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Vicarious Shame, Narrative, Social Reconnection and Public Recognition in Bamporiki's *Sin to Them, Shame on Me*¹

Abstract: *Sin to Them, Shame on Me* is a testimony by the Rwandan writer, filmmaker and peace advocate, Bamporiki, who suffers from vicarious shame because of the crime of genocide that Hutu perpetrators committed against Tutsis in the name of the group. His testimony redeems his sense of self by acknowledging the wrongdoing of his group, yet it also represents a step that separates him from that group. His powerful testimonial narratives allow him to associate with genocide survivors and the world, and to develop a new identity as a Rwandan. The polymorphic narrative structure of his written testimony in which the oral testimony is embedded, also allows to redefine himself and others.

Damaged self, disconnection, Genocide, group reconnection, narrative, political recognition, vicarious shame

Introduction

Sin to Them, Shame on Me is one of the rare testimonies written and published by a non-survivor of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Edouard Bamporiki was eleven years old during the genocide and like most Hutus, he was not persecuted during the genocide against the Tutsis. When the genocide began, he was sick in the hospital, his mother tending to his needs. There he witnessed the slaughter of Pascal, an innocent Tutsi man holding his baby on his chest and hiding under his hospital bed. Frightened by the brutal massacre he just witnessed and afraid of being the next target, Bamporiki's shout for help was quickly muffled by his mother's hand. Following this tragic episode, Bamporiki pressed his mother to explain the reasons behind the killing, but his questions were left unanswered.

¹ Edouard Uwayo Bamporiki is a Rwandan storyteller, poet, filmmaker, actor, writer and activist. Since 2013, he has been a member of the Rwandan Parliament. His testimony, *Sin to Them, Shame on Me*, was written in Kinyarwanda, the local language of Rwanda. There is no translation of this book in English or in French. All translations of quotations in this article are mine.

On another day, while outside of his hospital room for fresh air, he witnessed the killing of his Tutsi teacher. Going back to his room, he told his mother: “they are also killing the teachers, next it is going to be the turn of students” (2010: 14). His mother reassured him with the following words: “You are a Hutu, and Hutus are killing Tutsis” (*ibid.*). In a reflective interview with Margaret Ziegler, Bamporiki would later on qualify his mother’s answer as follows: “She [his mother] didn’t say, some Hutus are killing Tutsis; she said Hutus are killing Tutsis” (Ziegler, 2013: 16).

Finally, while on a bus ride with survivors to commemorate the anniversary of the genocide in solidarity with them, he overheard the following words: “Hutus have destroyed us, they are the cause of the sorrow we endure. If Hutus were not bad, we would not be complaining today” (2010: 29). The survivors also blamed Hutus as a group for killing Tutsis. This led Bamporiki to feel what is often referred to as “false guilt”, as opposed to “real guilt”.

In this study, I will use “vicarious shame”, an expression used by scholars of psychoanalytic theory, instead of the word “guilt” that implies a sense of culpability and responsibility. Indeed, Bamporiki’s many poems about the genocide and his main testimony, *Sin to Them, Shame on Me* were born from this vicarious shame.

Another unusual aspect of his testimony is the frankness of the narrator’s tone. Bamporiki speaks openly about Hutu shame and denounces publicly the crimes committed in his own name. In a de-ethnicized post-genocide society built on national identity, and on unity and reconciliation, this constitutes a very daring account of the problematic of ethnic identity, all the more so as discussions of ethnicity are silenced in the public sphere. By being true to himself and to others, Bamporiki thus breaks the silence on a very sensitive issue.

Central to Bamporiki’s testimony, vicarious shame has raised important questions for literary theorists, psychologists, scholars of conflict and resolution, and many others. One of these questions is identifying the multiple factors accounting for it. In my analysis of Bamporiki’s testimony, I take into account variables such as cultural factors and the severity of wrongdoing. I also focus on what I call the “power factor” determining the gravity of the wrongdoing, in this

case, genocide, the crime of crimes. Culture is another important element in understanding vicarious shame, most African societies emphasizing community and group identity over individuality.

In his testimony, Bamporiki aims at repairing his sense of self, weighed down by genocide trauma and vicarious shame. He does so by acknowledging the wrongdoing done in his name, a step that separates him from members of his group. Through the power of narrative, his testimony allows him to reach out to genocide survivors, and to develop a new identity as a Rwandan. The polymorphic narrative structure of his written testimony, in which an oral testimony is embedded, also allows him to redefine himself and others.

Vicarious Shame and its Impact on Bamporiki's Self-identity

In their article, "Vicarious Shame and Guilt," Lickel *et al.* define "vicarious shame" as negative emotions that innocent people experience when the negative behavior of someone with whom they have an interdependent relationship, whether family members or work associates, affects them emotionally. Vicarious shame can also occur when the wrongdoing or negative behavior of people who share a group identity affects the entire social group. According to Lickel *et al.*, "[...] our social groups are included as part of our self-identity (E. R. Smith & S. Henry, 1996), and thus the behaviors and attributes of other group members have implications for the self" (Lickel *et al.*, 2005: 147). The authors also make a distinction between the outcome of guilt and shame. Guilt, they assert, implies something negative about one's behavior or action(s) and calls for the desire to repair whatever harm has been done, whereas shame tends to produce a desire to hide or to distance oneself from the negative event, and therefore affects the sense of self:

[...] Guilt may elicit more approach related behaviors designed to repair the situation, whereas shame may elicit more withdrawing behaviors designed to distance oneself from the situation. [...] Thus, rather than facilitating reparative actions, feelings of shame provoke a desire to hide, disappear, or escape (*ibid.*: 146).

Bamporiki was traumatized from the very beginning of the genocide, especially after witnessing the killing of Pascal and his baby. Unable to endure the agony of the dying Tutsi, he asks his

mother to leave the hospital for their village. In his village, he learns that Hutus are running to find refuge in Zaire (DRC) because they are afraid of revenge by the advancing Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) army². Bamporiki's mother refuses to follow the crowd and chooses to die in her country. To survive, Bamporiki starts selling sugar canes until one day he decides to go back to school. Some schools had remained open in some parts of Rwanda despite the genocide. In the classroom, he is unable to concentrate. Instead of taking notes, he decides to write his first poem, "If we had not exterminated them". Embedded in his written testimony, the poem is a litany of questions addressed to the teacher and to Hutus in general.

How come my classmates are not here?
How come our teachers are not here?
Maybe among their killers, aren't you one of them?
What did Nsabimana do to deserve death? (2010: 18)

He also questions the misuse of education and history:

You want me to come learn History?
Even you, you know it was manipulated
[...]
If you were historians

You would not have exterminated human beings
You would have remembered the Rucunshu coup
You would have remembered World Wars
[...]
You want to teach me History?
It looks like you created yours
[...]

I cannot learn from you I am leaving
I cannot study while I am out of breath (*ibid.*: 19)

The Kinyarwanda expression used by Bamporiki, "to be out of breath", is significant because it also means to be traumatized. Bamporiki is clearly a traumatized child. He not only witnessed the killing of Tutsis but also the Hutus killing each other because of lust. He is bewildered by this surrealistic situation: everything seems beyond his understanding (*ibid.*: 22). As the poem conveys, this was a time when no one understood his/her own actions, and people seemed to have no conscience: "You see those who run and you run along, you see those looting and you join in, you see those who pray, you pray along. It was a terrible time" (*ibid.*: 24). When he sees

² The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) was composed mainly of previously exiled Tutsis who stopped the genocide against Tutsis in 1994.

Niyonsaba, his Tutsi classmate, he is not sure whether it is reality or a dream, but reality quickly asserts itself. Niyonsaba, who was supposed to be dead, is there alive in front of his eyes: "I wanted to hide my eyes but it was in vain, he was looking at me, and when I dared to look at him, I noticed that his hair was grayish and he walked like someone without a destination" (*ibid.*: 23). Niyonsaba is "a walking dead". As some Rwandan genocide survivors put it, "he is dead although standing" or more precisely, one of those called "revenants" in Holocaust survivors' testimonies. As he faces the survivor, Bamporiki's trauma suddenly morphs into a strong sense of shame.

After the takeover of the country by the RPF army and the restoration of order in the country, Bamporiki manages to go back to school and is able to sit for the national exam that determines matriculation from elementary school to junior high. After passing the test, he is transferred to a school some distance away from his native hill, with Hutus as well as young Tutsi survivors in the classroom. Upon learning that the government is paying school fees for genocide orphans, he thinks he too qualifies as he lost his father at age six. He asks his classmate how he can get the same assistance to which one of the orphans quickly answers that the government assistance program "is a parent who took care of the many children after Hutus killed [their] parents and family members, looted [their] home and destroyed them" (*ibid.*: 25). The last part of the answer brings back his initial vicarious shame:

I suddenly remembered when my mother told me that those who were killing Tutsis in the hospital were Hutus. [...] I started to even doubt myself, instead of studying. I kept thinking what Hutus from Kibogora did to the Tutsis. I wished for someone to take me away from Kibogora. I could not even have someone to talk to about it. Whenever I saw a survivor student [...] I could not stand myself (*ibid.*: 27).

Bamporiki quits school and moves to the capital city of Kigali where nobody knows his identity. Yet, he cannot run away from himself. One day, on the bus with genocide survivors, he overhears them saying that the calamity that befell them was caused by Hutus, and "want[s] to jump off the bus at that minute". He understands that his move to Kigali was not a solution and that he cannot escape the gaze of the survivors, and their indirect accusation: "Hutus are perceived as bad people everywhere" (*ibid.*: 27).

Bamporiki's shame is not just an individual feeling but a collective shame endured mainly by young Hutus, like him, innocent children in 1994, who now carry the shame of their fathers' sin. In his interview with Ziegler, Bamporiki explains: "You know, some people from my village changed identity when they left the village to come to town after the genocide. You knew him as a Hutu but in conversation between him and others, far from his family, he says, 'I am a survivor'" (Ziegler, 2013: 16). It is no wonder he includes in his testimony other testimonies of some young people who, like him, are carrying the burden of the crime committed in their name. One of these testimonies is by the young Emmanuel Hacineza, whose father, a local leader, incited the killers to "do a good job" in killing and even provided them with arms (2010: 57). After the genocide, Hacineza learns that "45,000 people who died in Nyamasheke church were the victims of (his) father's actions" (*ibid.*: 59).

Hacineza thinks he is marked forever by his father's wrongdoing and is afraid of neighbors and Rwandan officials. He resents being the child of the killer although there is nothing he can do to change the situation. Never at peace, he is convinced that it is not just an anonymous group of Hutus but his own father, who was the main perpetrator, as he was in a position of leadership in the village. The same goes for Bamporiki whose paternal uncles were among the perpetrators who committed the genocide in his native village. His paternal uncles most likely served as surrogate fathers and role models, as is customary in a patriarchal society.

As mentioned previously, Bamporiki's vicarious shame is also amplified by the cultural power factor. It has been noted that

the degree to which the person's behavior is seen as relevant to a group identity or reputation shared in common with the perpetrator should relate to an appraisal that the event is a threat to one's own self-image, which in turn should be associated with the degree of shame and distancing motivations (Lickel *et al.*, 2005: 148).

Psychologists and identity scholars such as Julie Connolly have recognized "the fact that we come to know and understand ourselves, to the extent that we can, in the presence of others" (2014: 422). This is even more evident in African societies where emphasis is on community over individuality, and in which one is often defined in relation to others. Individuals in African societies feel more peer

pressure to conform to the norms of the community and must often subordinate their own personal preferences to the welfare of the group. Although it might be argued that the same peer pressure was partially responsible for many individuals participating in the genocide by obeying orders from their local leaders, similar group dynamics appear to be at work in producing the shame that now causes some members of the identity group to condemn the acts of perpetrators, seeking forgiveness for the crimes committed in their names. In any case, whether these variables associated with vicarious shame are consistent or not, they still need to be accounted for because people can experience a self-conscious emotion due to the negative behavior of another person.

Reconnecting to the Group: an End to Vicarious Shame

In Kigali, Bamporiki cannot escape his shame, but the city offers him other opportunities. He holds menial jobs to survive and continues to write poetry and, occasionally, songs. Increasingly recognized for his poetic talents among filmmakers and singers, he writes songs and scenarios for them. Rwandan politicians also started to take note of his poetic talents, and in 2006, Bamporiki was invited by the Minister of Sport and Culture to recite one of his poems during the annual genocide memorial ceremony at the national stadium, filled with survivors.

Asked to read his poem after a young genocide survivor recounted how Hutus exterminated his family, Bamporiki stood up to recite his poem, but remained tied-tongue. Says Bamporiki: “I did not feel at peace with myself [...], the poem could not come out. I was full of sadness, full of shame and embarrassment”. In order to lift the weight of vicarious shame, he suggested instead “to give a short testimony before reciting the poem” (2010 : 31):

I am tired of hiding, I am tired of walking around ashamed, I am tired of not being happy with who I am [...]. As a young Hutu in 1994, I witnessed the wrongdoing of Hutus against Tutsi in my village. And now, wherever I go, I find Hutus killed Tutsi. It hurts to see that the Hutu perpetrators don't stand up and ask for forgiveness, that they are keeping quiet as if someone else has to do it in their place. I am afraid that they will age before they speak out, and then you will continue to see their crime in us – those who share the group with them or those born from them [...]. If those who killed cannot beg for forgiveness, I, Bamporiki, the child of the *Abasinga* clan,

am tired of this. I want peace in my heart. I am asking you that from now on, you see me as Bamporiki from a Hutu group but not a killer, not *Interahamwe*, not a criminal... And if possible, that you break the silence and speak out [*kwatura*] to free me because, often, I feel cursed by those who spilled blood and who belong to the same ethnic group as me; [and then] [w]henever I hear someone under extreme sorrow cursing Hutus who have hurt her/him, my heart can tell me that I was not part of those (*ibid.*: 31-32).

At this point in Bamporiki's testimony, the dramatized narrative takes the form of a purification ritual. He understands that only the community of survivors to whom harm was done has the power to free him from the shame he has been enduring. In the text quoted above, he purposely decides not to use the verb *Kuvuga* (to speak) but instead to *speak out*. Bamporiki strongly believes that words from the community of survivors will have the force to end the curse and heal him. Here, the words become *logos*, magical words imbued with the power of purification. This oral testimony by Bamporiki, embedded in *Sin to Them, Shame on Me*, was his first public intervention, and marked the beginning of his public recognition. In the process, the audience allowed him to seek justice for the wrongdoing he had endured.

In the second part of this oral testimony, the narrative turns into a trial in which Bamporiki is simultaneously witness and plaintiff, and the survivors making the audience are members of the jury. In the form of Emile Zola's *J'accuse* (*I Accuse*), Bamporiki asserts:

I am from a Hutu family but I am not a killer [...]. I want peace in my heart [...]. I accuse the Hutu leadership of using Hutuness to commit its crimes. I want you to be my witnesses in the international court or before God. I accuse the Hutu leadership of entrapping its youth, using our Hutuness without asking our opinion; we didn't vote for this and it was not in our constitution [...]; they spoiled our future, but they were mistaken: we pulled out the tree of ethnic discrimination they had planted and will even burn its roots" (*ibid.*: 32).

One of the survivors stood up and said to him: "Bamporiki get out of the trap, free yourself, walk as a Rwandan and work as a Rwandan, separate your ethnicity from your own actions, you are you, continue to fight against hateful thoughts wherever you go" (*ibid.*). After these uplifting words, Bamporiki felt his "heart free", saying: "I gave my message, recited my poem and went home

born again. I was neither Hutu nor Tutsi” (*ibid.*). And so he became a Rwandan.

In his testimony to genocide survivors, Bamporiki goes against the warning of the family elder who, thinking it might be an opportunity for Tutsis to take revenge, had discouraged Hutus from joining survivors at the remembrance ceremony. Instead, “he convinced us to hide in the bush” (*ibid.*: 24). Furthermore, Bamporiki and the other Hutus had learned to stay away during these times, for instance when the songs of mourning played on the national radio.

Therefore, in welcoming the invitation to go to a stadium full of sad, angry, and re-traumatized genocide survivors, Bamporiki accepted to confront his fears and expose his shame. Moreover, by appealing to the leader of the remembrance ceremony to allow him to give a testimony, he boldly went where no Hutu had been before. He sought to reconnect with innocent victims although he knew he was not considered one of them. Even though he knew that he had lost ties with the group, he was also aware that the survivors’ reconnection and recognition was the only path to his redemption. His attempt proved successful as he appealed first to their emotions and then to their good judgment. As a result, the recognition takes him beyond his crippled self-representation to the victorious rebirth of a new identity, and a new sense of belonging to “the Rwandan nation”:

I came to the mourning ceremony as a Hutu with a heart full of sorrow because of what my people did, but I went home a new person. I am no longer a Hutu anymore, nor a different Hutu, and I didn’t lose my Hutuness to Tutsiness. [...] No! There is no race or ethnicity that is better than the other. There is a bad and a good person (*ibid.*: 33).

Trauma specialists have shown the paradoxical link between separation and recognition, especially regarding the reconstruction of self-identity. As noted by trauma researcher Judith Herman, “when the connection is shattered, the traumatized person loses her basic sense of self” (1992: 52). Reconnecting with a group is therefore key to the reconstruction of the self-identity: “Trauma isolates, the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim, the group exalts her/[him]. Trauma dehumanizes the victim, the group restores her/[his] humanity” (*ibid.*: 214).

The Role of Narrative in the Reconstruction of Self-identity

While Bamporiki decided to narrate how he felt instead of reciting his poem as planned, he did not discredit poetry as some critics and survivors of the Holocaust had done. In fact, in his conversation with me in 2014, he confirmed that his poetry was born of the genocide. Until then, poetry for him had been the only way to communicate with himself and others. It should be noted that his narrative includes two very long poems and is also a rhythmic account of his self. His decision to write a narrative is therefore not a refutation of the force of poetry to recount a traumatic event. Instead the real reason resides in his intention to seek a reconnection with the world. As mentioned before, the traumatizing vicarious shame had destroyed the sustaining bonds between him and his community, but he also knew that his “sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depend[ed] upon a feeling of connection with others” (Herman, 1992: 214). In order to reconnect with the group, Bamporiki needed to expose the damage done to his sense of self. His oral testimony thus sets a storytelling atmosphere in which the audience is called upon to participate: “Although telling the story requires concentration, audience awareness will add to overall effectiveness. When reaction is seen upon the faces or audible gasps [are heard], help is given to the artist” (Wilkin, 2014: 71). Finally, in his interview with Ziegler, Bamporiki said that when the leader of the memorial ceremony accepted his request to give a testimony before reading his poem, the leader answered as follows:

Go ahead, say something. I said, I'm sorry. I'm not a survivor. I'm a Hutu. He said, Yeah, keep on [...]. When I said, I'm not a survivor, I'm a Hutu, even someone who was sleeping woke up and watched me. When I talked about genocide in Kibogora, people cried. Then I had more confidence, I don't know from where (Ziegler, 2013: 16).

So far, his attempts to define self and identity had relied on self-representations, but now these included representations by others, allowing him to reconnect with a wider group. Human beings are after all social animals.

With reconnection came recognition. His public speeches and his poetry made him visible on the artistic scene and led to his acting debut in Lee Isaac Chung's *Munyurangabo* for which he received a Best Actor nomination at the 2007 premiere in Cannes. From

this success came his film *The Long Coat* in 2008, which he wrote, directed, starred in, and produced. The film was awarded the first prize in African Film at the Focus Future Film Festival in New York. In 2011, Bamporiki was featured in *Kinyarwanda* (as Emmanuel) alongside Cassandra Freeman.

Bamporiki was born again as a new man and artist because of his oral testimony to genocide survivors. Born also was his strong advocacy for peace. As he explains in the preface to *Sin to Them, Shame on Me*, the writing of his testimony also stems from his public exposure outside Rwanda. Although *Sin to Them, Shame on Me* is an account of his life from 1994 to 2010, the narrative starts *in media res* in 2007 with his unfortunate encounter with a journalist in France. The journalist asks him the following yes/no questions:

- Q: Are you a Tutsi?
- A: No
- Q: Are you a Hutu?
- A: (silence) Yes!
- Q: Are you a killer? "I looked down and had a hard time to say something" (2010: 9).

Despite the success and pride brought by his first testimony, allowing him to hold his head up high, this encounter forced him, once again, to lower his gaze and look down. The journalist clearly associated Hutuness with killing, just as Bamporiki's mother did, and the genocide survivors in Kibogora and in Kigali, had. The same association was happening miles away from Rwanda, where Bamporiki went to celebrate his successful entry into the film industry. Hiding was no longer an option for him. On the plane ride back home to Rwanda, he wrote his answer to the journalist, which was to become the preface to his book: "I would like to ask you to be patient. You asked me only one-word questions, and now I am going to answer you by going back to Kibungo" (*ibid.*). Thus, the author takes the journalist back to the village of Kibogora in Kibungo district where he was born.

In writing this book and getting it published, Bamporiki also knows that he is going against his grandmother's injunction to "not say what [he] ha[s] seen". He apologizes first to his grandmother for his lack of respect and summons her to tell the truth: "I want to tell you in return 'do not quiet what you have seen'" (*ibid.*: 6). Bamporiki decides to break the silence once and for all by couching his testimony in

a book, getting it published for a wide audience, hence giving it posterity.

In the preface to his testimony, Bamporiki also makes a connection between self and narration. Indeed, the *incipit* of *Sin to Them, Shame on Me* opens up with the following core question, “WHO AM I?” (*ibid.*: 9), a reflexive probing that serves as the title of the first chapter. The question is also a counterpoint to the “who are you” asked by the French journalist. Through the strategy of “detour”, Bamporiki turns the question into a reflective argument. The journalist’s questions answer to a yes/no pattern known in linguistics as polar questions because of their suggestive power. But Bamporiki refuses to be defined by the simple words and attributes suggested by the journalist.

In the first chapter, Bamporiki respects the autobiographical contract conceptualized by the French literary critic Philippe Lejeune. The story is in “a narrative form”, “the subject treated” is “the individual life” of Bamporiki whose three names are spelled out. The main character is Bamporiki, the real person, and the narration is retrospectively oriented. Bamporiki starts from the beginning, taking us from his birth in Kibogora village to kinship, genealogy, and his clan of Abasinga. In doing so, he connects the narrative with the construction of identity. The retrospective account of his past is a strategy providing him with a personal identity as well as an opportunity to answer progressively to the question: “Who am I?”

In his *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbot shows that narrative is a human phenomenon found not only in the arts but also in daily life: “Artists and non-artists alike. We make narrative many times a day, every day of our lives. And we start in doing so from the moment we put words together” (2008: 1). Here a connection is made between time and narrative, “a new narrative comes into place stretching over the years” (*ibid.*: 5). It is clear to Bamporiki that it is the narratively structured unity of his life as a whole that provides him with the process of becoming. Using narrative to reflect on, or construct, identity is nothing new. Many critics have noted that connection, among them the French philosopher Paul Ricœur who argues that narrative constructs the identity of the character in the telling of the story. In *Oneself as Another*, he asserts that the

“narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (1992: 147-148). For Bamporiki, the narrative form is an appropriate tool because it allows him to describe through time the multiple facets of his life that are a part of his identity in formation. Through the process of writing, he is admitting that identity is not fixed but in constant formation, and he therefore rejects the fixed identity implicit in the journalist’s questions.

A Polyphonic Testimony, and a Political Recognition

The concept of “polyphony” was borrowed from the field of music by the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin who first used it in his critical work, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, to mean “many different voices, unmerged into a single perspective, and not subordinated to the voice of the author. Each of these voices has its own perspective, its own validity, and its own narrative weight within the novel”. The concept of “polyphony” is counterposed to the “monologism” (single-thought discourse ; also termed “homophony”–single-voice) characteristic of traditional writing and thought³.

Here, I use the term “polyphony” to refer to the different genres that Bamporiki adopts in his narrative. Indeed, his narrative testimony is anchored in oral tradition and a mixture of literary genres wherein prose, poetry and dialogue are interwoven and consequently, narrative linearity is broken by the juxtaposition of poems, prose and dialogues. At times a songlike narrative poem featuring rhythm and refrain, it is a “book of poems”, as Bamporiki himself claims (Ziegler, 2013: 16).

In *Sin to Them, Shame on Me*, the frontier between the real and the imaginary is also blurred, escaping into dreams that plunge the reader into an oneiric world. This is true of the chapter titled, “The Empty Page” (2010: 107-108) in which Bamporiki, like Martin Luther King, Jr., expresses his dream of the future. In this dream, a young naked child is holding a pen in his right hand and a blank page in his left hand. The world is empty and dark, and he writes every single thing he does to bring in light. At the end of his life, the paper is to

³ See the two-part essay, “In Theory Bakhtin : Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia” by Andrew Robinson, 2011.

be read in public. In the dream, a wrongdoer tries to hide and erase his paper, but in vain. The dream fluctuates from evil to good, all the while showing how our actions can affect others, even the future generations. In this chapter, therefore, Bamporiki's testimony takes on a serious and didactic tone. The same tone prevails through the inclusion in the narrative of many Rwandan proverbs calling upon Rwandan wisdom to support his argument or just offer guidance. As Bamporiki claims, he is born again after his long and difficult initiation journey, and he takes on the role of guide to lead neophytes on the path of recovery.

In his new leadership role, he calls on others to follow him, especially those whose identity is problematic. The book contains several testimonies from young people, especially those whose sense of identity is called into question, young people who, like him, suffered from vicarious shame, children from mixed marriages, and those born from rape. This narrative features multiple voices, some never heard before in the Rwandan public space. The multiplicity of these voices illustrates the complex problematic of identities in post-genocide Rwanda, as when Bamporiki interviews people in jail who had committed genocide when they were young. The author also reaches out to the parents of perpetrators who may want to send a message to their children. Thus, the narrative becomes polyphonic in the literal sense of the term. Unlike the generations before him, Bamporiki connects together different generations of a community and a country still suffering from the traumatic aftermath of the genocide.

Bamporiki has helped others break the silence and make their voices heard. He has invested the public scene through art and, through his advocacy for peace, created an important movement in Rwanda known as "Art for Peace", to foster understanding and a positive outlook for youth in Rwanda, one generation after. It became "MYICT" (under the Ministry of Youth and ICT), then "Youth Connekt Dialogue" in June 2013 in collaboration with the First Lady of Rwanda through her youth organization (Imbutu Foundation), created to educate, engage and empower young people of Rwanda. As a peace advocate, Bamporiki has given numerous talks in Rwanda and abroad.

His exhortation to be true to oneself and to others has caught the government's attention and prompted the new Rwandan

national movement “I am a Rwandan,” a motto used first by young people from Youth Connect. Today, Bamporiki enjoys an artistic and a political recognition that most likely earned him a seat in the Rwandan Parliament in 2013. Since the genocide, most Rwandans have changed the way they relate to each other. The frank dialogue initiated by Bamporiki in his book and film, and through his activist work, has helped Rwandans revisit the unchallenged notion of the national homogeneous collective identity constructed by the Rwandan government in 1999. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was established at that date to mobilize Rwandans to reconcile and reunify a society that had been torn apart by war and a genocide committed primarily by civilians. This marked the inception of a new national identity encapsulated by: “We are all Rwandans”. French essayist Ernest Renan noted at the famous conference, “What Is a Nation,” at La Sorbonne in 1822, that memories of certain events, or lack thereof, are crucial to the successful reconstruction of a nation. He wrote that:

To forget and – I will venture to say – to get one’s history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical studies is often a danger to nationality [...]. [I]t is of the essence of a nation that all individuals should have much in common, and further that they should all have forgotten much⁴.

Rwanda adopted this “chosen amnesia⁵” in order to move forward. But could Rwandans really forget about ethnicity in such a short time? This seems impossible because, in the course of more than sixty years, the ethnic divisions imposed by colonial powers had progressively become part of the Rwandan collective memory, and crystallized even more by the genocide in 1994. For Tutsis, the genocide meant a shared final fate that sealed their cohesion – a cohesion difficult to undo for the sake of unity and reconciliation. As shown above, some Hutus were innocent, yet they still suffer from unspoken vicarious shame despite the efforts of the Rwandan government. Bamporiki gives an even better answer to the question of “what is a nation”:

To remove or to forget ethnicity is a process. You can’t forget what you know. As time goes by, we will be free but I grew up in the mood of Hutus, so how can I forget it? But I will tell my kids that they are Rwandan. I did not have that chance. Hutu and Tutsi were material for politicians to get what they wanted (Ziegler, 2013: 16).

⁴ See the reprint of this conference in Alfred Zimmern, 1939: 190-191.

⁵ For a detailed study on chosen Amnesia in Rwanda, see article by Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 2006: 131-150.

The merit of Bamporiki's testimony and film is to engage Rwandans at all levels in a frank discussion about their feelings and to discuss the uncomfortable topics that they pretended to forget. In his advocacy for peace, Bamporiki invites young people to choose their identity. This explains the new motto in Rwanda, "I am a Rwandan", and the shift from the collective "we" to the individual "I" that implies ownership of one's identity. In my conversation with Bamporiki in June 2013, he proudly stressed: "I am the one to decide who I am", a statement he also makes in his testimonial book, after his watershed encounter with genocide survivors.

Conclusion

Bamporiki's public recognition of his shame over the genocide has had dramatic impact on the politics of the Rwandan post-genocide society. His testimony is a personal journey of public recognition and also a way of overcoming the problematic of ethnic identity, essential steps for the reconciliation to take place in post-genocide Rwanda.

My exploration of vicarious shame in Bamporiki's testimony has shown that it contradicts the conventional psychological view of shame causing individuals to withdraw into self-loathing and inaction. Instead, it has produced a social movement in Rwanda whereby people have been liberated to explore their own psychic pain and feelings of responsibility for the acts of others in their ethnic group, while finding a way to construct a new political identity that is positive, inclusive and healing.

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