

## CHAPTER 15

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In everyday usage, the term *reconciliation* references a process of restoring amicable relations or facilitating a shared understanding among otherwise conflicted parties. Since the early 1990s, however, this term has been increasingly used to encapsulate efforts to promote social and individual repair in the aftermath of war and related mass atrocities, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide—all of which are prohibited in international law. As such, reconciliation is often closely associated with international criminal law and a range of transitional justice and peace-building mechanisms, including trials, truth commissions, and commemorative sites and events, that aim to restore a sense of shared community, promote renewed trust and interdependence among civilians and parties to the conflict, enable social justice and civil rights, and ensure long-term political stability (Pham, Weinstein, and Longman 2004). It is likewise often pursued in tandem with community-based initiatives that seek to take universalized norms and practices related to reconciliation and render them more culturally and politically appropriate for a particular post-conflict setting, often by promoting locally conceived alternatives to international justice and commemoration.

To this end, scholars and practitioners who study reconciliation in various settings have emerged from the disciplines of international criminal law, anthropology, history, politics, social work, the forensic sciences, and beyond, and many of the resulting studies are thoroughly interdisciplinary and cross-cultural in scope. For example, in the context of the period following the civil war (1986–2006) in northern Uganda, much of the international work aimed at promoting reconciliation involved practitioners of anthropology, history, political science, and transitional justice working alongside Ugandan community-based organizations to privilege indigenous Acholi dispute-resolution rituals, such as *mato oput* (drinking the bitter root) and *nyouo tong gweno* (stepping on the egg), while simultaneously recognizing the importance of international justice and official recognition. In doing so, they have enabled a more nuanced understanding of the culturally specific ways that people are being negatively affected by their experiences of the war. They have likewise helped promote locally conceived reconciliation initiatives that stand a better chance of facilitating genuine social repair by spiritually cleansing individuals of the harms they experienced and the bad deeds they perpetrated, where parties to the conflict are willing (see, e.g., Anyeko et al. 2012; Baines 2010; Mpyangu 2014).

## Chapter 15: Reconciliation

This chapter draws on analyses of reconciliation in the aftermath of war and related mass atrocities in a range of settings and as comprehended through different disciplinary lenses to provide a comprehensive overview of the way that reconciliatory initiatives often intersect with local and international gender norms in important ways. It takes as its starting point the understanding that because war and related mass atrocities often take shape in ways that reflect contemporary gender norms, reconciliation efforts benefit from applying a similarly gendered lens. However, to demonstrate the kinds of initiatives and processes that might promote a gendered approach to reconciliation, as well as the particular challenges that can entangle and impede such efforts, particular attention is paid in the latter part of the chapter to reconciliation in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide. Postgenocide Rwanda is in some ways a fairly exceptional case study in that following the murder of an estimated 400,000 to 800,000 civilians—most of whom were members of the nation’s ethnic Tutsi minority population—by extremists affiliated with the nation’s ethnic Hutu majority, the violence was largely recognized in international law as genocide, alongside accompanying crimes against humanity and war crimes. As the nation was inundated with domestic and international initiatives aimed at facilitating reconciliation, Rwanda likewise proved fairly exceptional in that a cohort of women genocide survivors experienced a high degree of success advocating for meaningful policy changes aimed at promoting gender equality across Rwandan society. Rwanda is less exceptional, however, in terms of the subsequent challenges and limitations the nation encountered. In Rwanda, as in many post-conflict nations, efforts to promote reconciliation were complicated by the politicization of the conflict—most notably, official recognition of only Tutsi victims and survivors while condemning the Hutu majority as *génocidaires* (perpetrators of genocide), as well as the subsequent selective application of international and domestic justice—amid rapidly changing Rwandan gender norms.

### A HISTORY OF RECONCILIATION

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Erik Doxtader (2003, 270) identifies the origins of the term *reconciliation* in Greece around 400 BCE, at which point it connoted “a change from enmity to/for friendship” resulting from “the transformation of historical attitudes that promoted violence and/or the alteration of social-political structures that fostered conflict.” From this point, reconciliation became an increasingly important concept within European popular culture—particularly with its discussion in the New Testament as part of Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians. As a result of colonization and the global spread of Christianity that accompanied it, people around the world were gradually introduced to Christian ideas of reconciliation and accompanying values. And as conflict increased in the twentieth century, reconciliation emerged as a key, though often vaguely defined, concept in efforts to formally recognize the various harms inflicted on civilians, to promote social repair among the parties to a conflict, and to prevent the future resurgence of conflicts, most notably in the contexts of the truth and reconciliation commissions established in postjunta Argentina (1984) and postapartheid South Africa (1996–1998).

This shift toward a more formal and practical application of reconciliation emerged from the understanding that in the aftermath of war and related mass atrocities, it is important to restore good relationships and promote forgiveness among parties to a conflict—from state-level actors to individual civilians—to minimize the potential for further bloodshed along related lines (Pankhurst 2008). Social psychologist Malvern Lumsden was one of the earliest scholars to promote this view, highlighting the necessity of reconciling “the outer, social world” with the “inner, psychological world” (1997, 377) to

more effectively overcome the underlying traumas that enable cycles of violence to undermine the long-term social vitality of post-conflict communities. This approach has become so widespread that many post-conflict regimes have chosen to adopt the “therapeutic grammar of trauma, hidden suffering, repression, denial, closure, truth revelation, and catharsis” as part of broader efforts to lay national traumas to rest (Moon 2009, 85). Indeed, international relations expert Claire Moon argues that the successful performance of reconciliation and the post-conflict state’s perceived ability to “cure people of the pathologies that, on this account, are a potential cause of the resurgence of future violence” are often essential for demonstrating the legitimacy of post-conflict regimes in the eyes of the international community (2009, 86). To this end, the successful performance of reconciliation and healing often draws on the gender norms that exist in a particular post-conflict setting, impacting men and women in vastly differently ways, as will be discussed in greater detail below.

Where reconciliation initiatives are overseen by the international community, most notably the United Nations, the resulting interventions often take shape along particular lines, such as peacekeeping operations to prevent the resurgence of violence; trials, tribunals, or truth and reconciliation commissions (or a combination of these) aimed at holding perpetrators responsible for their crimes and at facilitating the creation of a rigorous historical record; commemorative sites and events intended to promote victim recognition and dialogue related to the conflict and its causes; and a range of peace-building interventions to ensure civilians’ security in those areas affected by the conflict, restore key government functions, encourage inclusivity and democratic reforms within political processes, provide basic provisions and services to the civilian population, and encourage the revitalization of the local economy (Boutros-Ghali 2009).

However, international practitioners such as Egyptian diplomat Boutros Boutros-Ghali have come to recognize that in order to be effective and meaningful for conflicted communities, reconciliation initiatives “must be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives” (United Nations Peacebuilding Fund). To this end, scholarship has emerged from different post-conflict settings that emphasizes the need to privilege locally conceived approaches to reconciliation alongside those mechanisms approved by the international community. For example, a 2010 volume titled *Localizing Transitional Justice*, edited by anthropologist Rosalind Shaw and international human rights law expert Lars Waldorf, included case studies from Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Israel-Palestine, and South Africa, among others, that demonstrated the necessity of interrogating the implicit cultural biases and assumptions inherent in much international transitional justice work, of which reconciliation initiatives are often an integral part. Shaw and Waldorf argued that many transitional justice initiatives were proving ineffective as the universal norms and best practices adhered to by the international community were “increasingly destabilized by its local applications” (2010, 4). This is particularly true of those reconciliation initiatives that were founded on the belief that truth telling facilitates healing—an idea that Shaw had earlier argued was “the product of a culture of memory that arose from specific historical processes in North America and Europe, originating, perhaps, in the redemptive significance of confession in the church” (2005, 7) and thus may not be globally applicable. Adding to this, international human rights law expert Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (2009) provides a reminder of the necessity of analyzing and deconstructing international masculinities that can be imported to conflicted or transitional communities as part of the international norms that surround many transitional justice programs.

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Following up on such insights, many experts on reconciliation now stress the need to draw on partnerships with local actors and organizations that can offer a more coherent understanding of the particular cultural, historical, political, and social factors that led to the emergence of conflict in their communities. While not without the potential to introduce further complications, this collaborative and locally informed approach is frequently regarded as necessary for establishing more appropriate, effective, and meaningful paths toward reconciliation. Indeed, there is widespread recognition among scholars and practitioners that the intersections between the international community's prioritizing of "liberal normative goods, such as the rule of law, peace, reconciliation, civil society, human rights, combating impunity, and justice," and the on-the-ground realities surrounding "local justice" are inherently messy (Hinton 2010, 1). Anthropologist Kristin C. Doughty has argued that, contrary to the romanticized notion that there is in some post-conflict contexts space "where a kinder, gentler reconciliation can occur, absent power relations of age, gender, class, or other forms of silencing. . . . the work of building and rebuilding social networks among 'intimate enemies' . . . is contentious, suffused with hostility and instrumentality" (2015, 432). This is because any locally conceived approach to reconciliation must involve an inclusive reckoning with the past—with its inevitable real and perceived injustices and privileges—that takes into consideration the post-conflict perspectives and needs of all parties to the conflict. Consequently, Doughty calls on transitional justice practitioners to attend to the various forms of social identity that inform transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives with the understanding that processes aimed at facilitating social repair are inherently violent, in so far as they frequently involve negotiating uncomfortable truths and conflicting values in ways that can facilitate further suffering within communities prior to enabling reconciliation.

### INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN RECONCILIATION AND GENDER

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Gender is but one important form of social identity that influences the experiences of reconciliation in post-conflict communities. For this reason, scholars and practitioners of reconciliation frequently highlight the importance of local gender norms and dynamics for developing culturally appropriate strategies to promote reconciliation. This tendency emerges from the realization that war and related mass atrocities often affect people in dramatically different ways as a result of their real or perceived sex or gender, among other identifying factors. Broadly speaking, in many contexts, state military and paramilitary institutions call primarily on men to serve as combatants, and many of these men may feel it necessary to respond positively to this call to arms to prove themselves both as men—by protecting their homes and families, for example—and as loyal members of their communities, although other factors, such as fear, revenge, and opportunism, might also motivate their decision to join the military. As the conflict escalates, men often serve primarily on the front lines of the conflict, witnessing firsthand the brutality of war and suffering the physical and psychological consequences of combat and any related mass atrocities that may occur, whether perpetrated by or against them. In this light, Adam Jones (2004, 2000) has highlighted the tendency for men of battle age to be the main victims of war and related mass atrocities—at least in terms of the number of dead—as a result of their status as (potential) combatants and their associated proximity to the front lines of the conflict.

This pattern was clearly evident during the Bosnian War (1992–1995), during which men from the Bosnian Serb, Bosnian Muslim (Bosniak), and Bosnian Croat ethnonationalist communities were called on by their respective political elites to protect their communities

by fighting those who they believed threatened their well-being. As a result, many able-bodied Bosnian men served on the various front lines of the war with either the national Bosnian army or the opposing Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat paramilitary groups, rendering them vulnerable to a range of conflict-related physical and psychological harms. Their potential to serve as combatants further rendered those men who refused to fight or were forced to lay down their weapons vulnerable to genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, most notably at Srebrenica in July 1995. Following months of siege by Bosnian Serb militias, commander Ratko Mladić invaded the former United Nations safe area that had been providing refuge to approximately 40,000 Bosniak civilians from around the Republika Srpska, a Bosnian Serb-controlled political entity founded in 1992. After permitting the evacuation of the Bosniak women and children, Mladić commanded the execution of the remaining 8,000 Bosniak civilian men. This massacre represents the only legally recognized instance of genocide that occurred during the three-year Bosnian War, although scholars such as political scientist Edina Bećirević (2010; see also Leydesdorff 2011; Simić and Daly 2011) have argued that genocide was perpetrated by Bosnian Serb militias against Bosniak civilians throughout Republika Srpska, if not Bosnia as a whole.

As a conflict draws to a close, surviving combatants often try to return to their prewar communities and resume their prewar lives, only to encounter a range of challenges, from finding gainful employment in an often dramatically altered social and political landscape to negotiating newly acquired physical and mental illnesses. Returning combatants may face particular challenges accepting certain necessities of the conflict that have caused changes within their communities, such as the prevalence of women in the public sphere following men's movements to the front lines, or community stigmatization of those who fought for the enemy or perpetrated atrocities against civilians. As such, former combatants can be rendered vulnerable to future violent outbreaks in their communities, from domestic violence within families to more public criminal acts such as theft and murder. Such experiences can leave them incapable of envisioning a future for themselves that includes cooperation across the national, ethnic, racial, religious, or gender boundaries that enabled or resulted from the conflict in which they were embedded. Such phenomena have been documented among men and women combatants alike, as part of the broader literature on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of child soldiers, among other types of combatants, in such postwar settings as Sierra Leone and northern Uganda, for example (MacKenzie 2009; McKay 2004).

Broadly speaking, women's experiences of war can vary in important ways, although the overall outcome in terms of their ability to envision a peaceful, collaborative future among parties to the conflict may be very similar. In many contexts around the world, women are not seen as appropriate combatants, although there have been important exceptions to this statement in such places as northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, Kashmir, and Syria (Cohen 2013; Düzgün 2016; Parashar 2011, 2009; Shekhawat 2015). More commonly, women are called on to serve military and paramilitary institutions in other ways, by cooking, cleaning, and providing moral support for troops and by rearing future generations of soldiers, for example. Because they rarely serve on the front lines of conflict, however, women more commonly experience the conflict directly only when it arrives in their communities, resulting in forced displacement or service to the newly arrived enemy combatants. In this context, women are frequently vulnerable to sexual violence, such as rape, forced marriage, and forced maternity, and may also witness the torture and murder of members of their community, including children and elders who are incapable of defending themselves and can serve no function for the combatants.

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As the conflict then draws to a close, women too must find ways to reintegrate into their communities while navigating a range of physical and mental illnesses associated with their firsthand experiences of the conflict, but perhaps further complicated by the suspicion or knowledge that they have been sexually assaulted or, worse yet, the perception that they willingly engaged in sexual acts with enemy combatants. Indeed, sexual violence, or gender-based violence, as it is commonly referred to in the literature (see, e.g., Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottmoeller 2002; Russo and Pirlott 2006), is a key point of focus for many reconciliation initiatives across the world. This at times singular focus emerges from the realization that women in post-conflict settings often struggle with community stigmatization and rejection associated with having suffered sexual violence in war and related mass atrocities, further complicated by the frequent need for women to transgress gender norms to take on roles and responsibilities previously performed by male family members who did not return from the war.

To return to the Bosnian example, following the genocide of Bosniak men at Srebrenica and throughout the Republika Srpska more generally, the Bosniak women who survived found themselves face-to-face with the unenviable task of rebuilding their communities through direct engagement in the previously male-dominated public sphere—a pattern that has repeated itself in other contexts, such as postwar Peru, Colombia, and northern Uganda (Amony 2015; Theidon 2007). These Bosnian women demonstrated remarkable resilience: despite often ongoing struggles with significant psychological and physical illnesses, they nonetheless found ways to speak publicly about their experiences, rejecting the stigma that they might have otherwise been forced to endure as “raped women” and taking on leadership roles in the rebuilding of their communities (Helms 2010; Leydesdorff 2011; Vranić 1996).

That said, studies by scholars such as political scientist R. Charli Carpenter (2006) and international law expert Chris Dolan (2014) suggest that men who survived rape and other forms of gender-based violence frequently continue to endure social stigmatization, even in settings where women have been empowered to break the silence on the subject. For this reason, these scholars emphasize the importance of recognizing and challenging the silences around gender-based violence—including not only rape and other forms of sexual violence but also forced recruitment and sex-selective massacre—endured by civilian men and boys in a range of settings around the world.

The stigma associated with gender-based and sexual violence may be further heightened in the case of individuals who are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI), for example. People who do not clearly adhere to the gender norms or sexual identities that dominate their communities are often vulnerable, during war and related mass atrocities, to additional forms of exploitation, discrimination, and sexual violence, which are often an extension of the microaggressions and oppression they would endure during times of peace. They may be excluded from serving in the military or paramilitary organizations, and subsequently as noncombatants they may be extremely vulnerable to various forms of torture, rape, and execution that are intended to highlight and punish or “correct” their perceived transgressions against dominant gender norms. For example, amid general calls for South Africa to prevent violence against women (Gobodo-Madikizela, Fish, and Shefer 2014), various human rights groups have placed special emphasis on recognizing the prevalence of “corrective rape” as a means of punishing black South African lesbians in the postapartheid period (see, e.g., Human Rights Watch 2007; Martin et al. 2009; Morrissey 2013). In this post-conflict context—in which homosexuality is often rejected as an alleged remnant of the nation’s colonial past—women’s efforts to

report these assaults and demand some form of legal accountability are most commonly met with indifference among law enforcement, creating insurmountable barriers to justice and reconciliation. This renders the women vulnerable to further persecution both as lesbians and as people who have broken “the traditional South African discourse of silence surrounding non-normative sexuality” (Morrissey 2013, 84).

## FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS IN RECONCILIATION

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These generalized experiences of war and related mass atrocities have been complicated in important ways, however, by feminist interventions in studies of reconciliation. For example, in response to Jones’s efforts to distinguish the plight of men as not only the primary combatants but also the primary victims of war and genocide in terms of numbers of dead, from women as the primary victims of sexual violence, Carpenter (2002) called for an explicit differentiation between sex and gender and a more comprehensive understanding of gender-selective violence, rather than sex-selective massacres. This allowed her to explore gender—understood in this instance as “a social process whereby divisions of labour, power, and emotion, as well as modes of dress and identity, are differentiated (and the differences naturalized), among as well as between men and women” in ways that do not necessarily correspond with biological sex—as but one of several interrelated social factors, such as race, class, age, and status, that affect a person’s experience of war and related mass atrocities and the peace-building initiatives that follow given the gender norms operating in a particular setting (Carpenter 2002, 80).

Feminist scholars have further pushed beyond the overly simplistic focus on men as combatants and women as victims of sexual violence to highlight women’s agency in conflicts as combatants, political leaders, and activists, for example, who take up arms and otherwise act alongside men on behalf of their communities, families, or political interests (see, e.g., Cohen 2013; Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Hogg 2010; Jessee 2015; Parashar 2011, 2009; Sharlach 1999). Of particular importance, political scientists Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg (2015) have prompted scholars and practitioners to push beyond patriarchal narratives that limit characterizations of women’s roles during conflict to that of mother, monster, whore, or some combination of these, because of the narrowly defined gender norms that persist in discourses on global politics, including post-conflict reconciliation. They stress that little insight can be gained in approaching women’s participation in violence and its aftermaths as exceptional or in stereotyping women’s involvement in conflicts and that, more importantly, such tendencies result in theoretical inaccuracies. As such, they call for the “active disruption” of such stereotypes to better explore the feminine elements inherent in political violence and its aftermaths (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015, 157).

Along a similar line, other scholars have sought to destabilize narratives that stereotype men solely as combatants and perpetrators to examine a wider range of men’s experiences of war and its aftermaths. For example, Dolan (2002) has highlighted the importance of understanding the impact of “collapsing masculinities” on sexual violence against men and boys in contexts such as the 20-year civil war in northern Uganda. He argues as follows:

Gendered assumptions, which for centuries obscured the rape of women and girls, continue to operate to mask what is happening to men and boys. . . . When a “real man” is defined as strong and in control and invulnerable, it is easy to assume that if he was engaged in a same-sex act, then surely “*he must have wanted it.*” (Dolan 2014, 2; emphasis in the original)

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Conversely, Dolan finds that the gap between the rates of sexual assault endured by women and men may not be as substantial as previously believed and that the impact of these assaults on men can include low self-esteem, depression, sexual dysfunction, and the destabilization of gender and sexual identity, in addition to social marginalization and isolation. Nonetheless, many of the humanitarian initiatives that emerge in the aftermath of conflict do little to address the specific harms and lingering vulnerabilities endured by men and boys who have survived sexual assaults. Indeed, following interviews with ten actors working toward shaping international policy regarding the recognition of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence, human rights lawyer Ellen Anna Philo Gorris (2015, 412) concluded that “men and boys have been historically and structurally rendered an invisible group of victims in international human rights and policy responses towards conflict-related sexual violence stemming from the United Nations.”

Thus, given the often varied experiences of men and women surrounding war and related mass atrocities, a common theme among the feminist scholars and practitioners discussed in this section is that reconciliation initiatives must be carefully targeted to address more effectively and comprehensively the specific post-conflict needs of men and women alike, as well as members of the local LGBTI community and related special interest groups who find themselves uniquely vulnerable in conflicts and their aftermaths. This approach, while necessary in many post-conflict settings, can add further complicating factors to the already “shaky balance” that must be sought in bringing universal norms on reconciliation promoted by the United Nations into conversation with the particular circumstances of individual conflicts (Wagner 2010, 25).

### RECONCILIATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1994 RWANDAN GENOCIDE

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To this end, present-day Rwanda effectively demonstrates many of the benefits and challenges that exist in applying a gendered lens to reconciliation in the aftermath of civil war and genocide. Following years of relative stability, in 1990 the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—a Uganda-based political party composed primarily of Tutsi who had fled political violence that targeted Tutsi monarchists in the era surrounding Rwandan independence in 1962—invaded Rwanda. This resulted in a three-year civil war that polarized the civilian population along political and ethnic lines. Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu politician who had ruled the country as president since 1973 and whose political legitimacy derived almost entirely from the powerful family of his wife, Agathe Kanziga, was ill prepared to effectively resist the RPF invasion and, as a result, was gradually forced to accept assistance from the United Nations in negotiating a power-sharing agreement. At the same time, however, elites within the Habyarimana regime became increasingly radicalized, leading to the emergence of an extremist Hutu Power movement among Habyarimana’s inner circle, including Kanziga and her brothers. These extremists began disseminating propaganda through the Rwandan media—most notably via the infamous magazine *Kangura* (meaning “to wake others”), which was established at the start of the civil war, and Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), established in 1993. These media outlets encouraged civilians to view the RPF and Rwanda’s minority Tutsi population more generally as a threat by promoting a politicized version of Rwandan history in which the Hutu majority had allegedly been enslaved and oppressed by the predominantly Tutsi monarchy prior to independence. Simultaneously, the Hutu Power movement created youth militias—the Interahamwe (meaning “those who fight together” or “those who work together”) and the Impuzamugambi



(meaning “those who have a common goal”)—which in their earliest incarnations trained Hutu youth to defend their communities against the RPF. However, the purpose of these militias gradually expanded to include priming their members to perpetrate atrocities against Tutsi civilians and other alleged *ibyitso* (RPF supporters).

Recognizing the growing potential for mass atrocities, the international community tried to intervene by empowering the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda to oversee the creation of a broad-based transitional government that included representation by Habyarimana’s National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development and the RPF, among other emergent political parties. On April 6, 1994, however, before the transitional government was implemented, unknown parties shot down Habyarimana’s plane on its approach to Kayibanda International Airport. In the hours following the confirmation of Habyarimana’s assassination, RTLM broadcast allegations that the RPF was responsible and called on Hutu to avenge the death of their president. Simultaneously, the Presidential Guard began murdering the nation’s political opposition and organizing the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi to establish roadblocks throughout the capital, Kigali, at which fleeing Tutsi civilians were murdered. Over the next three months, Hutu Power extremists facilitated massacres of Tutsi civilians in all regions of the country not yet under RPF control. An estimated 180,000 civilians ultimately chose to participate in the genocide, killing Tutsi at churches and other sites where they sought refuge, at roadblocks as they attempted to flee, and in the swamps and forests where they hid (Straus 2004). By the time the RPF declared its military victory on July 18, 1994, an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 Rwandans had been brutally murdered, most of whom were Tutsi (Des Forges 1999). In addition, the Hutu Power extremists had used rape as a weapon of war—against Tutsi women primarily as punishment for their perceived superior beauty, among other factors, but also against Hutu and Twa women who had married or had children with Tutsi men—resulting in an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 victims of sexual assault (Baines 2003; Degni-Ségué 1996; Nowrojee 1996; Taylor 1999). These assaults resulted in an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 children born of rape, many of whom were subsequently stigmatized by their communities as “little Interahamwe” (Mukangendo 2007, 42).

In the aftermath of the genocide, the RPF and the international community have worked, often in tandem, to promote reconciliation across ethnic and political divides. To this end, the RPF boasts a solid track record of attracting international donors, accounting for approximately 40 percent of Rwanda’s annual budget (Swedlund 2013). Much of this funding is, quite appropriately, channeled into a range of policies aimed at improving the overall lives of the Rwandan people in a manner that adheres closely to the United Nations’ aforementioned best practices toward promoting reconciliation. Under the banner of its ambitious Vision 2020 platform, the RPF in 2000 initiated broad educational reforms aimed at ensuring literacy and a basic level of education, with the long-term goal of reducing poverty; healthcare initiatives aimed at reducing the transmission of HIV/AIDS; a series of ambitious family-planning policies aimed at reducing population growth; and a gender equality policy that has led to a much-lauded women’s majority among Rwanda’s parliamentarians (Republic of Rwanda 2012).

However, while guided by the United Nations in many of its reconciliation initiatives, the Rwandan government has often merged these with distinctly Rwandan practices in an effort to improve its ability to promote genuine social repair in Rwanda, while simultaneously providing the government with an opportunity to shape these initiatives according to its political agenda. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) is a

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perfect example of this, charged with managing programs aimed at promoting reconciliation throughout Rwandan society and facilitating long-term regional stability.

Among its many initiatives, NURC has adapted the precolonial practices of *ingando* and *itorero* to educate Rwandans about their responsibilities in the “New Rwanda” and the dangers of bad governance and ethnic divisionism. Precolonial kings used *ingando* during periods of upheaval as a communal retreat “where people shared in decisions on war and peace and how Rwanda was governed” (Nantulya 2006, 48). Following the genocide, *ingando* referred to either solidarity camps where politicians, civil society leaders, and university students undergo “a form of political indoctrination for those who occupy, or will occupy, leadership positions” or mandatory reeducation camps for *génocidaires* and other criminals who are preparing to return to their communities (Thomson 2011, 334; see also Mgbako 2005). Conversely, in the precolonial period *itorero* included a range of court institutions wherein Rwandans studied Kinyarwanda (the nation’s indigenous language) and sports, dance, music, and national values. In 2009, however, *itorero* was reinvented by the RPF as leadership development centers attended by Rwandan civilians to support community public works projects (Sundberg 2016). These centers teach Rwandans to eschew ethnic labels and identify—first and foremost—as Rwandans working together for the “New Rwanda.” Indeed, public discussion of ethnicity has become taboo in present-day Rwanda—reinforced through a strict law that prohibits “genocide ideology”—although ethnic labels continue to be used in many private settings.

However, there is discussion among scholars and practitioners regarding the extent to which *ingando* and *itorero* are promoting reconciliation or whether they are primarily serving to reinforce the RPF’s political legitimacy. Numerous human rights organizations and scholars have documented a growing atmosphere of fear among Rwandans civilians, many of whom express anxiety regarding the consequences of publicly contradicting or criticizing the RPF and its policies. For example, in a 2010 Amnesty International press release, Erwin van der Borgh, the director of the organization’s Africa Programme, stated that “Rwandans live in fear of being punished for saying the wrong thing. Most take the safe option of staying silent.” Jennie E. Burnet has similarly criticized the RPF’s program of nationalized commemoration for creating a “shibboleth of genocide” (the term *shibboleth* meaning an outmoded but nonetheless defining framework) that permits people to speak publicly about their experiences of the genocide only in terms that uphold the dichotomous official narrative in which Tutsi are victims and Hutu are perpetrators (2012, 128). Similarly, political scientist Susan Thomson has documented the everyday practices of “staying on the sidelines, irreverent compliance, and withdrawn muteness” through which Rwandan civilians demonstrate resistance to the RPF’s policies of national unity and reconciliation, recognizing the inadequacies of these policies to resolve the problems they face in the postgenocide period (2013, 9).

The Rwandan government has similarly incorporated locally conceived transitional justice mechanisms into its efforts to ensure “universal accountability” for the genocide (Gahima 2013, xxxviii). Disapproving of the decision by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to prosecute high-level *génocidaires* outside Rwanda, the RPF in 1996 tasked Rwanda’s newly reconstructed national courts with prosecuting the remaining 150,000 alleged *génocidaires* who had been imprisoned and were awaiting trial (Tertsakian 2008). It quickly became evident, however, that it would be impossible to try this many accused in a timely manner in the national courts. Thus, the RPF reinvented *gacaca* (meaning “justice on the grass”)—a precolonial dispute resolution mechanism—to address the overflow by trying



***A Rwandan woman appears before gacaca to face criminal charges related to the 1994 genocide, October 16, 2001.*** *The gacaca courts were a precolonial form of dispute resolution that was adapted by the Rwandan government to address the massive backlog of alleged génocidaires awaiting trial. Between their nation-wide adoption in 2005 and official closure in 2012, an estimated 11,000 courts considered nearly two million allegations of genocide-related crimes.* MARCO LONGARI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES.

the cases of low-level génocidaires in open-air courts within their communities (Ingelaere 2009; Thomson and Nagy 2011; Waldorf 2006). Over a decade, more than 1.9 million genocide-related cases were tried through gacaca, with varying degrees of success (Rutayisire and Richters 2014).

Once again, however, gacaca is surrounded by debate regarding the extent to which it effectively promotes reconciliation among Rwandans. Political scientist Phil Clark argues that gacaca is allowing Rwandans to achieve what he terms “negotiated reconciliation” through long-term formal and informal negotiations between antagonistic parties (2014, 304). Other experts on gacaca, however, have documented its shortcomings, from the often oppressive measures used by district-level authorities to ensure a quorum (Thomson and Nagy 2011) and the potential for interpersonal conflicts to prompt false accusations that result in wrongful sentences (Rettig 2011), to the institution’s tendency to privilege the RPF’s official narrative over people’s lived experiences of the genocide (Ingelaere 2009).

Within these reconciliation programs, the Rwandan government has made a sustained effort to put its gender equality reforms into practice, recognizing that pregenocide Rwandan gender norms—alongside ethnic and political affiliation, among other social identifiers—had a significant impact on the patterns of violence during the genocide. In the decades immediately preceding the genocide, Rwandan society was patriarchal; moreover, ethnicity

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was inherited patrilineally, and only men could formally inherit wealth and properties from their fathers. The ideal for Rwandan women was to be reserved, submissive, respectful, silent, and maternal, focusing their energies on maintaining a respectable household and raising polite children (Burnet 2012). Rwandan women were largely excluded from politics, commerce, law, and education compared to their male compatriots (Burnet 2012, 2010; Jefremovas 1991; Nowrojee 1996; Sharlach 1999). Women who did not conform or actively resisted such expectations could be publicly mocked and ostracized for transgressing Rwandan gender norms. For example, in 1991 anthropologist Villia Jefremovas observed that “the language of public morality and stereotype is one weapon . . . used by both men and women to interpret, manipulate, validate or negate control over labour, resources and surplus” produced by women (379).

While the Hutu Power extremists targeted Tutsi men and women alike, Tutsi women more so than men were targeted with sexual violence, while Tutsi men were more frequently murdered. There are notable exceptions to this statement, as groups such as Human Rights Watch and Ibuka have documented instances in which Tutsi men were subject to sexual violence, including rape, castration, and forced incest. However, while there is public space in Rwanda in which Tutsi women can discuss their experiences of sexual violence during the genocide, there exists a powerful taboo that prohibits Rwandan men from speaking as freely about their experiences of sexual violence during the genocide, for the reasons cited above by Dolan and Gorris.

The genocide ultimately undermined the social vitality of many Tutsi communities and families, while also leaving a large number of women-headed households that faced substantial challenges in overcoming economic deprivation, as well as the mental and physical health challenges that accompanied firsthand experiences of the genocide’s extreme violence. The disproportionate number of women survivors has meant that they have often borne the weight of the nation’s various reconciliation programs, both in terms of the “narrative burden” associated with testifying at commemorative ceremonies, trials, political rallies, and related public events—occasions at which it is often important to narrate one’s experiences in a manner that upholds the RPF’s official narrative surrounding the genocide (Jessee 2017; Theidon 2007). As in many post-conflict settings, this often results in women survivors being given opportunities to speak publicly about certain kinds of experiences, such as rape and other forms of sexual violence that uphold the brutality of the violence perpetrated by the Hutu Power extremists, but silencing them on other matters that might complicate the RPF’s official narrative or allow for a more varied accounting of women’s experiences of the genocide (e.g., Ross 2003).

Likewise, the prevalence of women-headed households means that female genocide survivors have often had to take the lead in negotiating the future economic and social survival of their families and communities amid an often tense, and increasingly authoritarian, political climate in which failure can be synonymous with resistance to RPF policies (Burnet 2012; Longman 2011; Theidon 2007). On a more positive note, this has provided some substantial opportunities for a handful of Rwandan women to take active leadership roles in shaping policies and civil society in the postgenocide period. Most notably, these women have been able to pursue a gender equality agenda that has made meaningful progress in several instances toward shaping and implementing international gender equality policies in Rwanda (Mageza-Barthel 2015).

There is, however, extensive debate regarding the extent to which current gender equality and reconciliation initiatives are improving the everyday lives of ordinary Rwandan

women, including rural genocide survivors. On the one hand, the Rwandan government and its supporters are keen to promote the exceptional strides it has made in empowering Rwandan women to take up positions in the government and civil society through a committed policy of gender mainstreaming overseen by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, the Gender Monitoring Office, the National Women's Council, and the Rwanda Women Parliamentary Forum (Republic of Rwanda 2010). On the other hand, there are multiple critics of this success, particularly emerging from scholars who have worked extensively with rural Rwandan women, who argue that Rwanda's gender equality policies have genuinely benefited only female political elites. For example, Burnet has argued that despite gender mainstreaming and increased political representation by women, rural women often find it difficult to assert themselves independently from their husbands, fathers, or brothers or to take on roles that are perceived to be the sole domain of men. Burnet (2012, 45) has documented modern usage of the phrase *ni igishyamba*—translated as “she’s a big man-woman”—to insult women who are outspoken and aggressive, despite these traits being prized when displayed by Rwandan men. Similarly, sociologist Marie Berry's (2014) work among Rwandan women who comprised the nation's informal or agricultural sectors found that the benefits of gender equality policies were not being realized except among a small minority of women political elites. This trend emerges in large part from the cost-prohibitive nature of education and rents and permits for small businesses, as well as the various forms of structural violence to which many rural Rwandan women are vulnerable precisely because their lack of success contradicts the positive image of the New Rwanda the RPF is determined to uphold. Thomson, meanwhile, has argued that while Rwandan women's visibility in public life is at an all-time high, their ability to shape their nation's future is limited by the fact that Paul Kagame, who began serving as Rwandan president in 2000, and his advisers dominate parliament, making it difficult for women parliamentarians to implement meaningful changes. She concludes that “the number of Rwandan female parliamentarians glosses over their limited role in policymaking, the continued marginalization of the vast majority of Rwandan women, and the government's superficial commitment to democratic governance” (Thomson 2015, 20–21). In sum, it seems that Rwandan women political elites are better positioned to take advantage of the RPF's gender equality reforms than their rural counterparts and even then perhaps only in arenas in which they have the formal approval of the RPF and that do not involve any transgression of Rwandan gender norms.

In terms of the *génocidaires*, there were only an estimated 2,000 Hutu women who directly participated in the genocide. Among these female *génocidaires*, there is a tendency for them to present themselves as victims of gender-based discrimination—particularly among rural women *génocidaires*—and, to a lesser extent in the case of elites, as victims of the particular brand of victor's justice meted out by the RPF (Jessee 2015). There may be an element of truth to these claims to victimization. In terms of sentencing, Nicole Hogg (2010, 81), a specialist in international humanitarian law, found that women *génocidaires* who participated indirectly in the genocide frequently received preferential treatment resulting from the “chivalry” of men, whereby “male witnesses, investigators, prosecutors and judges are so infected by gender stereotypes that they either cannot perceive of women as criminals or feel protective towards them in spite of their suspected or proven criminality.” However, when direct criminal responsibility for murder, mutilation, or other serious crimes was established, women *génocidaires* were “regarded as ‘evil’ or ‘non-women’ and treated with the full force of the law” (71). This tendency emerged from the women's transgression of contemporary Rwandan gender norms when they opted to engage in direct physical violence, against which there were strong taboos in Rwandan society prior to the genocide (Jessee 2015).

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Nonetheless, it is primarily Hutu men who bear the burden of criminal responsibility for the genocide as the primary masterminds and perpetrators of the violence. Much as with women *génocidaires*, however, many male *génocidaires* expressed a strong sense of victimization resulting from the political climate in Rwanda surrounding the genocide, among other factors. In terms of their criminal actions, they cited diverse and complex motives: most notably, fear resulting from firsthand experiences of violence perpetrated by the RPF against Hutu civilians during the three-year civil war; situational peer pressure from Hutu Power extremists in their communities that made it difficult for them to resist the violence; and inherited memories of abuse at the hands of Tutsi elites affiliated with Rwanda's monarchy prior to the nation's independence in 1962 (Fujii 2008; Jessee 2017; Mironko 2004; Straus 2004; OHCHR 2010). Given that Rwanda's postgenocide transitional justice and reconciliation programs are controlled by the predominantly Tutsi RPF, the alleged mischaracterization of their criminal complicity was then compounded by their postgenocide experiences of Rwanda's legal system. These experiences were allegedly characterized by arbitrary arrests and detentions marked by the use of torture to extract confessions; poor prison conditions; long periods of detention while awaiting trial during which accused *génocidaires* were given no legal representation to prepare their cases; and the sense that survivors' testimonies were privileged over that of *génocidaires* and their supporters, resulting in sentences disproportionate to the actual crimes committed. Socially, *génocidaires* further complained that the stigma associated with being labeled a *génocidaire* resulted in widespread rejection by family and friends to avoid political contamination. In addition, the daily conditions in the prisons were so poor that *génocidaires* often went hungry and without appropriate medical care. Further compounding the problems they navigated in their everyday lives, many *génocidaires* reported symptoms consistent with trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder related to the violence they had enacted on behalf of and endured at the hands of the RPF, but they claimed they were given no treatment nor were their losses and suffering formally acknowledged by the government (Jessee 2017). Such experiences rendered *génocidaires* largely incapable of imagining a peaceful future for themselves that included collaboration across ethnic and political lines, despite substantial efforts on the part of the Rwandan government to promote reconciliation.

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### Summary

In examining in tandem the postgenocide experiences of Rwandan survivors and perpetrators, among other parties to Rwanda's civil war and genocide, it becomes clear that reconciliation is a complicated and fraught process, particularly when viewed through the lens of the nation's shifting gender norms. Despite significant efforts on the part of the RPF to promote reconciliation in accordance with international standards, a formidable and unenviable task under the best circumstances, its need to demonstrate legitimacy—as a predominantly Tutsi political party exercising power over a majority Hutu civilian population, not to mention a citizenry that has been deeply divided by experiences of civil war and genocide in ways that go far beyond ethnicity—has resulted in many of these initiatives becoming bogged down in local politics.

With respect to these difficulties, scholars have increasingly documented various subtle forms of civilian resistance to state-led reconciliation initiatives, among survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators of the genocide, and men and women alike, as well as lingering political

frustrations that have prompted many experts to conclude that there remains a powerful reservoir of ethnic and political tensions that threatens the long-term political stability of the nation (Jessee 2017; see also Buckley-Zistel 2006; Straus and Waldorf 2011; Thomson 2013). While the civil war and genocide affected Rwandan men and women in different ways, the outcomes in terms of their acceptance of the available avenues for reconciliation seem to be fairly consistent regardless of gender. Rwanda is by no means exceptional in facing these challenges. Indeed, as noted above, promoting genuine reconciliation is an inherently violent process. Nonetheless, the Rwandan case study raises provocative questions about the potential for state-led reconciliation initiatives, even when crafted in accordance with international best practices, to affect meaningful social repair among communities. These questions appear particularly salient in instances in which reconciliation initiatives are introduced by an authoritarian regime alongside a largely one-sided approach to transitional justice that fails to account for either the full range of atrocities endured by the population or the specific needs of the post-conflict citizenry given their often gendered experiences of the conflict.

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