

When children remember: A history of the Tutsi genocide through the eyes of children (1994–2006)

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Abstract

Drawing on a corpus of accounts written by survivor children in 2006, this article looks at the Tutsi genocide through the eyes of children, enabling us to see the radical social and emotional transgressions of 1994 from a new angle. As members of society and prime targets of the genocide, these children tell how the world of their childhood was turned upside-down, through the unique intensity of their own words. An idealized “before”, inhabited by the beloved characters of their parents, brothers and sisters, is brutally swept away as everything they have known becomes inverted. Forced to watch killings and cruelty, they adopt survival strategies that show how thoroughly they understand the radical nature of what is unfolding. An extreme distrust of adults will forever mark these children – now orphans – who still live in “the time of the genocide”.

Keywords: Tutsi genocide, Rwanda, children, survivors, orphans.



Introduction

Ijoro ribara uwariraye: “Only the one who passed through the night can tell its story.” Since the Tutsi genocide, this proverb has taken on extra significance and become inextricably associated with the experiences of those who survived. The stories of their never-ending journey provide an invaluable source of material for writing a history of the genocide centred on the subjective experiences of the survivors. It is of vital importance that we understand these events through the eyes of their victims. Our aim should not be to construct two parallel historiographies, one examining the genocide by studying those responsible and the other only reporting on the fate of the victims. On the contrary, we should construct a history that takes into account the interactions between the different categories of actors. It is from such a perspective that we can understand the powerful and deadly dynamics of the genocide, which made it possible to exterminate almost a million people in less than three months, between April and July 1994. Contrary to any image we may have of the Tutsi as passive victims, they developed multiple survival strategies as they were hunted, resisting the killers directly, using ruses and creating the conditions for survival in the bush and in churches. The killers responded to this palette of survival strategies by intensifying their efforts to track and slaughter. If we can see the stories of the survivors as more than just a reason for sorrow or a basis for moral edification, if we can use them as real historical material, then we may be able to see the genocide through different eyes.

The eyes through which we shall see these events in the present article are those not just of the victims, but more specifically of the children. The historiography of children during genocide or extreme violence includes several major works, all of which aim to give due weight to the testimonies of children, be they verbal or pictorial.¹ From an early stage, the fate of children during the human disaster of Rwanda’s genocide attracted the attention of NGOs, of UNICEF and of the Rwandan government. Later, specialists in psychology studied the new types of parenthood that grew out of the genocide, and in

1 The author shall not attempt to provide an exhaustive bibliography, but it is worth mentioning the pioneering work of Manon Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie: Génération Grande Guerre*, Seuil, Paris, 2012; Manon Pignot, *La guerre des crayons: Quand les petits parisiens dessinaient la Grande Guerre, 1914–1918*, Parigramme, Paris, 2004; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La guerre des enfants, 1914–1918*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2004; Catherine Coquio and Aurélia Kalisky, *L’enfant et le génocide: Témoignages sur l’enfance pendant la Shoah*, Bouquins Series, Robert Laffont, Paris, 2007; Ivan Jablonka (ed.), *L’enfant-Shoah*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2014; Patricia Heberer, *Children During the Holocaust*, Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context Series, USHMM and Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2011; Marta Craveri and Anne-Marie Losonczy, *Enfants du Goulag*, Contemporaines Series, Belin, Paris, 2017; Zérane Girardeau (dir.), *Déflagrations: Dessins d’enfants, guerres d’adultes*, Anamosa, Paris, 2017.

particular the phenomenon of orphans as heads of households.² All of this work is of great value when it comes to writing a history of childhood during times of genocide, but that is not the purpose here. The author wishes to construct a history of genocide that is not so much *about* children, but is, rather, told *through* them. By looking through the “eye of childhood”,³ we shall examine both the unique experience of children and the genocide itself, from the perspective that is theirs and theirs alone.

However, we must first consider the macro-historical context if we want to fully appreciate the position of children in the process of genocide. In Rwanda, as during the genocides of Armenians and of European Jews, the intention to exterminate became apparent as soon as the systematic mass murder of women and children began.⁴ Their deaths sever the line of descent forever, breaking the link between generations. Children are the primary targets of any genocide. To understand – or try to understand – the intention of Rwanda’s killers to exterminate, we need only recall the frequent practice of disembowelling pregnant women and the murderous fury directed against their foetuses, branded with a racial identity before they were even born.⁵ The youngest, like their parents, were bracketed off from the rest of humanity, and given animal nicknames such as “little snakes” (*utwinzoka*) or “snake eggs” (*amagi y’inzoka*). It is not surprising, therefore, that children appear in large numbers on the lists of victims. In fact, they form the majority.⁶ They also account for the majority of bodies found in the mass graves exhumed for forensic analysis, such as in the case of Kibuye. Of the almost 500 bodies examined, 66% were either women or were children under 15.⁷ A quarter of the victims were under 10.⁸ Because of the demography of Rwanda, with its high percentage of children and young people at the time, children under 15 accounted for almost 38% of those who survived, and over half were aged 20 or younger.⁹ The very large number of children with neither mother nor father bears witness to the widespread destruction of families.

2 Claudine Uwera Kanyamanza and Jean-Luc Brackelaire, “Ménages d’enfants sans parents au Rwanda”, *Cahiers de Psychologie Clinique*, No. 37, 2001–02.

3 M. Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie*, above note 1, p. 12.

4 Christian Gerlach, *Sur la conférence de Wannsee*, Collection Opinion, Liana Levi, Paris, 1999, p. 29.

5 One can read the powerful account of Rony Zachariah, who was working for Médecins sans Frontières in Rwanda at the time. He was told how his staff were murdered at Butare University Hospital, including one of his nurses, who was a Hutu but pregnant by her Tutsi husband. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme (FIDH), *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, 1999, p. 374, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yxf3r6dh> (all internet references were accessed in March 2019).

6 Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of the Interior and of Local Government (MINALOC), *Dénombrement des victimes du génocide*, Final Report, Kigali, 2004, pp. 22, 24. According to this report, children aged 14 or younger accounted for 50.1% of the victims of the genocide.

7 Physicians for Human Rights, *Recherches effectuées sur le site de l’église catholique de Kibuye (Rwanda)*, comp. William Haglund and Robert H. Kirshner, Vol. 1, Boston, MA, 24 February 1997 (French version), p. 40.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

9 MINALOC, *Raporo y’imirimo y’ibarura ry’abacitse ku icumu ry’Itsembabwoko n’Itsembatsemba hagati ya tariki ya 01 Ukwakira 1990 na tariki ya 31 Ukoboza 1994*, Kigali, 1998, p. 12. The author would like to express her warmest thanks to Assumpta Ingabire for facilitating access to the archives of MINALOC.

The total destruction of family structures ceases to be a mere question of statistics when children tell us what they experienced. “No-one can live without parents”¹⁰ writes one girl, aged 10 at the time of the genocide, expressing her indifference as to whether she was going to be found and killed. As she hid in the bush, she did not believe that a child could survive without those who had given it life. These words, written against a background of absolute abandonment, are taken from a corpus of approximately 100 accounts written by survivors who were children at the time of the genocide. The accounts are held in the archives of the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le Génocide, CNLG). Almost 1,800 sheets of paper, covered in careful or sometimes jerky handwriting, tell the genocide stories of 105 children, aged between 5 and 19 in 1994. These notebooks were written in April 2006 and assembled at the initiative of one of the main survivors’ associations, the Association of the Widows of Genocide (Association des Veuves du Génocide, AVEGA). The object was mainly to provide a form of catharsis for the people concerned, but also to record what had happened. Given that these accounts were compiled twelve years after the genocide, it would be reasonable to ask whether this was not a case of young adults writing down their tragic childhood memories. Are these really the words of children? When one reads these notebooks, there can be no doubt: these are children who are writing. Not only do the authors constantly describe themselves as children, but their way of writing – of creating themselves through the written word – is that of children. The tones of childhood leap off the page, especially when the authors express their love and affection for lost family members. They will be orphans forever, and as one reads their stories, one feels that experiencing genocide at such an early age has left them locked in an eternal childhood.

Writings such as these raise many questions regarding historical, social and cultural definitions of childhood. It is worth mentioning that when they wrote their stories, none of them had passed through the coming-of-age rites of marriage and starting one’s own family. They are children, both to themselves and to their readers. One is struck by the unblinking brutality with which they describe the most horrible killings. The unique nature of unfiltered description has been mentioned in connection with the collecting of eyewitness accounts from Shoah survivors. It has been suggested that “children’s words are more ‘authentic’ than those of adults, as they have not been filtered by social convention”.¹¹ Seen through a child’s eyes, genocide is exposed in all its brutal materiality, with meticulous descriptions of murderous words and deeds. While the special nature of such accounts certainly brings clarity, it creates other obstacles for the historian. The most obvious of these, and the hardest to overcome, is a powerful feeling of aggression when one is faced with such violence retold in the words of

10 CNLG Archives (CNLGA), story C44USC (born in 1984). The names of those who provided testimonies have been anonymized.

11 Audrey Kichelewski and Judith Lindenberg, “‘Les enfants accusent’: Témoignages d’enfants survivants dans le monde polonais et en yiddish”, in I. Jablonka (ed.), above note 1, p. 35.

a child. One has to be able to separate oneself from the images conjured up as one translates and reads those words, in order to be capable of paying equal attention to all parts of the story. But briefly achieving this detachment enables one to identify precisely what it is that has hit these children the hardest. When one looks past the inevitably different, subjective elements expressed in these texts, one common thread emerges – that of a world turned upside-down. Many of the young authors use a Kinyarwanda expression that puts it very well: *impfubyi zitagira hepfo na ruguru*,¹² which could be translated as “Orphans have neither Heaven nor Earth.”

It is this world with “neither Heaven nor Earth” that the author wishes to explore through the words of these children, by examining all the moments of sudden change, from the nostalgic descriptions of life “before” to the dramatic upending of their world and on to the unending time of the genocide. In so doing, we shall respect the underlying rhythms on which the stories are based.

Life before the genocide: The world of childhood

The lost world of families

AVEGA asked the children to tell their stories in chronological sequence in order to give them some sort of structure. However, they often departed from this, with individual timescales overriding formal indicators of time. Some of the authors even start their accounts with “life after the genocide”. The genocide period contaminates the chronology most clearly when the children are introducing their families. Most of what the reader learns about the family comes out as the author lists those members of it who died. In other words, the image of the family is based on the account of its destruction. One author, who was a boy of 15 in 1994, opens his story with this description of his family:

Mum and Dad got married in 1963. When the genocide happened, they were happy together. They had never been separated. They were separated by death in 1994. Mum could no longer have babies, and the youngest child was 9 years old. My parents had had eight children, and in 1994 seven of them were still living; four boys and three girls. Three boys were killed [he gives the names of his three brothers and two sisters who were murdered, along with their dates of birth]. The father who gave me life was killed [he gives his father’s name and date of birth]. Now there are just the three of us.¹³

Only the mother, a younger sister and the author survived, out of a family of nine. Similarly, a girl who was 13 at the time of the genocide starts her story by listing those who died, extending the inner family circle to include other relatives.

¹² Literally, “Orphans have neither top nor bottom.”

¹³ CNLGA, story C54NG (born in 1979).

Whether we're talking about Daddy, Mummy, Grandma, my big sisters, Grandpa or any of them ... I haven't seen anyone again, to give me advice. So what am I going to do? I never saw any relative who could love and care for me ever again. To this day, I have no-one to give me advice. But I try to cope with it. I can tell that I have no choice. To this very day, out of seven children, there are just the three of us, and I am the oldest. Before the genocide, I was in the third year of primary school. I had lots of uncles on my father's side, I had uncles on my mother's side, there were grandchildren. But today there are only ruins. I had playmates. Grâce, Agathe, Devota and Dominique for example. What brings me sorrow is that they are all dead and I am still here.¹⁴

Here we see how death has invaded a child's circle of friends. Many of the children mention the friends that filled their childhood world. The enumeration of all these losses paints a far clearer ethnographic image than any number of academic papers on the structure of the extended family. This little girl, aged 10 at the time of the genocide, lists every single member of her family as having died:

When I arrived in Rwanda [a Hutu family had taken her with them to refugee camps in Tanzania] I discovered that my family had been exterminated as I thought. All my aunts on my father's side were dead, all my uncles on my father's side were dead, my aunts on my mother's side were dead, my uncles on my mother's side, my grandmothers, my grandfathers ... there were only ruins. My parents, my brothers and sisters ... they were all dead.¹⁵

We should note two points here. The first concerns the extent of the inner family circle. In 1994, Rwanda had one of the highest fertility rates in the world.¹⁶ These child-authors were therefore members of large families, which made the losses during the genocide all the greater. Secondly, they are not listing all these uncles, aunts and grandparents merely for the sake of precision. Relationships with paternal uncles (*data* (daddy) *wacu*) and maternal aunts (*maman* (mummy) *wacu*) involve a parent/child degree of affection. Their children are seen as brothers and sisters. Kinyarwanda has a rich, precise vocabulary for describing the position of every individual in the family structure.¹⁷ It is not unusual to read in these stories that the children were brought up by one of these relatives, or by grandparents. This is not the place for an ethnographic study of Rwandan family structures, but we should simply be aware, from what the children have written, of the extent of the emotional bonds between members of their family units. That extent is sometimes accentuated by the use of the term "family" in the plural (*imiryango*). Knowing the context makes it all the easier to understand why these

14 CNLGA, story C73IVC (born in 1981).

15 CNLGA, story C44USC (born in 1984).

16 According to the national census conducted in 1991, the composite fertility index was 6.9 children per woman of child-bearing age (15–49). See Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Planning, National Census Service, *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat au 15 août 1991*, Kigali, April 1994, p. 235.

17 For instance, a maternal uncle is a *marume* while a paternal aunt is a *masenge*.

children repeatedly speak of loneliness, or of feeling as if they are living in a foreign universe, like one girl, aged 8 at the time of the genocide, who puts it so strongly: “I have no relationship with the world, and yet Rwanda is full of people.”¹⁸

While recalling these lost parents (in the wider sense of the word) involves creating a genealogy of the dead, it also creates space for happy memories of childhood. Accounts of “before” are no doubt tinged with a great degree of nostalgia, given that “before” refers to a life that is gone forever. The effects of reconstituting these stories *a posteriori* (we must remember that they were written down twelve years after the genocide) are apparent primarily in these accounts of an idealized “before”. Whatever the age of these young writers, the world of childhood is described in terms of harmony, both within their families and in society. The details included in the images they paint underline this idealization. For instance, the 10-year-old girl mentioned above writes:

Our parents loved all of us, but they loved me a bit more than the others, because I was the oldest. ... I also liked visiting my aunts on my father’s side who were married, they loved me very much too, and every time they saw me, they bought me clothes and lots of other things. ... I was brought up mainly by my grandmother, and when I was 8 or 9 years old she started to teach me how to do housework. I imitated the other children, doing things like weaving little baskets or little mats. One thing that hurt is that the day before the genocide started, I had promised Mummy that I would weave her a little mat, and she died without receiving my present.¹⁹

The first violence: School and war

The children soon move on to describing the first violence they experienced in their world of nostalgic images. The first division originated within the world of childhood itself – at school. The children’s discovery of “ethnic things” (*ibintu by’amoko*) starts with the school census that identified Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. As part of the quota policy set up by the Habyarimana regime to ensure “ethnic and regional balance”, school pupils were carefully counted, year after year, to ensure that Tutsi did not take up more than the 10% of secondary school places that were allocated to them.²⁰ While it does appear that the organizers of the writing workshop had asked the children to mention this point, inclusion of several particularly realistic details demonstrates the children’s independence in how they recorded these events. With the exception of two children who were under school age in 1994, all report having discovered that they were Tutsi via school,

18 CNLGA, story C67MMGC (born in 1986).

19 CNLGA, story C44USC (born in 1984).

20 Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Marcel Kabanda, *Rwanda: Racisme et génocide. L’idéologie hamitique*, Belin, Paris, 2013, pp. 160–161. The policy of limiting the number of Tutsi children entering secondary education was ended by the then minister of education, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, in April 1992. This courageous decision led to her being attacked at her home the following month. See Jordane Bertrand, *Rwanda, le piège de l’histoire: L’opposition démocratique avant le génocide (1990–1994)*, Collection Les Afriques, Karthala, Paris, 2000, p. 195.

as their parents appear not to have talked to them about this sensitive issue. The fact that these children were young at the time will not have been the only reason for their silence; under a regime that had elevated discrimination to the status of public policy, it was wiser not to mention that one was a Tutsi. For many children, the census was the cue for humiliation by both teachers and classmates. Fanned by the war propaganda against the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), to which every Tutsi was assumed to belong, racism began to enter the classroom, as this girl born in 1981 explains:

When 1992–1993 arrived, I started having trouble at school. My problems were the following: at that time, there was something about asking about our ethnicity at school, every term or every year. The teacher asked the Hutu to stand up, and after they had stood up he asked the Tutsi to stand. There were lots of Hutu who stood up, and I think that at that time there were only two of us who were Tutsi. When we two stood up, we heard shouts [*induru*] from the rest of the class. They liked to call us “snakes” [*inzoka*] or “cockroaches” [*inyenzi*]. On the day of the census, even the children you normally talked to refused to speak to you. I am talking about the Hutu we were at school with. Every time the teacher told the Tutsi to stand, the others, the Hutu, laughed out loud. That made me think about a lot of things. I asked myself whether the Tutsi were really human beings and I also asked myself what we had done. I was ashamed, and I even wanted to leave school. When we went home from school on the day of the census, my classmates made fun of me, a lot. I preferred to run home alone. This did not happen often. Just on the day of the census. Afterwards, the children might forget, but there were mean children who remembered.²¹

As well as being a target of ridicule and insults for the other pupils, this girl discovered that she was part of a minority—something she was powerless to change. It is reasonable to suggest that these racial tallies were intended not only to deeply humiliate Tutsi but also to give schoolchildren the idea that Tutsi were of little importance in Rwandan society. As we have seen, this type of violence was not just symbolic. In some cases it was met with a degree of fatalism, as evinced by this extract from the account of a girl born in 1978:

At the beginning of every school year, they would make us stand up, saying: “Tutsi, stand up!”, and then they would say, “Hutu, stand up!” That happened every year. This made me curious, and I asked my Dad what ethnic group we belonged to, because they always wanted to know at school. He replied that it was not necessary for me to know, but since this was an order issued by the school, he explained it to me, and said we were Tutsi. ... When I asked him why the teacher kept asking us to stand up and kept counting us, he said that it was a government programme and that it was well known. One day, when I was in the third year of primary school (I had

21 CNLGA, story C11UP (born in 1981).

acquired some intelligence), they made us stand up and I saw a Tutsi child stand up with the Hutu children. So I stood up as well, even though I knew that I was lying. The other children shouted “Look how the Tutsi are mixing in with the Hutu!” The teacher called us to him, and said we were wasting his time! This way of speaking was well known. People talked like that all the time and we were used to it. We carried on living like that and we got used to it. That was the policy of power [*ingoma*] at the time.²²

In many cases, a child’s discovery of “ethnicity” at school prompted the child’s parents to tell him or her about the persecution that they themselves had experienced since 1959. The adults tried to respond to the children’s incomprehension regarding this “difference” that was thrust upon them. The fact that the parents only told their children about this violence in secret bears witness to the fearful silence maintained by Tutsi families. The threat was twice as real when yesterday’s looters and arsonists were today’s neighbours. One boy tells how his father explained these matters to him:

Later, when I started school, I found out that there was a programme to make a census of Hutu and Tutsi in each class. This is how I finally found out about my ethnic background: when they told the Hutu to stand up, I stood up too. ... He [the teacher] said, “Sit down! You’re an *agatutsi* [a dirty little Tutsi]! Later, the teacher hit three of my classmates [he gives the names of these other – Tutsi – pupils], saying: “Him, with a nose like that [*dore kiriya cy’umuzuru*]? How dare he stand up!” ... Later, when I got home, I immediately asked my Dad if we were Hutu or Tutsi, and he replied, “Why do you ask me that, my child?” I told him what had happened at school, and that is when he revealed that we were Tutsi. I started by asking him why he was keeping these things secret, what the reason was. Dad told me: “Since 1959, they have been killing us and we have been forced to flee, because they destroyed our houses.” He continued by saying: “The man we call K. burnt our property and killed our livestock. So we are afraid that they might start again.”²³

As this story clearly shows, the world of childhood was impervious neither to racism nor to the violence it caused. As we mentioned above, war intensifies the violence that children describe. It is important to say a little at this point about the geographic origins of these young writers. The vast majority are from what is now Eastern Province, the former prefectures of Byumba, Kibungo and Kigali-Ngali,²⁴ which were particularly exposed to the effects of the conflict that took place between 1 October 1990 and 1994. In many communes, there were numerous arrests, executions and even massacres of Tutsi on account of their supposed “complicity” with the RPF. Following the first RPF offensive on 1

22 CNLGA, story C91KB (born in 1978).

23 CNLGA, story C2BJB (born in 1984).

24 In 2000 and 2006, Rwanda underwent extensive reorganization. The boundaries and names of the administrative units were altered to such an extent that one needs to work with two maps, one showing the situation as it was in 1994 and another showing the current situation.

October 1990, thousands of Tutsi and opposition Hutu were arrested and held for several months, accused of being *ibytso*, or accomplices.²⁵ The ferocious acts of repression that accompanied the war spilled over into the homes of the children. Many describe repeated searches of their homes by soldiers of the Rwandan Armed Forces who were determined to find rifles and ammunition supposedly hidden by the RPF. In October 1990, when he was barely 4 years old, one boy found out that his father had been arrested on suspicion of being an RPF agent. Although he was too young at the time to remember the details, his story is consistent with what we know of the situation in his home commune of Muvumba, which was close to the front. He was fully aware that the sudden arrest of his father led to the entire family moving to the southwest of the country, to the commune of Kinyamakara (Gikongoro prefecture) in 1992.²⁶ In this instance, what was intended as a refuge turned out to be a trap: when the genocide started, Muvumba rapidly fell into the hands of the RPF, whereas Tutsi in Gikongoro prefecture suffered a horrifically intensive extermination campaign that lasted several weeks.²⁷

While the world of childhood was not protected from the warlike, partisan violence that swept the country between 1990 and 1994, it was nonetheless populated by the familiar and loved figures of parents, siblings and friends. This initial experience of what were sometimes bloody disturbances did not make the children's shock any the less at the total upending of society during "the time of the genocide" (*icyo gihe cya jenocide*).

Living the genocide: The total inversion of the world of childhood

It is not the author's intention to reproduce here the full diversity of these 105 individual stories of the genocide. Rather, this article shall attempt to describe the experiences through which the children witnessed the inversion of all their points of reference. One experience they all shared was the total collapse of the adult world, which was either incapable of protecting them or became a deadly threat. In all these children's accounts, norms function in reverse, and it is through this radical axiological inversion that we shall examine their stories.²⁸

Turning the physical envelope inside-out: Mutilated bodies

Less than a year after the genocide, a UNICEF team started to assemble statistical data to obtain a picture of the extent and the nature of the trauma to which the

25 On this topic, see, among other sources, Committee for the Respect of Human Rights and Democracy in Rwanda, *Victims of Political Repression Since October 1 1990 in Rwanda*, Kigali, 15 December 1991.

26 CNLGA, story C90NJCC (born in 1986).

27 HRW and FIDH, above note 5, pp. 243–246.

28 The author would like to thank Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau for his valuable assistance in analyzing these texts; the physical traumas they describe sometimes caused a numbing horror.

children had been exposed.²⁹ The results give a first impression of the level of violence: almost 70% of those interviewed said they had witnessed killings or serious wounding.³⁰ When we examine individual accounts, the survivors' words translate those statistics into powerful, detailed descriptions. The first level at which we observe the inversion of norms is that of the mutilated bodies. The passage from the interior to the exterior is described with almost anatomical precision: the spurting of blood, the dismemberment of bodies, the spilling of brain matter and intestines. Bodies that had literally been turned inside-out play a central role in accounts of the massacres. On 13 April 1994, Tutsi who had taken refuge in Kabarondo Church were the victims of an attack coordinated by the local administrative and military authorities.³¹ A boy, aged 12 at the time, was inside the church. He describes the massacre:

They threw a grenade at where I had just put myself, and it blew my leg off. A river of blood [*umuvu y'amaraso*] was preventing people from moving. Lots of blood was coming out of the corpses and running out under the door. A big bomb [*igisasu*] exploded. It lifted up lots of people and lots of bodies fell on me, with lots of blood. I could not escape. They threw another grenade, which lifted us up again. I was hit in the head by splinters and then I fell in front of the altar. I tried to stand up to go and see the people with whom I had arrived at the church, and my neighbours. I saw that they had preceded me into death, and grief killed me. There was a door at the side, in the middle of the church. A woman [he gives her name] was leaning against it. She was carrying a small child. Other people whom I did not recognize were also leaning against this door. They brought the big gun with tyres and they fired a big bullet into this door. I saw everyone become like flour. Then the bomb lifted everyone up and C. [the woman mentioned] collapsed onto the altar. All she had left was her head and one arm. She was letting out screams [*aboroga*] of pain and when I hurried over to help her, she had died. They kept on firing. People, innocent people, kept on dying. At some point, I lost consciousness and lay down in the blood, as if I were dead.³²

This extract, deliberately quoted in full, illustrates both the awful fate of the victims and the determination of the killers. The young writer is as careful to describe the projectiles (“a big bomb”, “a grenade”, “the big gun with tyres”) and the points

29 Atle Dyregrov, Leila Gupta, Rolf Gjestad and Eugénie Mukanoheli, “Trauma Exposure and Psychological Reactions to Genocide among Rwandan Children”, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2000.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

31 The Kabarondo Church massacre was closely examined in 2016 and 2018 by the Paris Assize Court during the initial trial and appeal in the cases of Tito Barahira and Octavien Ngenzi, who succeeded each other as burgomasters of the commune. Both were sentenced to life imprisonment for genocide and crimes against humanity. Until 12 April, the parish priest Father Oreste Incimata maintained a register of those who had taken refuge. According to his testimony, at least 1,500 people died in this attack: High Criminal Court, Paris, hearing of 30 May 2018. An estimate by the Diocese of Kibungo puts the number of victims at 2,000. See the diocesan bulletin of Kibungo, *Stella Matutina*, No. 112, June 1995, p. 7. The author would like to thank Brother Benjamin Ngororabanga and Jean-Népomuscène Ntambara for making her welcome at the Dominican library in Kacyiru.

32 CNLGA, story C46HY (born in 1982).

from which they are fired at the crowd (“the altar”, the “imposing door at the side”) as he is to describe the effects of the violence on the human body. As in the drawings covered in red,³³ blood dominates the scene. His experience is both auditory and visual; we can imagine the crash of the weapons, mixed with the “screams of pain” of the woman who has collapsed on the altar, her body ripped apart.

Often, the children apply their descriptive powers to recounting what happened to members of their own families. The mental trauma of seeing bodies being emptied is even more severe when the bodies are those of their parents. Among those who provided testimonies, the vast majority of children witnessed the deaths of family members. This is how one girl, aged 9 at the time of the genocide, describes the deaths of her family in Nyarubuye Church, during the large-scale massacres of 15–17 April 1994:³⁴

I saw my Mum die, her head was cut off; I saw my big brother, *how* they hit him repeatedly on the head and how they fired an arrow into him; I saw my big brother who was at secondary school, they cut his neck and they crushed his head; I saw my big sister, *how* she died; I saw my big brother, who was older than me, *how* they cut his throat, he died gasping for breath; I saw all my family, my uncles on my father’s side, their children, my aunts on my mother’s side, my sisters-in-law, my cousins, my uncles on my mother’s side, my grandmother and everyone I was related to, *how* they died and where they were.³⁵

Given the scenes they witnessed, it is hardly surprising that images of the mutilated bodies of their parents haunted the minds of the young survivors for a long time. We see examples of obsessive precision, as in the account written by this girl: “I see Mummy, cut in two. I cannot stop seeing that image and that makes my despair even worse.”³⁶ In the case of another girl, the sight of her parents’ dismembered and decapitated bodies seemed so incongruous to her that her first action once the killers had left was to “put the heads back with the bodies they belonged to” and cover them with a skirt, one of the few garments to have escaped the looting.³⁷ But this child was soon to see her efforts to give some kind of dignity to the bodies of “her Mummies” – her actual mother and her maternal aunt – undone by the actions of scavengers and dogs. One point that crops up in many of these accounts is how canids acted as the animal successors to the killers: “even *their* dogs were full. They started to eat the people in the morning, they drank their blood until the evening, and then they had eaten enough.”³⁸ The final humiliation for the victims came when the killers returned after several days, and merely covered the bodies with a little earth “to protect themselves against the

33 Serge Baqué, *Dessins et destins d’enfants: Jours après nuit*, Hommes et Perspectives, Paris, 2000, p. 103.

34 For a full account of the genocide at Nyarubuye, see Privat Rutazibwa and Paul Rutayisire, *Génocide à Nyarubuye*, Éditions Rwandaises, Kigali, 2007.

35 CNLGA, story C87MFC (born in 1985) (emphasis added).

36 CNLGA, story C72URC (born in 1987).

37 CNLGA, story C88MVC (born in 1986).

38 *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

bad smell of the snakes”.³⁹ Even in death, the Tutsi remained snakes, giving off a recognizable smell. This little girl perceived and described the words and the careless covering-up of the bodies as something extremely offensive. She even uses the word *gutaba*, which normally refers to burying rubbish, showing that she has fully understood how “her Mummies” have been relegated to the status of foul-smelling refuse.

The children witnessed not only these dismembered and bleeding bodies, but also their decomposition. The texts are full of horrible descriptions of piles of putrefying bodies. Here again, the established order of things is turned upside-down; the care with which the dead are treated under normal circumstances meant that the living never witnessed the process of decomposition – not even adults, let alone children. Many of these writers underline that point – they had never seen a corpse before. “I had never in my life seen a dead person before, but from that moment on, I knew what death was”, writes the same little girl, aged 8 at the time of the genocide.

Experiencing one’s own death

Many of the texts describe the disappearance of the boundary between life and death, as if the children die many times over. One should take these accounts of successive deaths seriously; the fact that they are so widespread is an indicator of the depth of the mental trauma caused. Let us return for a moment to the UNICEF study, which mentions this phenomenon: 90% of children interviewed had thought they were going to die.⁴⁰ “That is how I died”, writes one girl at the end of her account.⁴¹ The young authors talk about experiencing their own deaths at specific moments. Seeing their parents killed is one of those, as the girl mentioned earlier explains: “We – children – were terrified. We no longer expected any mercy from them. We could see that humanity had left them. We died exactly at the moment when we saw the deaths of those who had given life to us.”⁴² Many of these texts mention the impossibility of living without parents; the death of the child’s family was their own death. These “deaths” are not symbolic, nor are they a rhetorical game of words; they are even more real when the children are thrown into mass graves with the corpses after large-scale attacks. Living and surviving in close proximity to the dead reinforces the already powerful feeling of being a corpse among corpses. The verb *guhembuka* that the authors use in this context conveys the idea of being dragged back gradually from the world of the dead to the world of the living. The disappearance of the most certain of boundaries in human experience – that which separates life from death – is all the more apparent when one owes one’s survival and one’s life to

39 *Ibid.*

40 A. Dyregrov *et al.*, above note 29, p. 6.

41 CNLGA, story C42IE (date of birth not indicated).

42 CNLGA, story C88MBV (born in 1986).

dead bodies. It is worth citing at length one particularly striking account on this topic:

Not one part of my body was alive, perhaps because of the time when I was in the pit and they threw heavy people onto me. ... I had lots of bruises and illnesses when I was in this pit. Lots of blood ran onto me. Sometimes I went for weeks without eating or drinking,⁴³ so I started to drink their blood and I noticed it had a taste; I was hungry and it was as if someone had added salt. I think it was this blood that gave me the strength to get out of the pit. ... I was very ill. I was vomiting a lot, and I was vomiting black things. They [the doctors who provided care immediately after the genocide] asked me what it was, but I was afraid to tell them because I did not want them to know that I had been drinking people's blood. I was still afraid, and I did not know where I was. The doctors took good care of me, and at some point I recovered.⁴⁴

This experience may be extreme, but it is not exceptional; many children were pulled out of these pits. While we will probably never know their exact number, the phenomenon is sufficiently widespread to be recorded statistically in the UNICEF study mentioned above. Almost 16% of children interviewed replied in the affirmative to the question of whether they had hidden among the corpses.⁴⁵ Another indication that the frequency of this situation was not insignificant is that medical practitioners working in Rwanda after the genocide noted a pattern of behaviour so prevalent that it was classified as an actual syndrome. This new syndrome, known in French as *chasse-mouche* or fly-swat syndrome, consists of a compulsive repeated movement as if brushing away a fly, observed among children rescued from the pits. The children explained that they were swatting the flies away from their parents' bodies.⁴⁶

The blurring of the distinction between life and death is apparent in another type of experience reported by these young authors. As we know, sexual violence was an integral part of the Tutsi genocide, so it is not surprising that it crops up in these texts. Here, sexuality is not a source of life – it is an instrument of death. Both boys and girls record these rapes. There is no gender analysis. One of the indelible memories of the genocide for this 10-year-old boy is the torture and death of a girl who lived nearby, and of his own sister:

People continued to die, but they died a bad death [*urupfu rubi*]. Before I forget, let me recall the death of a girl called U. The *Interahamwe* seized her. They took turns with her. They just kept going. When they finished, she was still alive. Then they impaled her with a stick in her vagina, and the stick came out of her mouth. Afterwards, they crucified her in front of the church, between the

43 It is more likely that she spent several days in the pit, but one can well understand that such an experience would make the time seem longer.

44 CNLGA, story C29US (born in 1987).

45 A. Dyregrov *et al.*, above note 29, p. 6.

46 The author found this description in Jean-Paul Turindwanamungu, "Contribution à l'étude de l'impact du génocide sur la schizophrénie", dissertation in psychology and education science written under the supervision of Jean-Damascène Ndayambaje, Université Nationale du Rwanda, Butare, 2000, p. 77.

trees that were there. The other death that I will never forget is that of my sister, whom they raped. They impaled her with pieces of wood as well, and when they had finished, they killed her.⁴⁷

The massacres may have ended in July 1994, but for the children who survived, the genocide had still not finished killing, as their aunts, mothers and sisters died of AIDS, having become infected through rape.

The collapse of the world of adults: Reversal of the protective role and inversion of societal relationships

Whether separation from adults occurred following a decision to split the family or as a result of their parents' murder, children often ended up unaccompanied by any adult during the genocide. In the absence of other protection, they sometimes banded together and tried to survive on their own. One story, that of a boy who was 13 at the time of the genocide, is worthy of closer attention as an illustration of the protective role that children took on.⁴⁸ After escaping from the massacre at Kibeho Church on 14 April, this boy first hid in a sorghum field before moving into the tea plantations, which were denser. There he found other children already hiding in jackals' dens. A micro-society of children emerged, its ranks swelling as other young survivors managed to reach the tea plantations. Their first priority was to track the movements of the killers – they were constantly on the alert because of the dogs sent out to find them. At one point they asked one young survivor about the “enemy” position: “We asked him where the killers were, and he said they were killing the pupils of Marie Merci [a school near Kibeho Church], and that it was the gendarmes who were doing the killing.” As well as guiding the group's choice of hiding place, such knowledge was also essential to the children's ability to obtain enough food. The killers did not leave their roadblocks at night; they continued to probe the darkness in search of Tutsi. But night-time was precisely when the children went looking for sweet potatoes to feed the group. This involved a specific gendered dynamic, in that only the boys were allowed to undertake these dangerous operations: “We did not allow the girls to go into the fields, because they were much more afraid than us and they could have given away those who were hiding with them if they had been caught; they would have shown them our hideout.” The children had all sworn that if they were caught, “no-one is allowed to say where the others are”. This was absolutely essential if the group was to survive. There was almost a routine in the distribution of food-related tasks:

Life went on, and *as usual* we went looking for sweet potatoes during the night. We came across roadblocks on the path. They often lit a fire next to a roadblock.

47 CNLGA, story C30BD (born in 1984).

48 The account that follows is based on CNLGA story C61HIC (born in 1981).

A fire meant that there was a roadblock, and we went around it without their seeing us.⁴⁹

But the few sweet potatoes they managed to gather – and which had to be eaten raw, as the smoke from a cooking fire would have given the children away – were nowhere near sufficient, and the children knew what it was to be hungry. They did their best to dispel the hunger pangs by tying strips of cloth around their bellies. In Rwanda, it was common practice in times of famine to tie a cloth around one's abdomen so as to be less conscious of one's hunger.

The cunning of the children, seen here in collective form, partly made up for the absence of parental protection in a world of adults who had become a deadly threat. In particular, the very nature of the lies the children told shows indirectly that they were fully aware of the transgressions which were being committed during the genocide. The first of these, which they understood early on, was related to the deadly manner in which the meaning of “neighbour” had become reversed. One thing we notice all through these accounts is that in order to stay alive, the children tried to avoid the consequences of knowing others and being known by them. Separated from their parents, and with no identity cards, they made up “Hutu” genealogies, sometimes choosing fictitious parents from the families of particularly zealous killers. For instance, when he emerged from the tea plantations, the boy quoted above went to “live with these Hutu who didn't know [me]”. A prisoner of the “humanitarian safe zone” set up by the French armed forces during Operation Turquoise⁵⁰ at the beginning of July, he tried to hide among the crowds of displaced Hutu. But killers among those who were fleeing the RPF continued to flush out Tutsi. On one occasion, when he was stopped at a roadblock, the child explained that he was fleeing the RPF and had become separated from his parents in the general panic. The men at the roadblock were not convinced, and told him to undress so they could examine his ribs, as racial imagery ascribed a larger number of ribs to Tutsi than to Hutu. He did as he was told, and received a blow to the head from a club. When he came round, he had to use all his cunning to find an explanation for his injury. He succeeded, and thanks to this new lie was taken in by an old woman who used him as a servant. Later, he was almost given away by a displaced man from the same area as him. When he was interrogated, it was ultimately the very effectiveness of the genocide that saved his life, as he heard the reply: “Nothing to do with us. Let's go. He must have mixed you up with someone else, because we know for sure that there are no more Tutsi here.”

The danger was not limited to the male half of the adult world, as women often barred children from the domestic sphere, refusing to give refuge or betraying

49 Emphasis added.

50 Regarding Operation Turquoise and French policy in Rwanda from 1990 to 1994, see in particular Republic of France, Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'Information Parlementaire, *Rapport d'information sur les opérations militaires menées par la France, d'autres pays et l'ONU au Rwanda entre 1990 et 1994*, Paris, 1998; Republic of Rwanda, National Independent Commission Charged with Gathering Evidence to Show the Implication of the French Government in the Genocide Perpetrated in Rwanda in 1994, *Rapport final*, Kigali, 2007, available at: <http://mucyoreport.rw/index.php/report/>.

them to the gangs of killers. Even when women remained passive, they were complicit in the children's fate. The words of adults were legitimizing the massacres. A girl aged 10 at the time of the genocide reports the words of the housewife with whom a militia member had placed her: "The time came when this *igitero* (gang of killers) returned. She took us to the doorstep and this lady bade us farewell, saying, 'They are going to kill you. They will not let any of you live.'"⁵¹ As the children left, not a single word of compassion was said to them.

The lethal inversion of societal relations also comes out in the accounts of some rescues. Earlier, we mentioned the story of a girl (then aged 9) who had escaped the massacre in Nyarubuye. After she took refuge with other survivors in a small room that served as a kitchen for the priests, a man arrived with some courgettes and a little juice. She appreciated this kind gesture on the part of an unknown man all the more because of the way her neighbours had betrayed her: "The fact that he helped us even though he did not know us touched me deeply. But those who knew us, our neighbours, they were the ones who killed our families, even though we had no problems with each other."⁵²

It would be naive to think that the children's world could simply return to normal after it had been so radically upended. Deprived of their families, filled with a total mistrust of adults, their suffering continues to express itself in their words. The ultimate form of inversion is that their pain becomes more intense with the passing of time. We shall now turn our attention to these "words of suffering".⁵³

***Ishavu ry'abato* (The sadness of the children)⁵⁴**

Written in 2006, these accounts are a valuable opportunity for children who have become orphans to record their experiences. Their testimonies form a subjective history of the survivors, blending grief, mental anguish and material deprivation.

The vast majority of those children who asked AVEGA for help said they wanted assistance in obtaining decent housing. The end of the massacres did not mean the end of their wanderings, as the destruction of a family always meant the destruction of its house and other property. A telling description of material devastation crops up repeatedly in these notebooks as the children describe their return to the hills: "We went back to our ruins." In 1998, according to a survey by the Rwandan government, almost half the survivors were homeless.⁵⁵ Very few of the children who provided testimonies were living in the orphanages to which the social workers had given the euphemistic title "centres for unaccompanied

51 CNLGA, story C44USC (born in 1984).

52 CNLGA, story C87MFC (born in 1985).

53 An expression coined in French as *dits de souffrance* by Arlette Farge in her work *Des lieux pour l'histoire*, La Librairie du XXe Siècle, Seuil, Paris, 1997, pp. 16–17.

54 From the title of one of the rare collections of children's accounts published in Rwanda: Dukundane Family, *Ishavu ry'Abato: Ubuhamywa kuri Jenoside yakorewe abatutsi mu Rwanda* [*The Sadness of the Children: Accounts of the Genocide Perpetrated against the Tutsi*], Kigali, April 2009.

55 MINALOC, above note 9, p. 25.

children". The story of Rwandan orphanages in the immediate post-genocide period would merit a study of its own, but we shall simply mention certain aspects here. Firstly, there were not nearly enough orphanages for the number of surviving children. According to a study carried out in November 1994 by the Rwandan authorities and UNICEF,⁵⁶ there were forty-nine centres, very unevenly distributed across the country, with over half in Butare and Kigali. Secondly, these orphanages were overcrowded,⁵⁷ and Rwandan government policy was not only to reunite families but also for orphans to be adopted by Rwandan families.⁵⁸ One other phenomenon no doubt explains the small number of children who were living in orphanages: they were setting up homes themselves. This social innovation, which arose out of the genocide, had a profound effect on family relationships. Boys and girls taking on the role of head of a family of orphans had been turned into mothers and fathers by the genocide. One could not put it any better than this young woman, who describes the difficult conditions she experienced following the genocide:

There were times when we could not pay [the rent] for a whole year. They [the authorities] kept lying to us, saying that they were going to build houses for us, but up until now we have been renting a house, with all these children. There are eight of us in a tiny little house. That is how we have been making progress in life. In addition to all that, one of the children [aged 14] had been infected by the AIDS virus by the man who raped her. I was feeding all these children. Afterwards, I tried to go back to school to see if I could improve my future life. Because we had no home, because we had no food and because we spent many days at the hospital because of the child that had got infected, I was not able to attend school. I went to school for a year, and then the following year I was taken up with all those things. Either I was at the hospital, or else they threw us out of the house because we had no money to pay the rent. And when I did go to school, I was always worried about these children. I would be wondering whether they had gone without food the night before, whether they had been thrown out of the house or whether they had been attacked and killed. The Hutu kept saying that those who were left would accuse them, so I was always worried. I was afraid that they had been attacked. I could not concentrate on my schoolwork. Instead of concentrating on school, I kept thinking about the lives of the children I had left behind. Everything I learned left my head as soon as I remembered the situation of

56 Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Rehabilitation and Social Integration, and UNICEF, *Évaluation des besoins des centres d'accueil pour enfants non-accompagnés*, Kigali, January 1995, MINALOC Archives, Box 56.

57 If we take the figures available (which we do with caution), the number of these orphanages fell from forty-nine to twenty-five between 1994 and 2003, and the number of children living in them fell from 10,000 to 3,600 over the same period. See *ibid.* and MINALOC, *National Policy for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children*, Kigali, 2003.

58 MINALOC, above note 57.

my children. Even though I have never actually had a baby, they are my children.⁵⁹

Having become a mother at the age of 19, this young woman completely accepts the role that the genocide has thrust upon her – and indeed does so with great courage. These few lines contain several references to other experiences. Firstly, there are what have been called in French *les morts différées*, or “postponed deaths”,⁶⁰ as the genocide carried on killing after the massacres of July 1994 had come to an end. Another pointer to this long-lasting genocide – so long-lasting that one wonders whether there can ever be such a thing as an “after” – is the permanent threat from hostile neighbours. In fact, this ongoing fear extends to everything to do with adults, to such an extent that some children place their confidence in inanimate objects. These objects may include “a little patch of bush”, as in the case of this girl:

Let me explain that there were times when I was on my way to school and I saw a little patch of bush, and I looked at it, and I thought it was pretty, and I thought how nice it would be to hide in it. Also, I wanted to go in and see if anyone would find me if I hid there. We went on living, but we were afraid. We no longer trusted anyone.⁶¹

Another girl, who had been only 4 years old in 1994 and was the sole survivor from her family, did not start to talk until she was 10. She had such a deep distrust of others that she confided only in a tree. “My tree looked after me at this time, because I could not talk to people.”⁶²

The orphans were also affected by serious psychological trauma. While the word “trauma” has entered the vocabulary of psychological theory and practice in Rwanda, it is primarily described in terms of somatic experiences, using terms specific to Kinyarwanda. Just as there was no word in Kinyarwanda to describe the event that had just occurred, there was no suitable word for describing the symptoms of the intense psychological pain linked to the genocide. It became “less acceptable, or even degrading, to describe someone as ‘crazy’ or ‘possessed’ if everyone knew full well that it was all due to the genocide”.⁶³ A form of popular nosography has filled the gap, and the terms *ihahamuka* and *ihungabana* have become part of everyday language. The term *ihungabana* refers to the “distress experienced by the subject in their internal mental domain”, whereas *ihahamuka* – which literally means “to have ones lungs outside oneself” – conveys the idea of an “expulsion from the inside to the outside, a process

59 CNLGA, story C31UM (born in 1975) (emphasis added).

60 The author is borrowing this highly apt expression from Anouche Kunth, who used it to describe the survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide.

61 CNLGA, story C81MI (born in 1982).

62 From Darius Gishoma, “Crises traumatiques collectives d’ihahamuka lors des commémorations du génocide des Tutsi: Aspects cliniques et perspectives thérapeutiques”, doctoral thesis in psychology, Université Catholique de Louvain, 2014, p. 289.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

whereby internal suffering enters the public sphere”.⁶⁴ The young authors regularly use both words to describe their mental anguish. As in the disturbing collective attacks of *ihahamuka* seen during commemoration ceremonies,⁶⁵ it is through the body that they express their deep distress. Trauma comes out primarily through somatic phenomena; it is the “disease of problems” (*indarwa z’ibibazo*), as one girl rightly calls it.⁶⁶ The children’s accounts frequently mention headaches, stomach aches and high blood pressure. They appear in a unique biographical context that mixes material deprivation and the memory of dead loved ones in an inextricable fashion.

While we were at school thinking about our little sister, all on her own with no food and no clothes, we were trying to do our schoolwork with no school supplies, no shoes, no clothes, no pullover to keep us warm. We were often ill while we were at school. ... This life continued to submerge me. I saw that not one single living person loved us. I do not know what happened, but I became ill. It was the trauma [*ihahamuka n’ihungabana*].⁶⁷

The head and the heart are the most frequent sites of the “diseases” that the children describe. For instance, one girl says her head is “full of water”,⁶⁸ while a boy describes his heart as “a stinking piece of rotteness”.⁶⁹ The bodies and minds of the survivors continue to suffer the powerful aftershocks of the genocide, out of touch with the period of social and political reconstruction. Clearly, the texts do not yield a linear history of “resilience”.⁷⁰

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that seeing genocide through the “eye of childhood”⁷¹ means seeing it with a new intensity. Using their own words, children recreate the brutal materiality of the tragedy. Not a single taunt, not one insult, no act of cruelty escapes their descriptive skill. In the writings of the child-authors, massacres come to life in all their violence. These children are writing about the genocide in the present tense. This is a literal expression of the violence they have experienced, and we must receive it as such. We must not succumb to the temptation to interpose the filters of psychological interpretation or a

64 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

65 We have already mentioned the most complete work on the subject – that of Darius Gishoma, *ibid.*

66 CNLGA, story C91KB (born in 1987).

67 *Ibid.*

68 CNLGA, story C12RNIC (born in 1982).

69 CNLGA, story C2BJB (born in 1984).

70 In this respect, the present author agrees with the following comment: “The notion of resiliency in children could easily become a new form of denial of trauma among children, whereby political systems evade responsibility for helping war-traumatized children.” A. Dyregrov *et al.*, above note 29, p. 14. Such denial can easily extend beyond the confines of politics and without a doubt helps to save our own consciences.

71 M. Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie*, above note 1, p. 12.

condescending view of their accounts. If these child-like words and their striking hyperthymia are taken seriously, new opportunities to deepen the knowledge of the genocide will open up. Not only do these stories tell us about the many survival strategies that the victims developed, but they also give us valuable insights into the belief systems of the killers and their murderous and cruel acts. All those involved in the genocide come together in the complexity of the behaviour adopted in response to the new order imposed by the command to exterminate. The richness of this material opens up the possibility of writing an “integrated”⁷² history of the genocide, without two separated historiographies based exclusively on killers or specifically on victims: a history of the Tutsi genocide that could examine *interactions* between all the actors.

72 In the words of Saül Friedlander, “Pour une histoire intégrée de la Shoah”, 30th Conférence Marc Bloch, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, June 2008, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yyomgzze>.