CHAPTER 5

Violence of Mind, Body, and Spirit: Spiritual and Religious Responses Triggered by Sexual Violence During the Rwandan Genocide

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Sexual violence is a common weapon of war and genocide; the twentieth and twenty-first centuries alone have seen its widespread use in conflicts around the world.[1] The quantitative research into this area reveals staggering results: in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 40,000 cases of war-related rape have been recorded during the conflict that ravaged the area between 1993 and 1995 (Ward and Marsh 2006, p. 2; Allen 1996). Nineteen per cent of women surveyed in Burundi reported that they were raped during the unrest encountered in their country in the early 1990s (Ward and Marsh 2006, p. 2). In 2003, 74 per cent of a sample of Liberian women living in refugee camps had been sexually abused prior to their displacement from Sierra Leone, and 55 per cent experienced sexual violence during the displacement process (ibid.). In 2005, the United Nations reported widespread use of sexual violence by governmental forces and militia as part of the ongoing conflict in Darfur (Eriksson 2011, p. 134). *Médecins Sans Frontières* documented 500 rape victims who sought treatment through their facilities in Darfur; however, this number is suspected to be just a

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fraction of those who have experienced sexual violence during this conflict, as many victims refuse to report their assault due to fear of social stigma and recrimination (Ward and Marsh 2006, p. 2). Throughout the Kosovo-Serbia conflict (1998–1999), between 23,200 and 45,600 Kosovar Albanian women are believed to have experienced rape at the hands of Serbian and Yugoslav forces (ibid.). Further, it is understood that approximately 90 per cent of female Tutsi survivors of the Rwandan genocide (1994) were raped (Rinaldo 2004, p. 141). There is no knowing the extent of sexual violence inflicted on those who did not survive.

Scholarship on the topic of genocidal sexual violence focuses on this violence as a tool of social destruction. Echoing Mary Douglas (1966), emphasis is placed on the effectiveness of rape as a weapon due to societal norms that revere the sociocultural value of women; the perception that a woman's sexual virtue is a matter of public ownership often renders it possible to translate an attack against one woman into an attack against an entire community (Shanks and Schull 2000). That is, the "pollution" of survivors[2] via the perceived contamination of their body by enemy rape is considered destructive for both the individual *and* the community (Sheth 2015, pp. 338, 341), rendering rape an effective weapon of devastation. In this context, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have considered the physiological, social, and psychological trauma encountered by genocidal sexual violence survivors. The impact on the spirituality and religious beliefs of these survivors, however, is less often discussed. In this chapter, I will therefore redress this imbalance, drawing attention to the spiritual and religious responses triggered within the individual by genocidal sexual violence, focusing particular attention on the Rwandan Genocide (1994) as a case study. As a majority Christian country,[3] the testimonies of Rwandan rape survivors frequently reflect a spiritual response to the sexual violence they experienced during the 1994 genocide. I will therefore engage with a number of these women's testimonies,[4] exploring the effect of such violence on their relationships to their faith.

My discussion is divided into three sections: I first provide a brief historical account of the Rwandan genocide.[5] Subsequently, I consider the ways that genocidal sexual violence appears to have caused *injury* to survivors' faith, and then turn to explore the testimonies of women who attest that such violence has served to *affirm* their faith. I thus intend to display the varying spiritual and religious responses to genocidal sexual violence, arguing that such violence affects not only the mind, body, and community, but also the spirit.

The Rwandan Genocide

From April to June 1994, Tutsi and moderate Hutu were massacred by members of the Hutu majority government and government-supported militias (*Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi*). The genocide took place over 100 days in the immediate context of the Rwandan Civil War, an ongoing conflict between the Hutu-led government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), comprised mainly of Tutsi refugees whose families had fled to Uganda after the 1959 Hutu revolt against Belgian colonial rule.[6] A ceasefire was enacted in 1993, initiating the creation of the Arusha Accords implementing a power-sharing government, much to the disappointment of conservative Hutu. The peace ended on 6 April 1994, when an aeroplane carrying the Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down. This was interpreted by the Hutu majority government as well as the *Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi* as an "assassination" at the hands of the RPF. From 7 April, Hutu subsequently undertook the systematic slaughter of Tutsi, as well as Hutu moderates. Eventually, the RPF took back the Rwandan capital of Kigali on 4 July, followed by the north of the country on 18 July, thereby halting the systematic slaughter.

While scholars disagree on the moment at which the genocide was arranged,[7] it is clear that extensive planning had occurred before its initiation. Death lists were drawn up by members of Hutu Power (a hard-line anti-Tutsi movement), racist propaganda was distributed through Hutu-controlled broadcasting and media outlets, and throughout 1993, machetes were imported in considerable numbers to arm Hutu militia (Melvern 2004, p. 56). At a conservative estimate, 800,000 people were slaughtered at the hands of Hutu forces over the 100 days that this conflict lasted.

Throughout those 100 days, sexual violence was regularly employed as a weapon by the *Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi*, to the extent that "rape was the rule and its absence the exception" (Rene Degni-Segu, cited in de Brouwer and Chu 2009, p. 11). Indeed, a conservative estimate suggests that 200,000–300,000 women experienced rape during the genocide (Morris 2016, p. 38). Sexual violence was employed as a means of "slow, inexorable death" (Drumbl 2012, p. 574), which included sexual mutilation, reproductive destruction, and a means of spreading HIV. Further, Zraly and Nyirazinyoye suggest that the *Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi* focused particularly on the rape of unmarried women and girls, because this "disrupted the normative cultural pattern of gender

identity by forcing girls into a painful social space" (2010, p. 1659). That is, the women and girls who survived sexual violence within the Rwandan genocidal context often became constant reminders to their communities of individual and communal trauma at the hands of the enemy; many were subsequently expelled from their communities due to their perceived "pollution" (Rittner and Roth 2012, p. 88). Indeed, some women who managed to survive the sexual violence perpetrated against them were told by their rapists that they were only being allowed to live so that they would "die of sadness" as rejected and tainted members of their community (Human Rights Watch 1996).

Genocidal Sexual Violence and the Injury of Faith

The connection between genocidal sexual violence and a crisis of faith is perhaps unsurprising to most readers. Indeed, Herman argues that the traumatic events of genocidal sexual violence may leave the survivor feeling rejected and abandoned by God, or even shattering their faith in God entirely (2001). Further, as Roth (2010) suggests, acts of genocide, and the various atrocities that occur therein, can render victims increasingly sceptical about the injunctions against violence expressed in their religious texts and traditions. In a recent survey of rape survivors of the Rwandan genocide, Liliane Uwimana notes that the highest proportion of sexual assaults took place in churches; she suggests that this may be due to the fact that "victims went to hide in churches, thinking that people would respect the place of God and that God was going to protect them" (2010, p. 41). The survivors interviewed in Uwimana's study subsequently "lost faith in God and have stopped going to churches because for them God has betrayed them" (ibid.). As this study illustrates, the widespread violence of genocide may call into question survivors' understanding of God's character and the validity of their faith more generally. In other words, their faith sustained injuries as the result of genocidal sexual violence—injuries that can still be felt keenly.

Some Rwandan rape survivors also encountered an assault on their sense of spiritual self-worth due to the perceived pollution of their body. This in turn resulted in an injury to their relationship with their deity due to feelings of lessened spiritual self-worth (Gingerich and Leaning 2004, p. 2). For others, the experience of sexual violence was felt as a direct assault on their soul, leaving them with doubts about their soteriological status (are they worthy of being "saved" spiritually?). Further, as Rittner

and Roth (2012) note, women who have experienced sexual violence within a genocidal context are often excommunicated from their religious community (p. 88), which inevitably impacts their sense of spiritual self-worth and relationship with their faith. For many survivors, feelings of betrayal by religious institutions result in a complete loss of faith (Herman 2001). In order to consider these multiple traumas to survivors' faith, I now consider the testimonies of those women who have experienced such traumas as the result of genocidal sexual violence during the Rwandan civil war.

Hyacynthia Nirere was only 12 years old when she was raped during the 1994 genocide, giving birth to a daughter and contracting HIV as a result of these attacks. Hyacynthia recounts one particular experience in Ka Hon Chu and Brouwer's collection of survivor stories, *The Men Who Killed Me* (2009):

> One night, a young man came into my bedroom and ordered me to take off my clothes unless I wanted him to take me to the killers. I said I would rather die than do what he wanted. He replied that he didn't even know why he was arguing with me. He jumped on me, took off my clothes himself and raped me. My sister was living the same horrors in the next room with her classmate. The young Hutu man raped me all night long, except when he was tired and took a break. I felt lot of fear and thought I would be killed soon. After the first attack, the young man raped me again on the second day, twice. The two men went out and killed Tutsi during the day and raped my sister and me during the night. We were forced to choose between being raped or killed, and they locked our room so we could not escape. There was nothing we could do in that room; we felt so much fear. I was bleeding from my private parts and aching everywhere. I could not join my legs together, because it hurt so much. (p. 120)

In addition to the attacks by Hutu, Hyacynthia was also raped by numerous soldiers of the national army of Rwanda (FAR) while under "protection" in Zone Turquoise, a French government-established "safe zone" in south-west Rwanda (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, p. 122). While in Zone Turquoise, Hyacynthia was taken as a "wife" by a FAR soldier, Rukokoma, who forced Hyacynthia to remain in this "marriage" for two years after the genocide (ibid.). During this "marriage," Hyacynthia gave birth to a daughter, whom, she admits, she still finds difficult to love (p. 117). Echoing the findings of Herman (2001) and Roth (2010), Hyacynthia has encountered a sense of abandonment by her deity in the aftermath of her

rape. A professed Christian prior to the genocide, she has experienced significant doubts about God because of the attacks against her, compelling her to wonder "why God has planned this life for me" (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, 117). While still acknowledging the existence of her deity, Hyacynthia questions the motives and character of God because of her experiences. These doubts are not only due to the attacks themselves, but are also fuelled by the ongoing physical, mental, and financial struggles that plague her life as a rape survivor. Her distrust in God comes from the continual suffering she has experienced post-genocide, as well as her cravings for relief and peace that continue to be unfulfilled.

Hyacynthia's reaction against her God and her faith is echoed in the testimony of another Christian Tutsi survivor, Marie Odette Kayitesi, who was gang-raped by ten Hutu men. After her rape, Marie questioned the existence of her Christian God: "I hated the world and asked myself where there was a God. If he really existed, how could he allow these atrocities to happen?" (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, p. 35). For Marie, the violence she encountered was evidence enough that God cannot exist. Hence, while Hyacynthia retained some of her beliefs (harbouring ill-feelings towards her non-acting God) Marie lost her faith in God altogether. As Herman (2001) and Roth (2010) suggest, the atrocious assaults these women encountered instil within them a sense of abandonment by their God, injuring or invalidating their faith.

For other survivors, the violation of their bodies caused a rift in their personal sense of spiritual self-worth. As Jewish philosopher and Holocaust survivor Jean Améry notes, survivors of genocide and violence feel that a part of their self is so degraded that it cannot hope to endure: "a part of our life ends and it can never be revived" (Améry 1980, pp. 28–29; cited in Rittner and Roth 2012, p. xv). An example of this can be detected in the language employed by Christian Tutsi survivor Olga which testifies to the connections made by survivors between the degradation of their body through rape and the "pollution" of their soul. These connections can result in survivors experiencing a loss of spiritual self-worth, as well as the physical and psychological impact of the assaults. Olga was raped until her gynaecological region was completely destroyed (Mukamana and Collins 2006, p. 149). These repeated rapes continued despite her suffering from both an infection and a broken back that rendered her unable to move. For Olga, they were "eternal torture" (ibid.); her soul had been tortured to death by the sexual and physical violence she endured (ibid.). Hence, as

Améry theorizes in relation to the degradation caused by genocidal violence, Olga believed her soul could never again be revived; feeling soul-*less*, she lost the will to survive, refusing to eat or drink, and begging her attackers for death in order to free herself from her spiritual turmoil (ibid.).

From these testimonies of Hyacynthia, Marie, and Olga, it is evident that genocidal sexual violence has the power to injure survivors' personal relationship with their faith due to their feelings of spiritual degradation. However, as Rittner and Roth (2012) note, for some survivors it was their rejection by their religious community that most greatly impacted their sense of spiritual self-worth and the overall strength of their faith. This is discernible in the words of Furaha, a Tutsi Christian. Furaha's feelings of decreased spirituality stem from her church's reaction to her as a survivor of genocidal rape: "[The members of the church] don't respect you, they ostracize you, people say that we were no different from prostitutes because we 'accepted' having sex with any man who wanted to have sex with us during the genocide" (Mukamana and Collins 2006, p. 158).

Furaha's rejection by her community and their likening of her to a prostitute left her feeling "less than human" and thus spiritually unworthy (ibid.). The comparison of survivors to prostitutes has been commonplace in Rwanda; prostitutes are considered an affront to Rwandan culture, due primarily to the Christian values that dominate the country's moral compass (Mgbako 2016, p. 173). Similarly, survivors have often been perceived as a threat to the country's culture and religion, being a constant reminder of communities' "contamination" by the perpetrators of the genocide. Relegating survivors of genocidal sexual violence to the same cultural and religious zone as prostitutes thus removes them from the centre of community life and places them at the margins, thereby allowing communities to avoid confronting the trauma being "carried" by these survivors (Mgbako 2016). As a result, ostracized rape victims, such as Furaha, experience exacerbated feelings of degradation and lessened spiritual worth (Mukamana and Collins 2006, pp. 157–158).

Thus, as these testimonies attest, some rape survivors of the Rwandan genocide did experience a loss of or damage to their faith as the result of the violence they endured. Post-attack, they were left battling with and grieving for the faith they thought would protect and nurture them. As such, these women have experienced a terrible violence, not only to their bodies, but also to their spiritual and religious identity.

Genocidal Sexual Violence and the Affirmation of Faith

Reading through the testimonies in the previous section, one would be forgiven for assuming that all survivors would undoubtedly lose their faith in the aftermath of such suffering. Yet the majority of testimonies encountered indicate that Rwandan women who experienced genocidal sexual violence have often held onto their faith *despite* the trauma that they encountered. Indeed, Mukamana and Collins suggest that those who sought solace in their faith become "more resilient in adapting to the difficult conditions resulting from the traumatic events they experience" (2006, p. 158). For many of the survivors whose testimonies I discuss in this section, faith functions as a tool of resilience, a bringer of meaning, a harbinger of justice, and a stronghold of comfort.

The ostracism that the broader community forced upon many survivors rendered faith itself a safe haven. For example, Christian Tutsi survivor Adela Mukamusonera was publicly gang-raped by *Interahamwe* militia and nearly burnt alive by one of her attackers (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, pp. 60–61). Adela contracted HIV from her rapists and also suffers from ongoing physiological and mental health issues in the aftermath of her attack. Further, she succumbed to alcoholism in order to ease the pain of her ongoing struggle (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, p. 62). Post-genocide, Adela found herself rejected by her faith community as well as the broader community due to her status as a survivor—she was seen by her community as a constant reminder of the "pollution" (Sheth 2015, p. 341) they had incurred at the hands of Hutu. Enduring this ostracism, Adela found comfort in her Christian faith, stating, "Only God has not rejected me, I am alone in this world" (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, p. 62).

While Adela gained solace through God despite her widespread social rejection, other survivors found refuge in their faith-based communities due to the support and resources they provided (see Postmus 2013, p. 379). As one survivor, Ingrid, states, "The members of my church know that I am HIV-positive and they accept me. They said that I am to them an example of a good Christian" (Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008, p. 382). Ingrid's church not only provided spiritual sustenance by bolstering her own feelings of spiritual self-worth, they also offered her financial support by including her in a basket-making project organized by the church. This project allowed Ingrid to raise money for her family and share her experiences with other women. Ingrid's story thus demonstrates

that, for some survivors, faith can function as a source of comfort and strength (Mukamana and Collins 2006).

Building upon the suggestions of Mukamana and Collins (2006), Zraly and Nyirazinyoye's 2010 study directly examines the usefulness of faith as a tool of resilience among genocidal rape survivors. Here, the resilience methods employed by Rwandan survivors of sexual violence are explored, with faith being identified as a central tool of coping and resilience for this cohort. Zraly and Nyirazinyoye interviewed 44 female survivors, all of whom were affiliated with a religious community: 75 per cent were Catholic, 18 per cent were Protestant, and 7 per cent were Muslim (2010, p. 1659). From these interviews, three cultural-linguistic concepts of resilience arose; *kwihangana*, *kwongera kugaho*, and *gukomeza ubuzima* (p. 1660). *Kwihangana* implies "to strengthen oneself, to forbid suffering from becoming overwhelming" (ibid.). It focuses on the "force within," the term *kwihangana* meaning "to withstand something you have experienced that has hurt your heart" (ibid.). The second tool of this cultural-linguistic resilience is *kwongera kubaho*, "the reaffirmation of life after death" (ibid.). Here, "death" refers to survivors' own notions of their obliterated social, physical, and spiritual self-worth following their attack. Finally, *gukomeza ubuzima* builds directly upon *kwihangana* and *kwongera kubaho*. This term conveys a sense of willingness, effort making, or participation in one's own life (ibid.). *Gukomeza ubuzima* is to "accept your everyday problems and not to despair as if you were no longer alive; you rather believe that you [are] still on your way forward" (ibid.).

In order to enact *kwihangana*, *kwongera kugaho*, and *gukomeza ubuzima*, respondents of this study engaged in a number of faith-based practices including prayer, invoking a spiritual power, and "meaning-making," that is, interpreting and making sense of life experiences (Zraly and Nyirazinyoye 2010, pp. 1660–1661). One example of this "meaning-making" practice articulated by a study participant demonstrates how some survivors draw on their faith to give meaning to their rape in ways that inspire their will to survive, rather than their despair: "If those three or four people raped you and you survived, He [God] has another thing that He wants from us" (ibid.).

The use of such faith-based practices by survivors of genocidal sexual violence is not only evoked by the women in Zraly and Nyirazinyoye's 2010 study. Faith-based practices as a tool of resilience amongst genocidal sexual violence survivors is also discussed by Mukamana and Collins (2006), Zraly, Rubin, and Mukamana (2013), and Pfeifer and Waelty

(1999). In Mukamana and Collins' study of the psychological trauma experienced by Rwandan genocidal rape survivors, the words of Tutsi survivor Martha highlight the comfort and strength she achieved through prayer: "During and after the genocide I hated God and everyone. Later, I learnt from the Bible that if we trust in God he will help us to bear our burden and console us because he loves us. I prayed a lot and God helped me to cope with my situation. God is really my strength" (2006, p. 158). The value of prayer in the recovery process is also supported by Pfeifer and Waelty (1999), who similarly suggest that survivors who pray to a higher power are more likely to adjust to life in a positive manner after their attack than those who do not (cited in Mukamana and Collins 2006, p. 158).

In addition to prayer, "meaning-making" is discussed in Zraly, Rubin, and Mukamana's work in relation to Rwandan genocidal sexual violence survivors who became mothers as the result of their attack (2013). Take, for example, Alicia, who was married with three children before the genocide (p. 421). During the genocide, her husband was killed, while she and her children survived. Alicia actively employed "meaning-making" as a tool of resilience, stating, "Now I say that God deserves thanks because even though it happened to me, at least I still have my children, and this is enough for me" (ibid.).

All of these examples cited illustrate the ability of survivors' faith to provide renewed meaning and purpose in the lives of women who have endured a great deal of trauma. Unlike survivors whose faith was injured due to feeling betrayed by their deity and/or their religious community, these women gained spiritual and emotional strength from their positive understanding of grace, mercy, and divine will. While there are no discernible reasons to explain how survivors make spiritual sense of their trauma so differently, those who did turn affirmatively to their faith appear to have found at least some sense of peace and healing within their lives.

For survivors of sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide, connection to God also played a pivotal role in their acceptance of children born as the result of rape. As mentioned previously, rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing and genocide is used to traumatize both the individual and the community. Once penetrated, the victim has been "tainted" by "the enemy"; a child born of rape is thus generally considered an enemy of the victimized community (Reid-Cunningham 2008, p. 281). Both the pregnancies and children that result from these rapes are therefore a constant reminder of individual and collective trauma (p. 288). One such example

of this process is related by Chloe (Zraly et al. 2013). A Tutsi survivor who gave birth after being subjected to multiple rapes during the genocide, Chloe also contracted HIV as the result of these attacks. Her child was also born HIV-positive. A devout Catholic prior to the genocide, Chloe subsequently struggled with her faith. She felt a sense of abandonment by her deity and confusion surrounding her understanding of her baby as an "enemy" of her community. Upon returning to her church, however, she found the community accepted her and her child regardless of her status as a woman with HIV, who had survived genocidal sexual violence and given birth to a child of "the enemy." Moreover, the church helped her connect with her daughter; the healing she received through her faith enabled her to accept and love the child:

> I have begun to love that child of mine now since I have known God, normally I didn't love her because I knew that, I felt she is a Hutu indeed, thus a killer, I feel that God gave her to me … now I finally love her. Then in this loving her when I think that she will not live, I'm grieved more. (Zraly et al. 2013, p. 429)

Like Chloe, Venautie also experienced a sense of healing within her relationship with her child by means of her faith. Raped by two militiamen during the genocide, Venautie continued to live with one of these men as his "wife" for several years after the genocide, both because he supported her financially and because of the community acceptance that came with being in a "marriage," rather than the ostracism she would have endured as a survivor and single mother (Human Rights Watch 1996). Having a child with this man was traumatic for Venautie; her relationship with her God nevertheless helped her to accept her son: "When I realized I was pregnant, I thought that I had to accept it because it came from God … I must accept him—God sent him" (ibid.). The faith of both Chloe and Venautie allowed them to strengthen their love for their children, and gave them a sense of meaning in their lives after their attack.

In addition to being central to post-attack recovery, faith is also core to many survivors' notions of justice. The prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence in Rwanda has been a slow process. A domestic justice system, *gacaca*, was established in local communities in order to try individual cases of sexual violence that occurred during the genocide (Morris 2016, p. 38). This system, however, only tried 6608 cases of rape between 2008

and 2010, far less than the hundreds of thousands of cases that are believed to have occurred (ibid.). Part of the failure of this system was women's fear of retribution in going to trial, as all community members were permitted to be present (p. 41). Furthermore, the *gacaca* court required that it "had to be physically able to bring the accused to the trial in the specific locale where the rape took place" (p. 42). Hence, if the victim had fled the area, or the country, the case would never be heard (ibid.).

Due to these restrictions imposed by the *gacaca* court, some survivors instead found refuge in the judgement they expected to be handed down by their God. One such example is that of Marie Clare Uwera. Marie was forced to be the wife of Yubu, an *Interahamwe* militiaman, who raped her multiple times over her three-week detainment in his home (de Brouwer and Chu 2009, pp. 67–69). After escaping from Yubu's home, she was captured by another militiaman, who detained her in his home for two weeks, raping her numerous times each day (ibid.). She eventually contracted HIV from these attacks. Finding little justice in the *gacaca* courts and even in the death of her attackers, she believed that "only God can bring us justice. I hope that God will also bring me hope for the future" (p. 71). Marie Clare was comforted by her belief that, while there may not be earthly justice, there will be otherworldly justice meted out by God against her attackers.

Similarly, Maria, a moderate Hutu attacked by her own kinsmen, also found solace in the judgement she believed God would bring after being gang-raped and having her genitals mutilated at the hands of Hutu militia (Human Rights Watch 1996). As a result of this mutilation, Maria had to undergo a hysterectomy. She subsequently travelled to Belgium in 1995 for genital reconstructive surgery. Maria's rectal–vaginal wall and anal sphincter were, however, irreparably damaged and she was left with chronic physiological and gynaecological problems. Maria also contracted HIV as a result of her attacks. Like Marie Clare, Maria was nevertheless comforted by the judgement she believed God would bring against her attackers: "What has happened, has happened … now the question is how to survive. They have ruined my future … I hope God will punish them" (Human Rights Watch 1996). A belief in God's judgement helped Maria move forward emotionally after her attack, as she took comfort from her belief that her suffering would be avenged.

In stark contrast to the previous section, these survivors appear "more resilient in adapting to the difficult conditions resulting from the traumatic events they experience" (Mukamana and Collins 2006, p. 158).

Their testimonies attest to the multiple roles faith has played in their post-attack recovery—it is a tool of resilience, a bringer of meaning, a harbinger of justice, and a stronghold of comfort. Hence, while many of these women are still struggling and healing, faith is a core part of their ongoing recovery.

End Remarks

Sexual violence is a common weapon of war and genocide. This chapter has focused on the impact of genocidal sexual violence on the spirituality of Rwandan female survivors. It is clear from the testimonies of survivors that this violence often impacted their spiritual and religious identities. For some women, their experience of rape damaged or weakened their Christian faith; for others, it served to affirm, strengthen, or sustain faith. While it is difficult to discern what particular elements of these women's experiences determined their spiritual responses, it is evident that genocidal sexual violence impacted *all* parts of their sense of self—physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual.

In considering these testimonies of Rwandan rape survivors, I have illuminated two key findings in relation to genocidal sexual violence. First, it should not be assumed that survivors' faith will be lost as the result of their sexual assault. Indeed, the majority of testimonies I encountered indicate the opposite outcome—survivors are more likely to experience an affirmation of their faith than a sense of spiritual injury in the aftermath of their ordeal. Second, consideration must be given to both *internal* and *external* spiritual aspects of faith, specifically the roles of both individual faith *and* the faith community in the recovery of the survivor. For some survivors, spiritual distress and rejection by their faith community can serve as roadblocks to healing; for others, however, their faith and faith communities serve as invaluable tools to nurture their resilience and recovery. The tendency in contemporary biomedical discourses to assume that faith and religion have little to offer in the way of post-traumatic therapies fails to consider the evidence that, for some survivors, faith and religious belief will play a significant role in their mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Further research into the relevance of religion and spirituality for genocidal rape survivors is therefore vital, given the effects that it may have (for both good and ill) on their journeys towards recovery and healing.

Notes

1. While there is no correct definition of the term "genocide," this chapter employs the definition offered by Hinton (2012): "the more or less coordinated attempt to destroy a dehumanized and excluded group of people because of who they are." This definition recognizes genocide as coordinated, with intentionality beyond a typical legal definition. It also notes that the targeted group does not need to be a minority. For Hinton, genocide is more than the *physical* destruction of a group of people, but may rather refer to any destruction that prevents the group existing as itself.
2. I use the term "survivor" rather than "victim" to describe collectively those who have experienced genocidal sexual violence, primarily as a means of bearing testimony to their strength in surviving the most terrible violations.
3. A total of 93.5 per cent of the population of Rwanda identify as Christian; 49.6 per cent are Catholic and 43.9 per cent are Protestant (Twagilimana 2015, p. 3).
4. The experience of male survivors of genocidal sexual violence is no less significant than the accounts considered here; I am focusing on female survivors for two reasons. First, the testimonies available for study are predominantly those of female survivors. Second, the patriarchal social structure of Rwandan society provides a particularly poignant example of the post-genocide ostracism some women have faced, and the role of faith in that experience.
5. For a fuller history of Rwanda leading up to the genocide, see Prunier (1995).
6. Germany assigned Rwanda to Belgium in 1884, the colonizers immediately favouring the Tutsi people. By concentrating power in the hands of Tutsi, colonizers thus laid the foundation for ongoing tensions between Hutu and Tutsi. This was exacerbated in 1935 with the introduction of identity cards labelling the tribal affiliation of each individual. See Prunier (1995).
7. Linda Melvern (2004) suggests planning for widespread slaughter began in 1990 with the initial RPF invasion, while Prunier (1995) offers the later date of 1992 when President Habyarimana began negotiating with the RPF.

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