her nieces and nephews dead on the floor: the girls in the sitting room, their brother in the corridor, wearing his favourite football shirt. She buries them with her own hands.

In addition to the family homes and by extension the familial relationships being concretely visited by violence, in both texts the sanctuary of the home is also troubled at a distance by the sharing of violent stories. Early in the genocide Gabriel's mother speaks to her sister from the house phone. Aunt Eusébie recounts how she listened to her neighbours being killed that morning on the other side of the fence, powerless to help. It is the last conversation they have. Gabriel recalls, "From April to July 1994 we lived the genocide being perpetrated in Rwanda at a distance, between our four walls, next to a telephone and a radio" (2016:163). After the genocide the sense that genocide has permeated daily life continues when the mother returns from her trip to Rwanda. She recounts the horror she found in Rwanda around the dining table. Then she stays on in the family home, drinking on the sofa by day, creeping into the children's room by night. There she shakes Gabriel's sister Ana awake to tell and retell the story of how she found the bodies of her nieces and nephews and tried in vain to scrub away the stains on the floor left by their decomposing flesh. In *Matière grise*, the viewer is left to imagine another return: Yvan's return from Belgium, the stories he finds at home and his decision to start wearing a helmet for protection. Here again it is the image of the corpse that

permeates the home. Young Anna draws corpses and houses in flames with her crayons (2016: 194). Yvan constantly hallucinates bodies in flames on the driveway, on the television screen.

With the metaphor of the corpse inside the family home both artists depict the collateral damage of mass violence: the destruction of families, parents so traumatized they can no longer parent, fighting that spills over into surrounding countries, the economic desperation that forces survivors into structurally violent situations (Yvan's sister engages in oral sex with a psychologist to pay for his medication). Faye's novel and Ruhorahoza's film capture the vulnerability, porosity and unpredictability of family memories with such power in part because their fictional forms allow them to move outside of the witnessing function of testimony or the narrative role of performance and into realms of fantasy and the symbolic. Piotr Cieplak, writing about *Matière grise*, argues that in contrast with international films that tend to emphasise the causality between traumatic events and their effects, *Matière grise* "refuses the option of mastery over not only the *History* of the genocide but also its individual, personal *histories*" (2018: 174). As a result these histories are impossible to contain, even unreadable (2018: 174). It is this lyrical uncontained nature that is perhaps what connects so profoundly with the dynamics of family relationships in peace, as in war.

Conclusion

Towards the end of *Petit pays* Faye presents us with a surreal letter from Gabriel to his French penfriend Laure. In it he describes a frosty, icy scene and reiterates, as a refrain: "For days and nights it has been snowing in Bujumbura". Faced with a reality too violent and aversive to recount or understand he escapes to a landscape of absolute alterity. Susan Suleiman, analysing what characterises child survivor responses to the Holocaust comments that "the 1.5 generation's shared experience is that of premature bewilderment and helplessness" (2002: 277). In Rwandan child survivor and returnee narratives, this bewilderment is often shaped by a sense of dislocation. At times this is concrete – children growing up in exile, children removed from the family home by genocide, children who no longer recognise the country of their childhood. At other times it is

symbolic: in *Petit pays* the child narrator cannot make sense of his lived experiences at the time and evokes this distress through describing being in a place that is not his place. It is also complicated by the overlaying of parental memories of violence with first hand experiences of genocide.

Hirsch refers to children of Holocaust survivors having their own stories “displaced” for a reason: both the Holocaust and the decades of violence in Rwanda resulted in children growing up with family memories that were grounded *elsewhere*. This sense of displacement expanded and extended after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, as child survivors struggled to carry on in the face of the loss of their homes and families and child returnees found themselves transported “home” to a country they had never known, to a place profoundly marked by death and trauma. Given the turbulence of this period, it is unsurprising that manifestations of intergenerational and family memory in creative work by this generation are still evolving. We have yet to see sustained artistic engagement by the children of survivors and returnees. Only twenty-five years after 1994 this is perhaps no surprise. Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* was published in 1980, thirty-five years after the liberation of the camps. Hirsch, detecting a pattern, went on to coin the term postmemory in her discussion of the text only in 1992. Theoretical framings for understanding the intergenerational transmission of memories of violence in Rwanda are likely to emerge more swiftly, building on extensive work in Holocaust and Diaspora Studies, amongst other fields. But the next generation of texts may take some time.

For now, what we do see in the relatively small arts world in Rwanda are vibrant creative exchanges between artists who grew up with their parent’s memories of violence in the diaspora and those who survived genocide as children within Rwanda itself. Ery Nzaramba for example acted with returnee theatre director Carole Karemera in Peter Brook’s touring production of *Battlefield* (2015-17) and went on to direct her in his short film *Knocking on Heaven’s Door* (2018). Kivu Ruhorahoza was recently cast alongside Gael Faye and Samuel Kamanzi in a bilingual musical production of *Small Country* for the Edinburgh International Book Festival (2018). As Rwandan artists respond to and participate in the production of each other’s work it makes sense that the connections between identity positions I’ve outlined here will deepen further. Whether they continue

to engage with genocide remains to be seen. When I've discussed this recently with emerging artists who are also child survivors of genocide (writer and filmmaker Jo Ingabire and singer, songwriter, author and archivist Claver Irakoze) they've suggested that for their own mental health their engagement will eventually reach a turning point. Whilst their existing artwork will continue to encourage the public to remember the genocide, having fulfilled their duty to memory, they will move on to more sustainable, less emotionally draining work. The novel Faye is currently working on doesn't engage with genocide, Ruhorahoza's more recent films are not overtly testimonial.

At this point in time, a quarter century after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, some of the most important cultural developments in Rwanda have been linguistic: the shift from French to English, the increasing loss of deep knowledge of the complexities of Kinyarwanda. Assumpta Mugiraneza, Director of the Iriba Centre for Multimedia Heritage, proposes that Rwandan culture is essentially verbal, transmitted from one generation to the next through the spoken word (2013). These verbal exchanges transmit both the ancient Rwandan aesthetics embedded in highly sophisticated oral poetry, and also, argues Kivu Ruhorahoza, ways of thinking about the family – recitation of genealogy, family history and so on. Rwandan academic Richard Benda, himself a child survivor of mixed ethnicity commented at a 2018 commemoration ceremony: “For better or for worse Rwandans are relational beings. We are never individuals. I am Richard Benda the son of, the brother of, the father of... Ancestry, genealogy, family affiliation, these things are very important to us.” The 1994 genocide radically interrupted and changed the ways in which Rwandan identity and culture was transmitted. When Stromae asks where his father is, he evokes both the loss of his father through violent death and the wider cultural loss: “where are you?” is also “who are you?”, “where do you come from?”, “where are you when I need you?”, “what is your culture?”, “how can I find you?”. In the music video his child's voice and young alter-ego emphasise his vulnerability, isolation and distance.

The artists I have discussed here all explore forms of parental absence and their effects on family memory. For Ntarindwa, Faye and other returnee artists growing up in the diaspora this absence took the form of parents whose identity was grounded elsewhere, who had experienced the radical uprooting of their family connections and

who were profoundly affected by genocide unfolding at a distance. For Kayitesi, Rida, Nzaramba and Ruhorahoza this parental absence is connected with personally losing or creating characters who lose parents during the genocide, with the associated end to childhood that signified. However, I hope to have shown that family memories, and their interruption, are complex and not as neatly divided according to genocide experiences as we might first imagine. Stromae, for example, both grows up outside of Rwanda and loses his father during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. When he asks where his father is he evokes multiple levels of absence. The father who dreams of being elsewhere, the father who is never emotionally present with his family, the father who is physically absent – at a distance, and the father who is dead and beyond reach. His plaintive question “Papaoutai?”, syncopated like a heartbeat, connects with both a missing parental generation and the dislocation and relocation of contemporary Rwandan artists.

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Notes

¹ PARMEHUTU, or the Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement, was founded by Grégoire Kayibanda and would go on to dominate local and later parliamentary elections (Prunier 2010:48).

² Banyarwanda is the collective term for Rwandans in Kinyarwanda. It refers to both residents of Rwanda and those residing in neighboring countries. For example the

Banyamulenge are Banyarwanda who fled to South Kivu (in what is now Eastern DRC) in the nineteenth century (Prunier 2010:380).

³ For example, this article addresses issues related to those explored by Beatriz Tadeo Fuica (2015) in her discussion of memory and postmemory in work by “second generation” film directors who grew up in Uruguay and the diaspora.

⁴ Whilst Kinyarwanda has always been the most spoken language in Rwanda, in 1994 French was the language of commerce and education. The government decided to change from French to English in 2008 when most of the artists I’m discussing had already completed their education. More recently, US-educated Rwandan child survivor Clementine Wamariya has published her testimony, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, in English (2018).

⁵ At the original time of writing the French texts I discuss in this article were not available in English. All translations are therefore my own. *Petit Pays* has since been beautifully translated by Sarah Ardizzone as *Small Country*. I have retained my own English translations because the published translation sometimes departs slightly from the original in a manner that changes my analysis.

⁶ Maria Tumarkin discusses how names imbued with historical significance transmit memories in both affective and declarative manners in her article about family memory and “more-than-representational forms of mnemonic processes” (2013:314).

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