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## Voices of Youth Born of Genocidal Rape in Rwanda: Their Social Exclusion after 26 Years of Genocide

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## **Voices of Youth Born of Genocidal Rape in Rwanda: Their Social Exclusion after 26 Years of Genocide**

Elly Musafiri, Shyaka M. Aggée, George Gona, and Kenneth Ombongi

### **Abstract**

This article explains social exclusion issues of youth born of rape during the 1994 Genocide after 26 years of genocide. Their social exclusion is exclusively related to the circumstances under which they were conceived and born and living with a neglected identity that is associated with Hutu killers. Thus, the research problem centered on their identity issue which leads to their social exclusion. The research approach was qualitative in nature where data was collected through individual interviews with 81 respondents and a review of existing literature. The study used social exclusion theory to contextualize the life experiences of the youth born of rape during the genocide. Findings indicate that children are continuously perceived as ‘children of genocide perpetrators’, ‘children of killers’, ‘children of Hutus’ ‘little killers’, or ‘evil children – so they exist with identity complex and inferiority. Though their identity was not a result of their own making, findings indicate majority are not legally or socially recognized either on the maternal or paternal sides. As a result of these life experiences, they suffer from abuse, internalized stigma, hurt feelings, abandonment, discrimination, and marginalization due to the circumstances they were born as children of Hutu killers. Gradually, they are losing self-esteem; they lack meaningful existence and belongingness due to structural family and societal social exclusion.

**Keywords:** Genocide, rape victims, youth born of Tutsi rape, social exclusion, Rwanda.

### **Introduction**

This article aims to analyze social exclusion suffered by youth born of Tutsi rape during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. These youth face identity issues because their fathers were Tutsi killers. Brigitte Rohwerder shows that such children face problems of social exclusion and emotional well-being and that in some countries they face physical safety.<sup>1</sup> In some post-conflict countries, Karmen and Volčič explain that they are also isolated in social, economic, cultural, and political opportunities at family and societal levels in their respective post-conflict communities and countries.<sup>2</sup> In Rwanda, some mothers of rape children refused to register them while some lack love for their children. Others committed homicide since such children were related to their targeted killing. Those who chose to keep them lacked and are still lacking

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<sup>1</sup> Rohwerder, B., *Reintegration of Children Born of Wartime* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2019), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Erjavex, K., & Volčič Z., “Living with the Sins of their Fathers: An Analysis of Self-Representation of Adolescents Born of War Rape.” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25, no. 3 (2010), 360, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558410361373>.

traditional family support because these are related to *Interahamwe* militias that wanted to wipe-out the Tutsi ethnic group from the Rwandan territory and beyond. Some children are neglected by their “maternal and paternal families”<sup>3</sup> as well as the Tutsi community, to a certain extent, across the country.

The issue of children born in conflict-related sexual violence has received less attention in public and international policy interventions to address their needs and problems in a comprehensive manner. This is witnessed in countries like Darfur, Bosnia, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)<sup>4</sup>, Myanmar, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Kosovo, Peru,<sup>5</sup> and Uganda.<sup>6</sup> Worldwide, Neenan shows that the 2001 survey estimated tens of thousands of children were born of rape in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> For example, in Sierra Leone, between 215,000 and 257,000 women and girls were raped during war and as a result, 20,000 children were produced thereby posing a problem related to the provision of basic needs by a government that seemingly demonstrated limited concern.<sup>8</sup>

In Rwanda, many Tutsi women and girls were subjected to severe rape by Hutu militias where between 250,000 and 500,000 Tutsi women and girls were sexually assaulted, and between 10,000 and 20,000 children were born of Tutsi rape.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, these children have faced trauma arising from the psychological effects they have been subjected to, which has reduced their welfare and social inclusion in families, schools, and communities.<sup>10</sup> Since rape was used as a weapon of war and a campaign tool to destroy the Tutsi ethnic group, the children born of rape were labelled as the ‘children of hate’ or ‘children of bad memories’, ‘devil’s children while others referred to them as ‘little killers’.<sup>11</sup> In other countries, rape children in German are “Russian brats” in East Timor are called “children of shame”, in Nicaragua are called “monster babies”, and in Vietnam are called “dust of life” and “Chetnik babies” in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the major research objective is to critically analyse the social exclusion of youth born of Tutsi rape. The central research questions are: (1) Is the social exclusion of these children structural or inclined to the cultural/traditional norms? (2) Are there any interventions taken by the state or other actors in addressing the social exclusion faced by these children? The article first introduces the issue under study; it then discusses the theoretical clarification on social exclusion, research methods, and literature review on social exclusion of children born of rape in violent conflicts in a general perspective but with a focus on Rwanda, followed by the study findings and study conclusion.

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<sup>3</sup> Rohwerder, *Reintegration*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Baines E., “Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis,” *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2003), 450.

<sup>6</sup> Jackline, O. Atingo, *Children born in LRA captivity: The Case of Gulu District in Northern Uganda* (MA Thesis, The Hague: ISS, 2008), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>8</sup> Megan M., *The International Politics of Rape, Sex and Family in Sierra Leone* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2009), 34.

<sup>9</sup> Rohwerder, *Reintegration*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Wax, E., “Rwandans are struggling to love children of hate.” *The Washington Post*. March 28, 2004, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/03/28/rwandans-are-struggling-to-love-children-of-hate/dd942c7b-9287-42cc-8763-bd0675c0b73f/> ..

<sup>12</sup> Van E. E & Kleber, R., “Growing Up Under a Shadow: Key Issues in Research on and Treatment of Children Born of Rape,” *Child Abuse Review* 22, no. 6 (2013), 387.

## Theoretical orientation

The study uses social exclusion theory to systematize social exclusion faced by youth born of rape during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda who is discriminated against based on they were conceived and born – from a peace and conflict studies perspective. Artinson and Klassen argue that social exclusion theory has been used in different disciplinary fronts in the contemporary world to understand the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, and cultural life and, in some characteristics, alienation, and distance from mainstream society.<sup>13</sup> The youth born of rape continue to lack integration which leads to suffering deficiencies in important capabilities that affect their welfare and education. Therefore, this paper argues that social exclusion theory offers insights into to current challenges and the plight of these youth based on their perceived identity as “children of killers”.

Also, theorists in peace and conflict research agree that identity issues lead to social exclusion and deep social cleavages at family and societal levels.<sup>14</sup> More so, peace and conflict researchers agree that identity discrimination undoubtedly triggers the polarization of identity victims. Against this background, we argue that the issue of inclusion of the youth born of rape during the 1994 genocide at the individual, family, and community levels is a concern not only to them but also to their respective families which eventually affects the inclusive peacebuilding process in post-genocide Rwanda.

As well, this theorization enables us to understand the effects of social exclusion on these youth from an everyday life perspective and how it impacts life opportunities not only on the side of the youth but also to their mothers. Indeed, various researchers did this connection in various social disciplines but in Rwanda, there is no literature on this subject matter from a peace and conflict discipline. This way, this paper addresses this academic gap.

## Research methods

Like studying everyday resistance in post-genocide Rwanda, also studying social exclusion provides limited space for a certain group of Rwandans to openly speak their mind specifically in public or group interviews. This social exclusion research area started as part of my current Ph.D. research that is focusing on the role of citizens and civil society in peace-building and reconciliation processes in post-genocide Rwanda. In the due course and in particular, to the civil society, specifically the community-based organizations (which are part of civil society in the Rwandan legal framework) many of these organizations are run or were started by women composed of survivors of the genocide who later incorporated spouses of the genocide perpetrators. During individual and group interviews with members of these organizations, some shared their genocide memory from various perspectives, including rape. Among the Tutsi victims of rape, those who shared their rape experiences on various occasions revealed how they ended up being pregnant and gave birth to unwanted or unplanned children. In reference to

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<sup>13</sup> Artinson B. A., *Poverty in Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998b), 3 & Klasen S. *Measuring Poverty and Deprivation in South Africa* (University of Cambridge: Mimeographed, 1997), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Galtung, Johan. *Solving Conflicts: A Peace Research Perspective*. Honolulu: Institute for Peace, University of Hawaii, 1989.

Rwandan culture, giving birth to a child who is not in line with legal or traditional marriage or a girl giving birth outside the wedlock is extremely taboo.

Today, 26 years after the genocide – in reference to the above Rwandan culture where a woman or girl becomes pregnant not in common practices of culture and legal framework; the researcher picked interest to understand how these children are either inclusively or exclusively involved in social, economic and political affairs at family, community and political institutions. In this context, I made further contact with rape victims to explain to their children how I wanted to understand their social inclusion in Rwanda's post-genocide peace-building or reconciliation process mainly from the social fabric perspective. Interestingly, 81 out of 85 Tutsi rape victims adhered to my request informing me that their children were ready for interviews. Organizing group interviews of at least 9-12 interviewees per scientific standards was somehow difficult since many of the children lived in distant localities which led the researcher to opt for individual interviews only. The individual interviews were carried out personally by the researcher and transcribed later.

In this regard, the researcher carried out 7 interviews in Rusizi district and 7 interviews in Rubavu district, Western Province; 3 interviews in Gicumbi district and 9 interviews in Musanze district in Northern Province; 14 in Gasabo district, 12 interviews in Kicukiro district in Kigali city; 8 interviews in Huye district and 6 interviews in Nyanza district in Southern Province and 16 in Bugesera district in Eastern Province. Like it is mentioned above, a total of 81 interviews were conducted with children born of Tutsi rape and their 81 mothers – not forgetting that there were beautiful Hutu women that were also raped mistakenly of being Tutsi by their fellow Hutu perpetrators. In this context, 9 Hutu raped women and their children were also interviewed to get valid data about social exclusion. In total, 180 respondents participated in this study. Notably, the researcher had to confirm with genocide survivors through their associations that the children being interviewed are of women of Tutsi identity who were being targeted for rape as a weapon of Tutsi extermination. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed in Kinyarwanda and later translated into English by the researcher. The individual interviews were complemented by observation methods during different interview periods with interviewees. Furthermore, the researcher had informal conversations with the interviewees in their respective homes which also provided additional information on their social inclusion in families, communities, and schools since detecting silent and hidden social exclusion is a great challenge in families.

The lead researcher to have first met with their mothers who convinced them to hold interviews with the researcher, it provided more trust and confidence to the children to speak their minds. The information that emerged from the interviews and informal conversations was analyzed using analytical tools provided by social exclusion theory. In this context, the study used an interpretive exploration of their life experiences as a research strategy to understand social exclusion in the face of those who live with it. This required pure qualitative data analysis and interpretation methods, as summarised by Bogdan and Biklen as classifying, coding, comparing and weighing<sup>15</sup> the empirical data to get meaning from the subject under consideration in a more coherent and scientific explanation. Indeed, as John Gerring indicates that there is no lone approach to analyzing qualitative data<sup>16</sup> thus, data analysis kicked off after the early days of data collection. The essence was to shape the form of further questions and

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15 Bogdan R., and Knopp, B. S., *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992), 78.

16 n Gerring, J., *Social Science Methodology: Strategies for Social Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23.

more information to be collected in the next interviews so as to understand each case in a comprehensive manner and what they do not share and why. This is called the “simultaneous process” which is used to identify patterns and themes emanating from the interviewees’ views in order to reach saturation.<sup>17</sup> This enabled the researcher to reach at similar concepts and themes into coherent and consistent descriptions that eventually spoke to the research aim, research questions, and research objectives.

Though construct validity in interpretive exploration has been a subject of criticism in some studies due to the researcher’s subjectivity<sup>18</sup> the researcher adopted Yin’s four remedies: employing numerous sources of evidence, ascertaining a sequence of evidence, key informants reviewing the report, and effective listening skills.<sup>19</sup> In order to achieve valid and objective data, that is why children born of rape and their mothers (both Tutsi and Hutu) were interviewed. The four of Yin’s remedies were strictly followed and respondents had no contradiction with the third remedy.

### **Existing literature accounts for the social exclusion of children born of rape in wartime**

Based on the review of literature, in the last two decades, there has been a growing academic analysis of children born in wartime or conflict-violence. From the literature analysis, there are three major areas of academic debate: violation of human rights, social exclusion, and psychological issues of children born of rape. There are three dimensions of literature on this subject matter: Socio-cultural and socio-political stigmatization, identity issues as a prolonged issue without societal or legal remedy, and living with the historical un-chosen evil.

Starting with the sociocultural and socio-political stigmatization, Neenan found two types of stigmatization: ‘internalized’ and ‘external’ stigma. ‘Internalised’ stigma is defined as a child’s internalization of negative social perceptions of being born of sexual violence, to an ‘enemy’ father while ‘external’ stigmatization refers to “discriminatory acts and behaviours directed against a victim by others, often in a position of relative power”.<sup>20</sup> For example, Denov, et al., argue that in Northern Uganda, former Yugoslavia, and Colombia, such children live under ruthless and terrible conditions and this applies to their mothers and those who have been left out of building social cohesion processes<sup>21</sup>.

Denov, et al., further indicate that children born of rape in violent conflicts are forgotten, stigmatized, and remain invisible victims in their respective countries or in countries they have taken refuge in and are in most cases excluded in the processes of state-building and reconciliation in their later ages.<sup>22</sup> Neenan indicates that these children have suffered lifelong deprivation of basic human rights, security, life opportunities, and a sense of belonging and love,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>18</sup> Bryman, A., *Social Science Methods*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Yin, K. R., *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), 34.

<sup>20</sup> Neenan J., *Closing the Protection Gap for Children Born of War: Addressing Stigmatization and the Intergenerational Impact of Sexual Violence in Conflict* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2018), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Denov M., Woolner L., Bahati J. P., and Shyaka O. “The Intergenerational Legacy of Genocidal Rape: The Realities and Perspectives of Children Born of the Rwandan Genocide.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 35, no. 17-18, (2016), 3287. doi: [10.1177/0886260517708407](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517708407).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 3.

as shown in different academic and policy studies.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, rape history in Rwanda has been ignored by policymakers and their respective communities.<sup>24</sup> The above history has come to be considered a taboo item that most members of Rwandan society fear to talk about. Equally, the children born of rape are sometimes excluded in their families, communities, and schools.<sup>25</sup> From the literature, the common agreement is that the children born of rape are perceived as illegitimate both legally and culturally across post-conflict nations.

There is open and hidden harassment and hatred of such children at the family and community levels. In the case of Rwanda, Uwizeye et al. found that this is exacerbated by the fact that in Rwanda's society which is patriarchal in nature where children take their father's lineage – and this makes it difficult to be accepted in their mothers' families.<sup>26</sup> In Northern Uganda, such children are prevented to participate in social and economic activities either in their matriarchic or patriarchal families.<sup>27</sup> However, even before the genocide, any child born of rape or outside wedlock was regarded as a curse and abomination in Rwandan society. Denov and Piolanti, found out that associating such children with the *Interahamwe* militia is attributed to Rwanda's patriarchal lineage according to which children belong to their fathers and not their mothers.<sup>28</sup> Analytically, worldwide, such children tend to undergo similar experiences and end up becoming victims of exclusion, stigma, and discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

Denov and Kahn argue that in developing countries, it is contended that individuals, families, and communities as a whole are strictly attached to their cultural beliefs – they question the validity and legitimacy of children born outside wedlock.<sup>30</sup> This is what social exclusion theory describes as the permanent social rupture<sup>31</sup> between rape victims, their children born of rape, and their respective families. That is why children of rape violence 'continue to be a taboo' across post-conflict countries.<sup>32</sup>

On the second front, which is identity issues as a prolonged issue without societal and legal remedy, though Rwanda is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has demonstrated a strong commitment to children's rights, the question of social exclusion based on identity for genocide-born babies in Rwanda is still a societal complex issue.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Uwizeye et al., found that children born of rape or other violent circumstances are difficult to integrate into society due to their identity, and legal and societal norms.<sup>34</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>23</sup> Banyanga, J.D.A, Björkqvist K., and Österman K., "The Trauma of Women Who Were Raped and Children Who Were Raped as a Result of Rape During the Rwandan Genocide. Cases from the Rwanda Diaspora." *Pyrex Journal of African Studies and Development* 3, no. 4 (2018), 32.

<sup>24</sup> Devon, et al., *The intergenerational legacy of genocidal rape*, 324.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>26</sup> Uwizeye, G., DeVon, H., McCreary, L., Patil, L. C., Thayer, M. Z and Rutherford, J., "Children born of genocidal rape: What do we know about their experiences and needs?" *Public Health Nurse* (2022), 39, 350-359

<sup>27</sup> Denov, Woolner, Bahati and Shyaka, *The International Legacy*, 3289.

<sup>28</sup> Denov, M., & Piolanti, A. "Though My Father was a Killer, I Need to Know Him": Children born of genocidal rape in Rwanda and their perspectives on fatherhood. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 107, (2020), 104560.

<sup>29</sup> Denov, M., & Lakor, A. A. "When war is better than peace: The post-conflict realities of children born of wartime rape in northern Uganda. *Child Abuse & Neglect*," 65, (2017), 255– 265.

<sup>30</sup> Denov, M., & Kahn, S. 'They Should See Us as a Symbol of Reconciliation': Youth born of genocidal rape in Rwanda and the implications for transitional justice. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 11, no, 1, 2019, 154.

<sup>31</sup> Toby Seddon, "Drugs, Crime and Social Exclusion," *The British Journal of Criminology* 46, no. 4 (2005), 683.

<sup>32</sup> Denov, et al., *The intergenerational legacy of genocidal rape*, (2019), 3288.

<sup>33</sup> Pamela Abbott and Francesca Sapsford, *Rwandan Public Policy Observatory Report: Legal and Policy Framework for Children's Rights in Rwanda* (Kigali: Institute for Policy Analysis and Research, 2012), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Uwizeye, G., Thayer, Z. M., DeVon, H. A., McCreary, L. L., McDade, T. W., Mukamana, D., Park, C., Patil, C. L., & Rutherford, J. N. (2021). Double Jeopardy: Young adult mental and physical health outcomes following

such children whose identity is denied end up having their rights denied by and within their families or communities due to an insecure sense of belonging either to the paternal or maternal sides.

Kahn and Denov show that for someone to become a member of a society or group, they must fulfill certain conditions that depict their origin, values, culture, ethnic affiliation, religion, and language.<sup>35</sup> All this resonates with Rwanda's situation where most children born of rape during and in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi were denied a sense of belonging<sup>36</sup> and yet they were not responsible for what happened. In other countries like Bosnia, Colombia, Timor-Leste, Nicaragua, and Uganda children born as a result of violence continue to face human rights abuses and neglect because there is a significant facet of the protection gap which lies in the state's failure to respect and protect human rights of children born of rape.<sup>37</sup>

On the last front, living with the historical un-chosen evil, psycho-social consequences suffered by these children include improper interpersonal maturity, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, and the development of psycho-social disorders.<sup>38</sup> A study conducted by Binaifer Shalihah and Fiqri, found that all this has developed into superficial relations between the family members and the community.<sup>39</sup> In Rwanda, some of this young generation was infected with HIV/AIDS and their children also contracted the disease.<sup>40</sup>

In other countries, Neenan indicates that children of sexual violence in countries like Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone, Peru, and Uganda are being neglected in national and international post-conflict policies due to ethnonational narratives.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Eramian and Denov, shows that abuse and neglect of children born of rape are common practice by mothers, family members and society at large in most post-conflict situations.<sup>42</sup> As well, Devon, et al., demonstrates that some children born of rape during the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi were neglected by their mothers, family members, and communities. Also, Carpenter writes that "children conceived in rape are at a greater risk of abuse by their mothers and their extended families that seem to lack resources and emotional capacity to care for them".<sup>43</sup>

This goes with names attributed to such children. For example, in Kosovo, they are labeled as "children of shame", in Colombia, they are called "children of the green people" or *paraquitos*, in Timor-Leste are called "children of the enemy", in Uganda are labeled as "rebel

conception via genocidal rape during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. *Social Science & Medicine*, 278, (2021), 113938.

<sup>35</sup> Kahn, S., & Denov, M. "We are children like others": Pathways to mental health and healing for children born of genocidal rape in Rwanda. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 56, no. 3, (2019), 510-528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461519825683>

<sup>36</sup> Muhayisa, A., Datchet, A., Mukarusanga, I., & Duret, I. "Que deviennent les enfants nés du viol et leur mère vingt ans après le génocide au Rwanda?" *Thérapie Familiale*, 37, no. 2, (2016), 151-170. <https://doi.org/10.3917/TF.162.0151>

<sup>37</sup> Neenan, *Closing the protection*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Shanahan, F., & Veale, A. "How mothers mediate the social integration of their children conceived of forced marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army. *Child Abuse & Neglect*", 51, (2016), 72- 86.

<sup>39</sup> Shalihah, F., & Fiqri, M. R. Overview of Human Rights Violations Against Rohingya Ethnicity in Burma and Uighur Tribe in China in International Law Perspectives. Paper presented at the *International Conference on Law Reform (INCLAR 2019)*, 2022, 48- 53

<sup>40</sup> Denov, Myriam, Shevell and Meaghan. "An Arts-Based Approach with Youth Born of Genocidal Rape in Rwanda: The River of Life as an Autobiographical Mapping Too". 11, no.1 (2021), 21-39.

<sup>41</sup> Neenan, *Closing the protection*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Eramian, L., & Denov, M. "Is it always good to talk? The paradoxes of truth-telling by Rwandan youth born of rape committed during the genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*", 20, no. 3, (2018), 372- 391.

<sup>43</sup> Carpenter, *Forced maternity*, 229.



children”, in Bosnia; they are called “Chetnik babies” and “monster babies” in Nicaragua.<sup>44</sup> Such naming exacerbates external and internal stigmatization, neglect, and abuse in legal, cultural, social, and economic spheres. This is no different in Rwanda, as explained in the introductory section. Nonetheless, during adolescence, many questions cross their minds regarding their acceptance by and integration into society. However, Rwanda’s patriarchal society does not help these children because culturally children are identified with their fathers’ lineage and are therefore linked to the perpetrators of the genocide who were ‘enemies of the Tutsi’.<sup>45</sup>

Hence, these children have become a liability to the victims of genocide and their families. This explains why many of these children are facing stigmatization and/or abuse on daily basis. Zamperini et al., argue that some children are even forced to move out of the maternal family due to abuse and stigmatization of the family members,<sup>46</sup> which has been the case in Rwanda. Van Ee and Kleber explain that the anguish of their experiences is so unbearable that children feel insecure about their future.<sup>47</sup> The reviewed literature indicates that these children have caused deep divisions and frustration in their mothers’ families because they are perceived as unwanted children.

### **Study findings: Social exclusion of youth born of Tutsi rape after 26 years of genocide in Rwanda**

This findings section explains the family and societal social exclusion, and denial of basic and fundamental rights of the youth born of rape after 26 years of genocide. The section also highlights how this young generation is living in an abnormal way in an abnormal un-chosen life and how they are excluded in the state-building and reconciliation processes.

#### ***Family and societal threads of social exclusion***

There exist identity and cultural connotations associated with youth born of rape during the 1994 genocide due to the circumstances these children were born in. Rwandan society despises any child born as a result of rape or outside wedlock. They are labeled as unwanted children fathered by *Interahamwe* killers. They are called names like “little killers”, “young killers” children of killers” or “products of killers”. On the maternal side, they are viewed as Hutu children. This creates a sense of hostility and stigmatization from their paternal and maternal families, in schools and across Rwandan society. This creates an internalized guilt on a daily basis at the intrapersonal level. This life experience exacerbates the socioeconomic and psychological conditions of these youth. One of the youths had this to say: “Even when I visit my father’s home, I get traumatized because he hates me and always threatens to beat me and that I am the source of shame to their family”. A rape victim noted that “the perpetrators’ families are very

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<sup>44</sup> Neenan, *Closing the protection*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Zamperini, A., Bettini, M., Spagna, F., & Menegatto, M. Mothers and children of violence: Memorialization, reconciliation, and victims in post-genocide Rwanda. *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 24, no. 3, (2017), 317– 331.

<sup>47</sup> Van Ee and Kleber, *Growing up under a shadow*, 390.

hostile to rape victims and their children to the extent that their children cannot make a visit to their paternal families”.

Therefore, the children born of rape are perceived as an abomination to the families where they are born. So, they face a question of belongingness in terms of identity affiliation – they are neither Hutu nor Tutsi, and family affiliation where the majority are neglected by their maternal and paternal sides. Since all are currently grown-ups, some chose to distance themselves from their families due to the shame that is attached to the circumstances were born. Some never wish to return to their villages of origin due to mistreatment and the perception that they are children of killers. Others cut ties with their mothers and some mothers felt relieved since they perceived these children as a shame to their Tutsi families. Indeed, some rape victims asserted that these children were a “curse” or a burden to their identities – though some cited a lack of support from families or from the government.

As well, at the community level, the lack of belonging continues to be experienced. They are subjects of social discussion as children of genocidal rape despite the fact that some conceal their identities. They described this experience as “being cursed” due to the crimes committed by genocidal rapists and it is likely to be an intergenerational legacy. Their life is an emotional trauma and abuse. Some have resorted to using drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism after discovering the origins of their birth and others have opted to live outside Rwanda.

Therefore, social exclusion is a social disadvantage that infringes one’s right to belong to a family and society, particularly where mothers of the raped children perceive their children as ‘symbols of trauma’. To make it worse, rape victims argue that many victims cannot identify their rapists because some Tutsi women and girls were raped by Hutu males in a single hour or a day. That is why even some mothers committed infanticide.

### ***Denial of basic and fundamental rights***

Most of the Tutsi women who gave birth to children after being raped ended up not registering their children because the parent (mother) felt ashamed of registering her child because she considered the former to be associated with ‘evil’. The majority have been denied the right to access education, the right to a family membership, and the right to inheritance either in their patriarchal or matriarchal families. In the Huye district, a child born of rape said that “he was denied membership to the family due to circumstances associated with his birth, ethnic belonging, and physiognomy”. Some of the sampled youths argued that the problem lies with the government since there are no mechanisms set aside to deal with such a social problem that occurred at the end of the genocide against the Tutsi. This might heighten further risks of victimization.

The needs of these young people currently seem to be unattended to by their respective families, civil society, and the state in general. Many of them think that their civil, economic, and cultural rights have been denied to them. Nonetheless, despite such bad memories, the latter has a right to citizenship because most of them were given National Identity Cards as *bona fide* Rwandans.

To date, the government of Rwanda has not yet set reparation programs for such people and their mothers. The contestation of their identity makes them more vulnerable to the rising levels of poverty in Rwanda. They continue to be precluded from inclusive development and some are no longer bearing the brunt of being denied basic rights that begin within a family and community setting. Indeed, such obstacles “can adversely affect their exercise of a range of other

human rights and impede durable solutions for their integration into family and society while the transition to adulthood”<sup>48</sup>.

Youths born of rape should have equal access to socio-economic, life skills, and family opportunities as well as secure safe housing, alongside psychosocial support and counseling. This is a central pillar in building and sustaining social justice for all despite the deprivation of their basic human rights.

### ***Living with the normal un-chosen evil***

It is a painful life legacy and profoundly traumatic in nature because of the poor parent-child relationship that resulted in abusive parenting and neglect. Many have chosen to live with the unchosen evil characterized by great social stigma as well as related severe psychological and psychosocial effects. Some are denied to participate in family activities – hence prompting some to quit their families by joining street life or working for money to survive at an early stage – as well as dropping out of school. For almost two and half decades now, some Rwandans still describe them as “children of hate” or “seeds of killers”. Associating these young people with genocide killers has far-reaching consequences of social exclusion.

These young people perceive the current political system, the church, and civil society to have neglected their right to participate in building family social inclusion, social cohesion, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. None of the actors have stood up with them to fight the unchosen evil. Despite having Rwandan citizenship, they are profoundly riddled with injustice, hopelessness, and neglect by their respective families and the state institutions whose dockets deal with children and youth affairs. They continue to live with unbearable likelihoods against them. A child born of rape argued, “I feel the guilt and embracement of how I was born. Sometimes, I think of committing suicide to avoid this traumatic life experience”.

What hurts them more are hateful labels. They are accused of having “genes of genocide”, “genes of violence”, or “devil’s children”. This is often committed by family members and their respective communities.

Nothing recognizes them as victims by law. They think that the sustainable future of Rwanda is impossible without recognizing and acknowledging the existence of each Rwandan identity on an equal basis, as stipulated in article 7 of the 2003 Constitution and as it is amended to date. To avoid a painful legacy, they recommend mental health support and inclusive citizen participation to attain just peace across sections of the post-genocide society. These young people are not recognized as victims of poor politics that characterized Rwanda in the late years of independence and after which culminated into the genocide in which they were born as seeds of rape.

On the other hand, mother victims of rape do live with the unchosen evil. For example, a rape victim stressed that “these children constantly remind us of our past violence and even my family does not want to see this child at all in their eyes”. Another respondent added, “Whenever

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48 See the Joint Statement by CEDAW and CRC on Ensuring prevention, protection, and assistance for children born of conflict-related rape and their mothers

I look at the face of my child, I remember those killers who massacred my nuclear and extended families and also the Hutus who gang-raped me”.

### Voices of the rape victims

Raped mothers face a similar traumatic experience to their children. Banyanga et al. explain that genocide perpetrators in Rwanda used rape as a weapon to exterminate the entire race. The authors add that “men who were HIV positive intentionally transmitted the virus through rape, and many Tutsi women were given as gifts to Hutus who had excelled at killing Tutsis”<sup>49</sup>. Des Forge adds that rape was used as a strategy to annihilate the Tutsi race. Amnesty International indicates that the rape done in Rwanda was not an individual act but was a crime planned by the State.<sup>50</sup>

Many rape victims contended that rape was a systematic weapon that consisted of rape, mutilation, and molestation. They argue that rape was done in hospitals, churches, checkpoints, closed houses, or government buildings, bushes, streets, and cultivated land. Interviewees narrated how some Hutu women who physically resembled Tutsi women were also raped in case they carried no identity cards. Some rape victims were infected with HIV/AIDS. Those who were infected with HIV/AIDS are continuously suffering from physical and psychological pain. Many of them are traumatized by the disease and are irritated by how they were infected.

Rape victims are continuously being marginalized by their community members which leads to traumatic life experiences as well as social, mental, and somatic disorders. Although a lot of funds have been provided by the government to support such victims in the health sector the problem still persists. Secondly, the Tutsi girls who were raped have failed to get married because of the cultural shame attached to rape. Victims of rape have become objects of stigma, marginalization, and isolation and this has rendered the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes ineffective at individual, family, and community levels. The social relationship between the families of victims and the families of perpetrators has deteriorated. Some rape victims have also abandoned their children born of rape because of the perception that their fathers were genocide killers or “Hutu killers”. This has led to moral deprivation of the victims. A rape victim in the Rusizi district narrated that “these children constantly remind us of our past violence and even my family does not want to see this child at all, in their eyes” Another respondent in the Gasabo district added, “Whenever I look at the face of my child, I remember those killers who massacred my nuclear and extended families” and another in Huye district argued that that “this child reminds me of the Hutus who gang-raped me”.

As a result, these children have become a problem to the victims of rape and their families. Culturally children are identified with their fathers’ lineage and children of rape are therefore linked to the perpetrators of the genocide who were ‘enemies of the Tutsi’. The end result is that some children have been denied recognition into their patriarchal or matriarchal families simply because they were fathered by the ‘*Interahamwe*’.

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<sup>49</sup> Banyanga, Björkqvist & Österman, *The Trauma of Women Who Were Raped*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> Amnesty International (2004). Rwanda: "Marked for death", rape survivors living with HIV/AIDS. Retrieved from: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4129fd524.html> - accessed on August 8, 2018

## **Conclusion**

The problems faced by youth born of Tutsi rape in post-genocide Rwanda are not far different from other post-conflict countries. The similarity in their experiences is mainly seen at the level of family and society in socio-economic and identity exclusions. Social exclusion involves limitation or denial in accessing family resources, inability to participate in family and society activities and relationships, and inheritance rights as enshrined in Rwandan laws and regulations. It is important to note that the social exclusion of youth born of rape is entirely related to identity issues where they are linked to the killers of the Tutsi social group. In particular, the social exclusion of youth born of rape is about the deprivation of their rights and exercising social relations in family and societal settings whereas on the side of their mothers is about sexual violence and its impact in the post-genocide period.

From the analytical point of view, social exclusion is largely informed by identity myths since colonialism that characterized Rwandan politics and social relations which also shaped the country's politics after independence and culminated in the 1994 genocide. As well, to a lesser extent, social exclusion of children is based on cultural norms where a child born of rape or outside the wedlock is perceived as a taboo in Rwandan societal settings. Whereas, "identity and selfhood are formed through social relations with others", identity in prior and post-genocide Rwanda is informed by an illiberal political landscape not by ascribed statuses though leaders pretend to be working in that line of democratic operationalization where people chose their identity alignment. Rwandans have no democratic autonomy to choose or formulate their identities, as applied to the children born of rape. This thoroughly explains why children born of Hutu rape against the Tutsi, are caught up in the history of the past and present politics of contemporary ethnicisation in Rwanda.

The policy of family and societal development remains non-inclusive due to the complicity of the past. To make it worse, children born of rape during the genocide are not recognized by law as victims of past violence. In one way or the other, this is a constraint to sustainable peace at individual and family levels. In solving this problem, social dialogue between the families of rape victims and perpetrators of rape is therefore advocated for. It is this dialogue that will create sustainable interpersonal relationships in the quest to understand the past and build for the future.

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