Personhood, Violence, and the Moral Work of Memory in Contemporary Rwanda

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Vol. 8 (1) 2014

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Why do Rwandan genocide survivors informally remember not only the kin they lost in the 1994 genocide, but also losses suffered by friends and acquaintances? Drawing on one year of ethnographic fieldwork in the Rwandan university town of Butare, I argue that survivors are at pains to reconstitute their personhood in the absence of relations, and informal memory practices are a form of moral work by which they struggle to do so. I show that survivors maintain limited exchange relations with the dead by thinking of them regularly in return for protection and guidance, and that they use their knowledge of others' losses to stake moral claims to still being "of" Butare. I theorise these narratives using anthropological perspectives on the constitution of personhood through memory and social relationships. The moral demands of remembering the dead give rise to complex predicaments with which survivors of violence must contend as they navigate what it means to dwell in a present that is marred by the absence of significant others.

It was tax season in Rwanda, and Pauline,[1] a widowed genocide survivor, and small business owner in her fifties, was worried about not being able to make her payments before the 31 March deadline. We had been discussing these and other challenges she faces in running her business when her thoughts took a seemingly unexpected turn:

> You know, a survivor I know came to see me the other day. She lost all of her family in 1994 except for an uncle and a sister-in-law. I have the impression that she isn't well. It seems that some of her family's remains were recently found not far from here. What's a person to do when they hear that kind of news?[2]

(March 2009, Butare)

During my fieldwork in the Rwandan university town of Butare in 2008–2009, narratives like Pauline's that attest to losses in the 1994 genocide arose in the course of

everyday conversation with Tutsi survivors. These informal practices of remembering, which I witnessed several times a week and sometimes several times in a day, were typically directed at establishing how many and what kinds of relations people had lost or the circumstances of their deaths. Accounts were more like short interludes in conversations than formal memorial practices symbolically demarcated from the everyday as in official commemorations. Sometimes seeing a person or place or object seemed to precipitate these testimonials; at other times, I had no idea what brought them on. Even though these interjections went by quickly, I contend that their duration is not indicative of their significance. Strikingly, survivors spoke less often about their own losses than of the numbers and categories of kin lost by other town residents, many of whom were no more than acquaintances.

1   All names used here are pseudonyms, and some details of people's lives have been changed to further protect their identities.

2   All interviews and conversations cited in this article took place in French. All translations are mine.

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In this article, I use anthropological perspectives on remembering as a moral practice tied to personhood to understand what survivors are doing when they recount who lost whom in 1994. I argue that genocide survivors in Butare undertake a crucial form of moral work when they informally – yet habitually – attest to their own and others' losses in the genocide. I call this "work" because of the *effort* undertaken to reckon with the violent past – work that is moral because it constitutes a "continuous practical judgment in the living of a moral life," a life composed of both "speaking the future and speaking the past" (Lambek 2006, 213). Indeed, remembering is a moral practice because memory is itself a function of social relationships (Lambek 1996), which encompasses an understanding of obligations concerning what is owed to others, including the dead. Through informal remembering, survivors lay bare concerns about personhood and their place in the world that remain peripheral in prominent frameworks on memory and violence. The argument is predicated, first, on the anthropological view that one's social relationships, especially kinship and exchange of shared substances like food or drink, are constitutive of one's personhood (Geertz 1973; Mauss 1967 [1925] and 1985 [1938]; Strathern 1988), and second, on the challenges that genocide survivors – especially educated ones – face in claiming to be fully "of" Butare. It is in the context of a devastating history of violence in which persons have lost so many relations that these dimensions of remembering come into particularly sharp relief. The dead are by no means absent from the world of the living, but their presence is a terribly partial one that survivors struggle to maintain.

During my fieldwork, I investigated not only memory practices around the genocide, but also their intersection with socially charged relationships of work, friendship, neighbourliness, and clientship. It was in conversations on these and other topics that informal remembering of genocide victims arose. Interviews and conversations took place in private homes, at the National University, at people's workplaces, at local *cabarets* [bars], and on walks around the town and its surroundings. Given my interest in how town residents navigate unequal social relationships, I worked with many affluent people (such as university professors, NGO workers, clergy, and small business owners) in addi-

tion to low-income residents like motel cleaners, waitstaff, and the unemployed. The voices of the affluent are disproportionately represented here because most of the lower income residents I spoke with were migrant workers, a category characterised by high turnover, who knew relatively little about other Butareans. The urban survivors with whom I did my fieldwork – roughly even numbers of male and female – all had at least some secondary education and spoke French fluently. They had lived in town between ten and forty years, but all of them had a rural upbringing and all faced the daunting task of rebuilding their livelihoods after the devastation of the genocide – two points that they emphasised when wishing to express commonality with the rural majority. I am mindful that educated urban dwellers are not representative of all Rwandans or even all Butare residents, but the post-genocide sense of social dislocation that my research participants express is by no means restricted to persons of their social position; Claudine Vidal (2001, 6) has noted similar findings among survivors in other towns and in rural areas. Thus, while educated residents might be especially at pains to articulate their knowledge of what happened and to whom in 1994, all genocide survivors must contend with the problem of how to manage the absence of relations. I focus on this subset of Butareans because the moral demands of remembering and the post-1994 difficulties of claiming belonging are especially visible among a mobile elite with strong affective ties to the local.

Informal narratives of loss were often recounted to me alone in private settings, but similar talk between Butareans suggested that these were not accounts solely for filling in outsiders on what happened in 1994. However, a researcher's presence affects the social situation and what is said or not in ways that cannot be easily ascertained, and so the content of the conversations I present here may differ from ordinary discourse between town residents. For instance, people's knowledge of my interest in memory practices may have elevated the frequency of these narratives. There is also a broader post-1994 moral imperative not to make too much of one's own problems because everyone is suffering the effects of violence. This tendency may have shaped conversations with me and could account for why others' losses were emphasised over one's own.

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The argument unfolds in four parts. First, I outline two prominent approaches to understanding the relationship between memory and violence in Rwanda and in other cases of political conflict. I suggest that neither one exhausts the question of how personhood is transformed by violence. Second, I situate my research participants' memory practices in anthropological perspectives on personhood. In the last two sections, I detail two key ethnographic findings: first, that survivors maintain limited relations with the dead based on long-standing precepts as to what the living owe the deceased and second, that informal memory practices do the moral work of locating the speaker in the social space of Butare.

One might ask why I focus on the memory practices of Tutsi survivors when it is well recognised that scores of Hutu also lost family in the genocide and its aftermath. Since I worked with both Hutu and Tutsi town residents over the course of my fieldwork, to focus only on Tutsi losses seems to uncritically reproduce the Rwandan government's denial of Hutu victimhood in the genocide and of crimes perpetrated by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) against Hutu throughout the civil war of the 1990s and after the RPF took power in July 1994. However, recollections of Hutu loss of life remained less accessible to me since they were raised only very rarely, in private settings with trusted interlocutors. Rwandans who speak openly of Hutu deaths open themselves to accusations of "revisionism" and of spreading the "double-genocide" thesis, a dangerous crime because it undermines the narrative of Tutsi victimhood that is central to the government's political legitimacy.[3] Indeed, while struggles for official acknowledgement of subaltern or marginalised memory are common in other postcolonial settings (e.g. Werbner 1998), the current political moment explains why we do not find substantial studies on the subject in Rwanda. Nonetheless, this fraught situation raises a compelling question: if my research participants' informal recollections are not attempts to set the record straight against a national narrative that denies their victimhood, why are survivors at pains to articulate them?

1. Beyond Memory, Nation, and Psychosocial Healing

Two sets of approaches are prominent in pursuit of questions about remembering, and by extension, forgetting, the violent past in the Rwandan context. The first considers the politics of memory and nation building and how narratives of the past are implicated in forging national identifications, reconciliation or forms of exclusion. In Rwanda, the political uses of memory raise the question of what a "just allotment" (Ricoeur 2004, xv) of memory and forgetting might be in terms of the nation's capacity to forge unifying forms of belonging. On the one hand, scholars ask whether national memory politics are reproducing the ethnicised fault lines of the 1990s. Many researchers express concern that even as the government frames public remembering of genocide victims in terms of promoting unity, it risks reproducing the opposition between reified groups: Tutsi-victim versus Hutu-perpetrator. These concerns are linked to the state restriction of victimhood to Tutsi at official commemorations of the genocide and the suppression of open dialogue about the past (Burnet 2009; Hintjens 2008; Vidal 2004). On the other hand, some scholars suggest that remembering violence on a public level might provide the means to overcome past conflicts by forging national unity and reconciliation and thereby prevent future violence or denial of genocide (Staub 2003). Many scholars have focused directly on this tension between remembering violence as obstacle versus pathway to peace and take up these questions vis-à-vis commemorative events and judicial processes (Buckley-Zistel 2006; Longman and Rutagengwa 2006; Rettig 2008).

A second set of approaches focuses on the relationship between memory and the psychosocial injuries of political violence. Some Rwanda scholars have characterised remembered violence – or the inability (or refusal) to narrate it – as a form of suffering to be addressed through

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[3] Scholars have noted a veritable "conspiracy of silence" by the Rwandan government when it comes to Hutu victimisation (Richters 2010, 177; Vidal 2001, 45). The exception to the public denial of Hutu suffering and loss of life is the demarcation of the "Hutu moderates" category of genocide victims. As Nigel Eltringham (2004, 75–76) notes, however, this category is only used retrospectively to refer to Hutu killed in the 1990s for their opposition to the genocide. The troubling implication is that all "moderate" Hutu are dead and that those still alive supported the campaign of violence.

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therapeutic interventions for individual or social healing (Staub 2003, Steward 2008). These approaches engage with the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), its degree of cross-cultural universality and long-standing debates around the nature of traumatic memory, its relationship to "normal" memory, recovery from psychosocial wounds, and intergenerational transmission of trauma (Argenti and Schramm 2010, Herman 1992; Young 1995). Here, the normative question of how much to remember or forget arises again, although the concern is as much with the psychological wellbeing of the individual as it is with collective cohesion (and it is worth remembering that the analogy between the individual and collective healing from the effects of violence is not uncontroversial [Young 1993]). In terms of Rwanda, central questions revolve around what healing interventions ought to look like, especially whether truth telling by victims and perpetrators and remembering violence is, indeed, cathartic (Brouneus 2010).

We could theorise informal memory practices using either of these approaches. We could read survivors' attestations to loss as ongoing preoccupations with the past and evidence that ethnic schisms persist in the face of government reconciliation and de-ethnicisation policies. We might theorise that a compulsion to recount one's own or others' losses indicates ongoing psychosocial suffering from experiences of violence. Perhaps people speak more often of others' losses because it is less painful to communicate what happened to others in 1994 than to talk about one's own absent relations. There were certainly times during my fieldwork when people showed concern for the question of what individual or collective "healing" entails or what the national political stakes of remembering violence might be. Nonetheless, I found that the significance of informal memory practices in Butare exceeds these approaches. While I am cautious of drawing too sharp a line between different "levels" of belonging, for the purposes of understanding what people are doing in their everyday memory practices, I find it useful to analytically distinguish between belonging at the "imagined" (Anderson 1991) level of the nation and belonging in one's immediate social world of face-to-face relationships. By focusing primarily on the latter (but without losing sight of the former), I show how informal memory reaches into a complex repertoire of

modes by which persons claim belonging in their social worlds and engage in moral practices vis-à-vis the dead.

2. Personhood at the Nexus of Collective and Individual Remembering

Two perspectives on the relationship between personhood and remembering violence frame this analysis. First, some may argue that attestations to other town residents' losses are not "memories" at all in the sense that they may not concern what the speaker saw first hand. However, if we take remembering as an active process that transmits knowledge of the past between persons (Connerton 1989), then such practices are not outside the realm of "memory." My research participants do not claim vicarious memory of events they never witnessed; they are instead remembering the fact of others' losses and that there were once persons with them who are now gone. Informal remembering thus functions as a form of collective memory in the sense of a shared body of knowledge (Wertsch and Roediger 2008) – in this case, about who lost whom in the genocide. This is not to say that this body of knowledge is uncontested, static or unchanging, but since Butare's genocide survivors are remarkably knowledgeable about how many and what kinds of relations others lost, I heard little debate over these facts.

Second, if remembering and personhood are mutually constitutive, then any strict dichotomy between individual and collective memory obscures the fundamentally social nature of the person. In order to focus on the social constitution of personhood through these practices of remembering, we must, as Jeffrey Olick (1999, 346) suggests, overcome our common tendency to treat individuals and collectivities as strictly separate kinds of entities. Among the survivors with whom I worked, memory is a practice through which the shared body of knowledge of who lost whom in 1994 is deployed to make moral claims about social relationships and their absence. Indeed, a shared body of knowledge on losses incurred in 1994 is built through intersubjective remembering that is inseparable from the processes by which they struggle to reconstitute personhood in the absence of significant others.

Personhood is a cornerstone of the anthropological analysis of social life. It deals with how people respond to the question: "Who are you?" Personhood is the basis on

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which one becomes a recognised member of one's social world and understands one's location in social relationships. Anthropologists underscore that the "egocentric person" – the classic Western model of a bounded, autonomous individual and bearer of a unique identity – is by no means a universal view of the person and may not even properly capture Westerners' experiences of selfhood.[4] A relational or "socio-centric" notion of personhood in which persons do not "have" relations but are rather constituted by them is common to many an African context (Riesman 1986) and beyond (Geertz 1973; Strathern 1988). Taylor (1992, 2005) has underscored the relational nature of the Rwandan social person, which is never complete and is always being built out of relations with others. Exchange of social fluids like beer and milk create and maintain relationships that constitute persons, and the exchange of sexual fluids through the fusion of each parent's "gift of self" explains how a child is produced (Taylor 1992). Danielle De Lame (1996), in her ethnography of the rural hill of Murundi, has demonstrated how the nuanced practice of beer sharing and other exchange relations are central to the forging of belonging and recognition among co-residents. While rural survivors stress the economic hardships of having lost key relations in 1994 (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 139) more so than educated urban dwellers, this relational conception of personhood that bridges urban and rural contexts helps to grasp why authors like Vidal (2001) found forms of social dislocation among rural survivors not unlike those expressed by educated Butareans.

During my fieldwork, I noted a relational configuration of the person in Butare residents' tendency to refer to others by kinship status more often than by their names. Such practices indicate that personhood and "who one is" are deeply connected to the question of to whom one is related and how.[5] A friend or acquaintance with children is called *la maman* or *le papa* more often than by name, and modifiers for age or other characteristics are used to distinguish people from each other (e.g. *le vieux papa*). Teknonymy, a

practice by which parents are referred to by the names of their children, is also prominent in Butare. For example, friends and family of a married couple, Ferdinand and Josephine, usually called them by the teknonyms they acquired after the birth of their son, Kalisa: Mama-Kalisa and Papa-Kalisa. While kinship relations are by no means the only way in which personhood is configured in Butare (clientship and friendship are notable, too), I restrict my discussion to them because they are the central foci of informal attestations to loss and exchanges with the dead.

The question is, how do people who suddenly, and moreover violently, lost many or even most of their relations in the 1994 genocide locate themselves in the absence of these relations? There are many possible approaches to this question, but I look here to memory, the temporal axis of personhood (Antze and Lambek 1996, xxv). To draw on Paul Antze's (1996) felicitous phrase, albeit in a very different ethnographic context, by *telling stories* – even very short ones interjected into other lines of conversation – survivors are *making selves* in the absence of relations that constitute the person. Indeed, echoing the way Janet Carsten (2000) has shown that relatedness is forged through shared substance, sentiment or space, in Butare shared experience and *knowledge* of one another's loss and dislocation also constitute grounds on which people engender belonging.

3. The Moral Economy of Exchange with the Dead
Genocide victims are not inert or absent from the world of the living. The notion that the dead are still involved in the affairs of the living is not a new, post-1994 phenomenon in Rwanda. In Rwandan cosmology, ancestor spirits can make malevolent interventions in the lives of the living, but thinking of them and making symbolic gestures of exchange maintains good relations (see also Taylor 1992). The duty to think of the dead has become all the more pressing vis-à-vis those who died so violently in 1994 and whose memorialisation is bound up with broader political questions of doing justice, forging peace, or condemning

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[4] See Hollan (1992) for a critique of the egocentric view of the Western self and its strict opposition to a non-Western socio-centric view of the person.

[5] Butare residents also explain this reluctance to use proper names as a symptom of mistrust and secretiveness. It is not unusual for a new acquaintance to avoid giving her or his name upon meeting.

Residents who have lived in Euro-American contexts where first names are freely disclosed sometimes joke about how "Rwandan" it is not to introduce oneself by name.

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the absence of international action to stop the genocide (Vidal 2001). However, in the wake of the violence of 1994, relations of exchange with those who die "normal" deaths due to illness or old age seem to be declining in importance. Catherine Coquio (2004, 158) has described the post-1994 banalisation of "natural" death in which the death of elderly family members is no longer considered tragic when juxtaposed to the deaths of the genocide. Virtually without exception, those I spoke to treated "natural" death as something unremarkable that one must accept. *"C'est comme ça, la vie,"* was the phrase I heard used repeatedly when someone's family member fell severely ill or passed away.

Simbi is a university graduate who, at the time of my fieldwork, was in his mid-thirties and working on a temporary contract at a local NGO. As an RPF soldier during the civil war, he is not a civilian "survivor" as many of my other research participants were. Still, as a post-1994 Tutsi returnee to Rwanda, he faces similar problems to other survivors in forging belonging. To assert his rootedness and authority on matters historical, Simbi routinely drew on his elderly father's recollections of the colonial period and customary socio-cultural practices in southern Rwanda. He emphasised to me that, historically in Rwanda, it was not the body of a dead person that was treated with care, but the memory or the name of the person:

> In our tradition, the body was not important. In fact, Rwandans can't stand being near corpses – we always disposed of them quickly. So people would wrap the body in a mat, they would make their way into the forest, and they would abandon the body. Then they would run – as fast as they could – because they were afraid of the body but also because they were afraid of the animals who would come and eat the remains!
>
> (May 2008, Butare)

Scholarly accounts of precolonial burial practices (Vidal 2001, 2004) mirror Simbi's description in many ways, but they also reveal a greater diversity. Rwandan funerary practices have historically varied considerably by region and even from family to family (van't Spijker 1990, 39). Bodies were not always abandoned in uncultivated areas, and interment of deceased relatives within the enclosure of the *rugo* (rural homestead) was also common (van't Spijker

1990, 91, 98). Pauline confirmed Simbi's assertion that burial sites were historically insignificant for Rwandan memory practices, but she underscored the importance of the practice of *guterekera. Guterekera* is a form of ancestor worship predicated on the notion that the dead continue to concern themselves with the affairs of the living and that the living can invoke the ancestors' assistance by making offerings to them. In *guterekera,* beer, meat or whatever the deceased used to enjoy is shared between the living and the dead by sprinkling some on the ground (Taylor 1992, 142; van't Spijker 1990, 18). Pauline explained:

> If the dead person liked to drink, then everyone would drink. If he was known for giving to the poor, then everyone would do that. But it wasn't just to honour the memory of the dead person. It's also because people were afraid. Afraid that the dead would come back and say that people aren't doing anything for them! They may come back and do harm to people; they can be nasty spirits, so each time someone dies, the living retain their relations with these people.
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> (May 2008, Butare)

While many urban dwellers today tend to denigrate "traditional" beliefs about the dangers posed by the dead (someone who accidentally spills beer or food on the ground might be teased for "sharing with the ancestors", for instance), educated Butareans by no means live in a completely disenchanted world. For them, the dead can still be helpful forces if treated with due care and respect. Indeed, Marcel Mauss famously saw reciprocal exchange as a "moral transaction, bringing about and maintaining human, personal relationships between individuals and groups" (Evans-Pritchard 1967, ix), and in this case, death does not sever exchange obligations completely. Views vary on how these exchanges should be practiced and the degree to which not only thinking of the dead, but also visiting burial sites is important in maintaining relations with the deceased. Some survivors express a desire to restore dignity to victims whose bodies were haphazardly tossed into mass graves or simply left to decompose; hence the post-1994 emphasis on formal public commemorations, elaborate monuments, and the re-interment of bodies (Vidal 2001, 16–17; 2004, 279). Memorials are most often visited during the annual genocide commemorations; then, crowds of Butare residents participate in walks to memorials around town, and the Association des Étudiants et Élèves Rescapés

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du Génocide holds all-night vigils at the National University memorial. For some, however, being near the dead is an important part of keeping their memory close no matter the time of year. Thomas, a university student at the time of my fieldwork, who was proud of his ancestral ties to the precolonial royal court at Nyanza, talked about going to memorials when he needed to reflect on an important decision. As he explained: "I survived, so I want to bring value to my life. So I go and pray to the spirits of the dead to help me do good things with my life" (June 2008, Butare). On the few occasions when I saw people visiting memorial sites outside the annual week of mourning, the formality of the occasion was made evident by their impeccable dress and solemn demeanour. However, the majority of those I spoke with underscored why it is not compulsory to attend official commemorations or visit sites. As Rose, a small business owner, put it: "You think of those you lost every day. I don't need a ceremony to remember" (February 2009, Butare). Similarly, Pauline expressed horror at the idea of visiting memorials and told me that she regretted once having accompanied a Belgian friend to the Murambi memorial in Gikongoro because it disturbed her sleep for weeks. Some of her family members are buried at the Ngoma memorial in Butare, but she refuses to visit and declined to collect items of clothing that belonged to them. "I try so hard to remember them alive," she explained. "Why would I want clothing to remind me of how they died?" (March 2009, Butare).

Whether one places importance on visiting burial sites or not, exchanges with the dead still involve thinking of them in exchange for assistance or protection. Pauline, sitting with me in the peaceful surroundings of her place of business, described how her husband and children whom she lost in the genocide still help her to overcome major challenges. As she remarked one day after she had just dealt with a rather delicate problem concerning a business partner who was behind on his taxes and utility bill payments: "I know it's they who are helping me. It's my husband and children – not God or Jesus! If I didn't still feel them here with me, if I didn't believe they were always close, I wouldn't even be able to walk" (February 2008, Butare). Some survivors expressed guilt if they went too long without thinking of certain victims. "I think of the

closest family I lost all the time," Rose said in reference to her husband and children. "But then sometimes I realise that several weeks have passed since I thought of an aunt or cousin or brother, and I feel guilty [*coupable*]" (July 2008, Butare).

While thinking and speaking about genocide victims is a way of maintaining good relations with them, it is moreover a way for survivors to remain connected to the relations that constitute their personhood. As Pauline once said, "You feel like pieces of them [kin; friends] are still here somewhere, even though you cannot know exactly. If I left Rwanda for good, I would feel guilty" (March 2009, Gisenyi). The dead are active agents in the present, not only because, controversially, some of their bodies have been left exposed at memorial sites as reminders of the scale of devastation in 1994, but also because of the moral duty to maintain relations and the claims to (erstwhile) belonging in one's social world that they make possible.

These limited exchange practices with the dead raise perceptions of injustice among Rwandan genocide survivors that remain peripheral in approaches focused primarily on national memory politics or healing from trauma. Survivors express anger not only for what perpetrators of violence took from them, but also, crucially, for what accused or convicted perpetrators still have. Survivors who are at pains to maintain limited forms of exchange with the dead resent that many perpetrators still have relations and support networks. Since prisoners must rely on their families rather than the state for provisions, once or twice a week a stream of women can be seen making their way to the Butare prison and carrying food, small amounts of money, or other items requested by inmates. While prisoners are not permitted to see their family members on these occasions, they have people to whom they can return home when they are released. Moreover, because prisoners in Rwanda are required to build infrastructure like roads and drainage ditches, they are to a limited extent permitted out in public. In Butare, they also run an auto repair garage and build furniture to sell to the public. From these points of contact with the general population, they maintain relationships of exchange and commerce with their family members and other townspeople.

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Meanwhile, genocide survivors like Pauline express a sense of dislocation in the absence of relations, and resentment of those accused of genocide crimes who do not suffer in the same way survivors do. She does not "know who she is anymore" in the absence of her pre-1994 relations, while those who are released from prison have families to whom they return. For her, this injustice is something she faces on a daily basis since victims and perpetrators released from prison share the same public space:

> Now I walk around Butare, I go to Uganda on the bus. Am I really living? Yes, I have my projects, I know how to use money, but when I get into bed at night, I don't know who I am any-more. I'm tired so I'll sleep, I sleep for a second, then I feel myself wake with a start – ok, I can't stay awake anymore so I sleep. […] I've been forced to conclude that we have no country. We have victims who suffer injustice and we have killers who come and live with us. And the killers? They walk around, free and happy, they drink with their friends in the *cab-arets,* they build houses, they have sex with their wives, they take the bus to Kigali with us. Can you imagine?

(February 2008, Butare)

Although many ex-prisoners did lose family members or do not easily resume their relationships upon returning home, for those who lost the majority of their kin in 1994, there is nonetheless resentment towards perpetrators who have people with whom to rebuild relations at all. Concerns like these should not be read simply as evidence that Tutsi survivors harbour resentment towards the blanket category of Hutu perpetrators. Rather, they speak to a different scale of injustice, namely the everyday anguish of living with absence and no longer knowing oneself. The significance of having relationships and the hardship and disconnect that comes from their absence is perhaps best captured in something that Pauline reported *génocidaires* having sometimes said to those Tutsi whom they spared during the genocide: rather than dying right then, the survivor would instead die a slow "death of sadness" in the absence of everyone to whom she or he was related.

4. Personhood in the Absence of Relations

While exchange with the dead is an important moral practice for educated Butare residents who have lost many of their relations, these exchanges do not sufficiently compensate for the losses of the relations that constitute personhood. The social context of attestations to loss in everyday conversation is what demands attention and what suggests that these narratives are meaningful practices deployed to make particular kinds of claims about the self.

Affluent town residents place importance on the moral dimensions of being embedded in local networks, on being "of" the town. For educated and relatively wealthy genocide survivors, there are particular challenges associated with this, which are common among postcolonial urbanites who seem to have one foot in the world of the local and the other in the world of the former coloniser or the global north more generally (Cohn 1996). To be called or treated as a stranger carries a particular sting for affluent Butareans – not just those of Tutsi descent.[6] It connotes an accusation of being more interested in forging ties to the resources, knowledge and power of Westerners. To ally oneself too much with Westerners can lead to accusations of having become a *muzungu* (white person) or no longer being able to understand the problems of "ordinary Rwandans." On four occasions that I am aware of, such accusations were levelled at friends of mine for having been seen with me. Because of their wealth and modern Western dress, many Butareans complain of being charged the "*muzungu* price" at the market. And after visiting a Canadian friend in Ottawa in 2008, Pauline returned home to discover that a neighbour had been spreading the rumour that she had left for good and no longer cared about Rwanda and its people. This rumour had necessitated weeks of damage control during which Pauline had to correct the assumption that she was no longer living in Butare. Indeed, for no one is the moral importance of remaining "of" Butare more significant than for the affluent town residents I knew – those

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6 However, since the anti-Tutsi propaganda of the 1990s famously represented them as "foreigners" or interlopers in the "Hutu nation", affluent Tutsi in Butare perhaps still possess particularly strong sensitivities to accusations of being a foreigner.

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who travel internationally for conferences and consultancies, study or pleasure, and who speak the colonial language of French (or, increasingly, English[7]) effortlessly. The claim to belong takes on particular significance in light of a postcolonial political economy that makes intellectuals, small business owners, and other affluent Butare residents symbolically and materially distant from "ordinary Rwandans". While I often heard low-income town residents complain that it is as though local professionals and entrepreneurs "live in another world", claims by materially privileged residents to knowing about others' losses and having suffered together in 1994 are a form of moral agency that might mitigate such accusations. Educated Butareans no doubt faced similar challenges in claiming belonging due to class differences prior to 1994, but they perceive a sharp contrast between how they fit into their social worlds before and after the genocide. Some may idealise the degree to which they were thought to belong before, but it is perhaps all the more significant if they do: to remember pregenocide modes of belonging as relatively unproblematic lays bare how the absence of robust kinship networks compounds affluent urban dwellers' sensitivity to social divisions between themselves and the low income majority.

Concerns over being treated or perceived as a stranger are evident in survivors' anxieties about where they fit in today. Many lament how few people they still know in Butare. Hélèna, a survivor in her forties who works for a local HIV/AIDS NGO, revealed one day:

> I was born on this hill, but since 1994 I've lived all over. Brussels, the United States, Japan, Kenya, and now I am back. But it hardly feels like my home […] everyone I know is gone. They were all killed, so I don't know anyone anymore. The only people I know now are the prisoners who work on the roads around here who greet me when I pass. Can you imagine?
>
> (February 2009, Butare)

On another occasion, Pauline and I had been walking all over town. I crossed paths with her again the next day, and

she looked sullen. She explained that our walk had reminded her of the absences of those she used to know:

> Everyone I know is gone, and the new neighbours look at me like I don't even belong when I've lived here all my life! Can you believe that we walked around the entire town yesterday and I only ran into three people I know? Three! Everyone I knew is gone. I don't even want to know the new neighbours. I thought I was the one who was watching them, but I couldn't believe it when I realised that they're watching me like I'm a foreigner, too!
>
> (February 2009, Butare)

It is in this space of loss and absence that the significance of survivors' informal practices of remembering is located. Below, I recount a series of these narratives. I selected them not because they stand out as remarkable, but for their representativeness of the accounts one is likely to hear in informal conversation. Regardless of their precipitating factors, all assert a claim to knowing what happened in Butare and to whom.

4.1. A Suffering Friend

One afternoon in March 2009, Daniel, a National University graduate, and I were with Hélèna at her home in Butare. We had been discussing the improvements in local police responses to incidents of domestic violence when for reasons unknown to me, a younger sibling brought out an envelope of photos and handed it to her. "That's me there," she said, pointing to a picture of herself and several other young female family members taken some years ago before the genocide. "Almost everyone in this photo is gone now. We were so close back then." She reflected on the impunity of the perpetrators of the genocide, and then spoke about the losses of a female friend of hers:

> You know, I have a friend who only just found out at gacaca [local level genocide tribunal] that it was her own husband who was responsible for killing her whole family – her mother and father, her siblings, all her relations. Can you imagine? Her own husband. He never even told her. He just went out one day, killed them all and never said a word. And the craziest part? She

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stayed with him after that! I said to her, you have to leave him after what he did. But she said she couldn't because he's the only one [husband] she's ever known.

(March 2009, Butare)

4.2. The Loss of a Sister

On a long hike in the rural areas around Butare, Simbi had been quizzing me about my knowledge of local agricultural crops – knowledge deemed crucial for anyone who claims to "know" Rwanda. All of a sudden, we were passed by somebody he knew from when they were both at university, who was careening down the hill on his motorcycle, hands and feet in the air while waving to Simbi. As he disappeared around the corner, Simbi, laughing at his antics, explained:

Il est fou, ce type [This guy's crazy]! You know, he survived the genocide, but he lost his mind after what happened. It's true, they killed his whole family – parents, uncles, aunts, everyone. But what really did him in was that they killed his twin sister. He's never been the same since then, although he has calmed down a bit since they found her body. Before that, he used to talk of nothing but revenge, but now he's mostly harmless. But before, I used to see him in the *cabarets* and he would always be looking for a fight. I had to stop him myself a few times.

(July 2008, Southern Province)

4.3. Enumerating Acquaintances' Losses

On another occasion in June 2008, Simbi and I ran into a prominent local official and small business owner who had been attempting to help Simbi secure a stable job as a favour to Simbi's brother-in-law. After we had parted company, Simbi explained, "He lost his wife and three children in the genocide. He suffers every day without them." Shortly thereafter we crossed paths with a middle-aged woman Simbi knew from the now defunct University Club gym. As is typical, we paused, exchanged greetings, and they shared news for a few moments before we moved on. As we began to walk again, Simbi told me, "She is a [genocide] survivor and she lost all seven of her children – can you imagine?"

4.4. Knowing the Private Lives of Others

One afternoon in May 2008, I was at the university chatting with a recent graduate, Emmanuel. We had been talking about his job prospects and the possibility of his pursuing graduate study when, for reasons I was unable to discern, he began to recount the tragic losses suffered during the genocide by a mutual acquaintance, Florence, who works at the National University. Emmanuel, a genocide survivor himself, explained the complications that Florence has had to face in her family relationships since 1994.

The first problem is that it was some of her in-laws who killed her husband and four of her five children. Can you imagine? But more than that, she told me once that she feels it is her fault that only she and her youngest child survived. Before the genocide, her husband had told her that he thought four children were enough, but she wanted more. Her husband was angry when he found out she was pregnant, and he told her that meant that the first four children were for him, but the last one was for her. Now, because he and the four oldest were killed, she thinks that the others died because he had claimed the oldest children as his and left the youngest to her.

(June 2008, Butare)

4.5. The Loss of a Husband

Often I would accompany Pauline on errands, and she would narrate to me what had happened to other survivors as we passed by their homes, places of business, or a burial site. As we passed by a quiet neighbourhood bar one afternoon in March 2009, she told me what had happened to the Tutsi survivor who now owns and operates it:

You know this place? It's a woman who owns it now, a survivor. Back in '94, her husband had the foresight to take her and their four boys to Burundi after the genocide started in Kigali.[8] But he came back after he left them there. He thought it wasn't dangerous here in Butare because the killing hadn't started here yet. He thought, "oh, if I come back, maybe I could recover a few of our belongings." But he was killed at their home and she never saw him again.

(March 2009, Butare)

What is striking about these accounts is that everyone knew everyone else's details: how many family members died in the genocide, what types of relations they were, and even how and where they were killed. In a small town like Butare, perhaps this should be expected, and yet it is remarkable given how often it emerged that affluent residents did *not* knew each other or that they know very little

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8   Violence did not befall Butare province until roughly two weeks after it had begun elsewhere.

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about each other beyond their stories of loss in 1994. Moreover, to keep straight the details of so many people's hardships requires a level of care that is unusual between people who are not particularly close. It would be easy to dismiss these narratives as little more than the routine gossip that characterises social relationships in small towns. I see these more as memorial practices than gossip since the latter tends to thrive when the facts are uncertain (Merry 1997, 51); but even if we do read gossip into how Butare's survivors speak of others losses, it is nonetheless noteworthy as a central way of demonstrating one's belonging and "insider knowledge" of the lives of fellow town residents. By asserting knowledge of others' losses, survivors evoke the absence of the relationships that constitute their own personhood and that of other survivors. Therefore, to speak about the genocide and what happened to people is not just evidence that national reconciliation policies are failing or that people are unable to heal from the trauma of violence. Informal memorial practices, when situated in their social contexts and in webs of social relationships, are complex in their meanings, and while they may tell us something about the state of ethnic schisms and psychosocial "healing," they cannot be reduced to them.

What is central is that these narratives and reflections are doing moral work; they are among the few ways left by which these town residents can stake a claim to having had the relationships constitutive of personhood and rootedness in Butare. When people can no longer actively live their relationships with family and other relations, they invoke those absences, as well as what happened to other survivors as a way of saying, "I have knowledge of this town and its residents, and I am still 'of' this place." These claims to belonging are speech acts in Austin's (1962) sense: by deploying them, survivors are "doing things" with words, and they are deeply aware of the potential for infelicities should their claims to belonging not be received as intended. Indeed, it is crucial that survivors track out these relationships beyond their own families because to know about the losses of even distant acquaintances is what does some of the most important work of grounding survivors as members of their social worlds. This is in no way to say that survivors disingenuously instrumentalise their own and others' losses to make strategic claims about belong-

ing. Claims to the absence (and therefore, erstwhile presence) of the relationships that constitute personhood are directed as much inward to assuaging doubts about one's selfhood as towards making claims about one's moral status and connection to Rwanda. Indeed, seen from the perspective of relational personhood in which the self is always being built out of relations with others, to lose those relations is to lose a part of one's own person. Paradoxically, then, the violence is what severed survivors' relationships, their connections to "here", *and* what permits them to continue to show how they fit in with others in their social worlds through memory practices. *Tracking out* the networks in which they used to be embedded, coupled with exchange relations maintained with the dead, is what stands in for *living out* the relationships that used to constitute their personhood. Indeed, these attestations to loss are never just about the past, but are always also about how that past paradoxically connects persons to and disconnects them from their social worlds. Since it goes without saying in Butare that everyone has had terrible problems since 1994, to have suffered with others is a way that mobile town residents often accused of becoming strangers or *bazungu* [pl. form of *muzungu*] stake claims to ongoing locatedness and attachments to local people and places.

5. Conclusion

I have shown that informal talk about the 1994 genocide and its victims is a practice that speaks to the ruptures in relationships constitutive of survivors' personhood and the ways in which the violent past enters into everyday practices of making selves and forging relationships. That educated survivors are at pains to assure themselves and others that their claims to "hereness" are legitimate demonstrates that there is no contradiction between having ties to power on the one hand and being devastated by loss and dislocation on the other. What their informal memory practices reveal is that people now navigate complex predicaments of what it means to dwell in a present that is marred by the absence of friends, family and neighbours with whom they once socialised and with whom they were engaged in relations of mutual dependency – a problem that is by no means restricted to educated survivors in Butare. Indeed, it is the challenges that these Butareans face in claiming locatedness that put the effects of the sudden

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and widespread loss of kin on relational persons into particularly sharp focus.

A focus on personhood and its diverse cross-cultural configurations can enrich current perspectives on memory and violence. Indeed, the effects of violence on relational selves are not easily apprehended through national reconciliation or trauma-focused frameworks that implicitly or explicitly take persons as discrete individuals who "have" relations. Recovery from violence as conceptualised in these frameworks means that the cohesive, integrated, bounded person and relations between such persons should be restored – although debates abound on the techniques through which to effect those changes, be they judicial, political, retributive or restorative. But if one is one's relations, if in losing one's relations one loses parts of one's own person, can frameworks based on "healing" or "reconciliation" communicate the texture of how violence affects the self? An ethnographic perspective on the relationship between personhood, memory and violence suggests that memory practices are located not just against the "background" of a violent past, but within broader patterns of everyday social relationships and precepts for the living of a moral life. The concept of personhood – situated at the nexus of the individual and the collective and bound up with questions about one's place in the world – is a strong conceptual tool for investigating these dimensions of how remembered violence matters.

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