

**MY JOURNEY FROM
RESEARCHING BY MIND
TO RESEARCHING BY HEART**

A legacy from my mother

I. PERSONAL TESTIMONY

- 1994: Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda
- Four members of my immediate family were killed
- My trip to Kigali, Rwanda in 1994 after the takeover of the city by RPF soldiers who ended the genocide
- Searching for my sister Carrie who asked to be rescued through an underground note sent to another sister in Congo

II. ENCOUNTER WITH TRAUMATIZED SURVIVORS

- My encounter with traumatized survivors in Rwanda
- Back in the USA: dealing with my own trauma and helping my surviving family members (some of them genocide orphans) to deal with their trauma
- My training in trauma and counseling: Certificate after three-week course

III. MY NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

- Classes in trauma counseling triggered my interest to study and research on rape survivors' testimonies: rape was systematic during the genocide in Rwanda.
- My research focus: socio-linguistic study of oral and literary testimonies of genocide survivors.
- Objective: Do research to influence both international and Rwandan national policy on the issue of rape.

IV. THE IMPOSSIBILITY TO SPEAK THE UNSPEAKABLE

- No adequate words to say/translate what genocide survivors went through
- At the beginning of their testimonies survivors refer to that difficulty in the following words in Kinyarwanda:

Sinamenya uko mbivuga: I don't know how to say it

Birenze urugero: It is beyond measure; what I saw, can block your mouth

V. THE IMPOSSIBILITY TO SPEAK THE UNSPEAKABLE

Ntibyoroshye: It is not easy

Ni akumiro: It is inconceivable,
unspeakable

Ni amahano/ni ishyano: It is a calamity

VI. PHYSICAL PAIN AS A DESTROYER OF LANGUAGE

Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and the Unmaking of the World*:
Oxford, Oxford University Press 1985

“Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (Scarry: p. 4).

VII. PAIN IN GENERAL: A LANGUAGE DESTROYER

Examples: Interjection noises such as:

“huum !”, “aaaa-a !”, “ayiiweee !”, “Ayiiii !” appear frequently at the beginning of survivors’ testimonies.

“gu-ha-ha-muka” (a-a-a): literally to be out of breath, to be traumatized. This word expresses the failure of language to offer the adequate word to say the unspeakable.

VIII. ETHOS OF SILENCE IN RWANDA

- *Amarira y'umugabo atemba ajya mu nda*: tears of a real man (human being) flow within his/her stomach
- Showing one's emotion is a lack of good manners
- Showing one's emotion is accepting defeat
- A society which has been influenced by aristocratic demeanor
- Unlike animals, human beings know how to master emotions.

IX. Operation *Ceceka*: Operation Keep Quiet!

- Intimidation of witnesses by perpetrators
- Fear of physical violence or rape
- Playing on vulnerability of witnesses:
 - putting a dead animal on the front door of the victim's house
 - hanging a dead animal on a tree in the victim's front yard etc. . .

X. Bearing Witness About The Sexual Body

- Rape survivors face a double unspeakable and a painful silence.
- Fear of stigma: “We cut our tongue and swallow it.”
“Shame makes you swallow poison.”
- No word for rape in *Kinyarwanda*
- There is a will to speak, but the impossibility to do so causes pain.

XI. GENDER AND GENOCIDE

- **Ijambo:** act of speech, word
- **Gufata ijambo:** to speak in public, to have the floor
- **Nta mugore ugira ijambo:** no woman may be heard
- A woman could not testify in the traditional Rwandan court of law
- The *Kinyarwanda* word for witness is **umugabo (male/man)**

XII. EXAMPLES OF LEGAL EXPRESSIONS

- *Gutanga umu-gabo*: to present a witness
- *Umu-gabo utitabye*: missing witness
- *Umu-gabo ushinja/umugabo ushinjura*: prosecution witness/defense witness
- *Guhanganisha abagabo*: to confront witnesses
- *Iyoshiyamugabo*: subpoena a witness
- *kumva umu-gabo/kubaza umu-gabo*: to hear the witness or to question the witness
- *ku mvugo y'abagabo*: evidence
- *ibazwa ry'abagabo*: the questioning of a witnesses

XIII. FACING THE PAINFUL SILENCE

- **Turaruca tukarumira:** We cut our tongue and swallow it. Speaking will require to extract that tongue which causes obstruction in one's throat
- **Isoni zirisha uburozi:** Shame, rather scruples, makes one swallow poison.

XIV. RECOURSE TO EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE

- No exact word for “rape” in Kinyarwanda
- Use of euphemistic expressions such as:
Kurongora: to marry, to rape
Gusambana: to make love: the only reciprocal verb in reference to the act of making love

Kujya hejuru: to climb on the top

Gusambanya (ku ngufu, ku gahato): to make love by force , to make love against one’s will, to rape

Gukora ibya mfura mbi: a metaphorical expression which means literally: to abuse or violate one’s trust

XV. RECOURSE TO EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE

guhohotera: to impose injustice on someone:
guhohoterwa (passive voice): to be or to become a victim of injustice

gufatwa ku ngufu: to be taken by force

Sinkiri umugore: I am no longer a woman , I lost my femininity

These are expressions that victims of rape used to break the silence. They cannot verbalize the pain imposed on them.

XVI. Use of the French Language or “Rwandanized” French

- *baranviyoye*: they raped me
- *baranviyola*: they raped me
- *amasiperimes*: sperm
- *za siperime*: sperm
- *amasohoro* is the kinyarwanda word for sperm: a positive meaning

XVII. STIGMATIZATION OF RAPE VICTIMS

- ***“Madame Arusha”***: this was a name given to a woman who testified in Arusha, a city in Tanzania where the UN Int’l Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was located.
- ***“Dubai”***: survivors were called *“Dubai”* in reference to the cheap products of poor quality exported from the city of Dubai
- ***“abagore bikoreye”***, which means literally “loaded women” or “high voltage women”
- ***“abagore baliye umwanda”***: “women who swallowed dirt/filth” are considered high risk/dangerous women. Expression “to swallow filth” was used by street children from the Nyamirambo area of Kigali

XVIII. LESSONS LEARNED FROM RESEARCH OF THE MIND

- Rape victims have multiple layers of trauma
- They need more help than any other other victims of the genocide
- Obstacle: The lack of mental health care specialists in the country
- The creation of Step Up! American Association for Rwandan Women in 2006 after my encounter with Abasa women who participated in this research

XIX. WHO ARE THE ABASA

- Abasa is an association of 60 Rwandan women and girls who were all raped during the genocide in Rwanda
- The word Abasa means “those who look alike, who share the same destiny” in this case: rape
- Many among them were infected with HIV
- As a researcher, I was happy with my study but I also felt a necessity to be more engaged by creating the Step Up NGO.

XX. INTERVIEW WITH ABASA ON THEIR MENTAL NEEDS

- **The main Question of the Interview:**
When do you get traumatized?
- What triggered their trauma was the lack of material/financial necessities. Mainly the primary needs such as food, clothing, uniforms for their school-age children, and school fees for their children
- The harshness of the HIV medication

XXI. CHANGES IN STEP UP OBJECTIVES IN 2006

- **Sewing Project:** Renting sewing machines and a place in the market: sewing uniforms for the Abasa children, and selling the remaining
- **Gira Inka:** giving a dairy cow to each Abasa woman in need
- **Apiculture:** raising bees and producing honey
- **Income Generating Projects:** short-term loans to the Abasa women from Step Up
- **Providing University Scholarships** to the young Abasa

XXII. MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING IN RWANDA BY STEP UP

- Trauma courses in 2009, 2011, 2013, 2016
- This is a two week training in Rwanda with different organizations: clinics, universities, churches, and NGOs
- Creation of the Nsanga Association by Step Up trainees in Rwanda
- Establishment of the “Nsanga Center” in 2013
- Purchase and remodeling of a house near the national university campus where women, children born of rape, and others in the community can go for counseling and support.

XXIII: TEACHING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

- 2010: Introduction of published testimonies by Rwandan survivors of the genocide in my graduate seminars
- 2009: Creation of the Missouri Summer Study Abroad Program in Rwanda
Objectives: learning, reflect , inform and engage
- Lessons learned in Rwanda: A new look at the realities in America
- How to get students engaged in peace building back home?

XXIV. CONCEPTION OF STUDY ABROAD IN RWANDA

- **Multi-part Course:**
- Pre-departure lectures on the genocide and the post-genocide society, gender and genocide, and empowerment of women in post-genocide societies
- In-country visits to memorial sites, NGOs such as reconciliation villages, art and healing in theater setting. Guest lectures from civil society leaders, government officials, legal and judicial staff.
- Two week internships at organizations in Rwanda
- Final research paper/project; journals and blogs
- Re-entry engagement: Students share with the university population the lessons learned abroad
- Creating venues for students to continue speaking