

Excusing the Self and Blaming Others: Participation in Genocide and the Fundamental Attribution Error

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Abstract: In the aftermath of genocide, individuals convicted of crimes develop explanations for both their own participation and that of others. While previous research has addressed the rationalizations and neutralizations put forth by those who commit genocidal violence, few have considered how these explanations compare to participants' perceptions of the motives of their peers. Using the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as a case study, this article draws from in-depth interviews with 165 people convicted of genocide crimes to examine such accounts. We analyse their narratives to compare how they talk about their own crimes with how they talk about those of others. In doing so, we find partial support for what psychologists term the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE), as participants predominantly attributed their own participation to external factors—like being coerced or forced to act by others—while more often attributing the participation of others to a combination of external and internal factors—like being greedy or evil. We connect these findings to existing research on accounts of participation in genocide and reflect on the implications of these narratives for the construction of collective memory and reconciliation in Rwanda.

Keywords: Fundamental Attribution Error, Reentry & Reintegration, Rwandan Genocide, Post-Conflict Narratives, Neutralizations

Introduction

Life is precious'. With these words, Deo—one of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans who were convicted of committing crimes of genocide against Rwandan Tutsi in 1994—began his explanation for why he participated in a killing group. He elaborated further, 'the order was saying that they [Hutu local leaders]

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would kill anyone who will not join them because that person would be either an accomplice or a traitor'.¹ Deo maintained that he participated in genocidal violence because the Hutu local leaders in his community forced him to participate, noting that he believed refusing to join a killing group would have been dangerous and perhaps even life-threatening. Yet, when asked why he thought other Rwandans participated in the violence, Deo gave a different reason: namely, greed. As Deo explained, 'Many did it because they wanted to take the properties and the belongings of these Tutsi'.

This article relies upon a case study of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to ask: how do people who were convicted of genocide account for their own actions compared to the actions of others? We draw from 165 interviews conducted in 2017 and 2018 with Rwandans who were incarcerated for genocide. Like Deo, many of the respondents pointed to the importance of external factors in influencing their actions. Yet they were much more likely to also invoke internal factors when explaining the motivations of others, while still often citing external factors as well. We suggest that these findings constitute partial evidence of the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE),² or the social-psychological tendency to attribute one's own actions and circumstances to external factors while attributing others' actions and circumstances to internal factors. We consequently draw upon the narratives of individuals convicted of genocide crimes to document the presence of the FAE and theorize its impact.

As a case study from which much recent literature on genocide perpetration stems, post-1994 Rwanda provides a valuable context for examining the post-hoc narratives of individuals who perpetrated genocide. As such, this analysis provides novel insight into Rwanda's long-term peacebuilding and reconciliation process.³ This study contributes to research on how people explain the decisions they made during genocide, especially perpetration. Such accounts shed light on how people think about their crimes after the fact and inform present un-

1 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Deo* (Pseudonym). November 2017. In-person at the prison.

2 Lee Ross, 'The Intuitive Psychologist and His Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 10 (1977), pp. 173-220, doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60357-3.

3 Among recent works, see especially: Kjell Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide: A Criminological Account* (Routledge, 2017); Emily Bryant and others, 'Techniques of Neutralization and Identity Work Among Accused Genocide Perpetrators', *Social Problems*, 65.4 (2018), 584-602, doi:10.1093/socpro/spx026; Erin Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda: The Politics of History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

derstandings of past violence. Indeed, the stories that people tell themselves, their spouses, their friends, and their children impact personal and collective memories of past violence, including those that are being passed to future generations. Such conflict-related narratives, among a myriad of other factors, have important implications for reconciliation and prospects for future peace.⁴ Analysing how people explain their own and others' actions during genocide is also important for methodological reasons, as most research on why people perpetrate genocide leans heavily upon interview-based data to understand individual decision-making during genocide based on such accounts.⁵ By becoming mindful of the influence of the FAE on such narratives, researchers can clarify the methodological limitations of drawing factual conclusions based on what are often the cognitively-biased perceptions of people who perpetrated genocide.

In what follows, we outline the existing literature on how people account for their actions during genocide, with a particular focus on research related to our case study of Rwanda. We then summarize research on the FAE in order to apply it to our study of people who perpetrated genocide in Rwanda. After outlining a brief case history and our methods, we highlight the most common reasons our respondents provided for explaining their own and others' participation in the genocide. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for efforts at long-term memorialization and reconciliation in Rwanda, as well as genocide studies research more broadly.

Explaining and Narrating Participation in Genocide

Much research has emphasized understanding why people perpetrate genocide, with a growing body of work also addressing how people explain their participation in genocide, as well as the consequences of such

4 Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Sarah Federman, 'Narrative Approaches to Understanding and Responding to Conflict', *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution*, 4.2 (2016), pp. 154-171, doi:10.5553/IJ CER/221199652016004002002; Jessica Senehi, 'Constructive Storytelling: A Peace Process', *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 9.2 (2002), pp. 41-63, doi:10.46743/1082-7307/2002.1026.

5 For example, Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Cornell University Press, 2006); Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Cornell University Press, 2009); Timothy Williams, *The Complexity of Evil: Perpetration and Genocide* (Rutgers University Press, 2021).

explanations. This paper focuses on explanations for the perpetration of genocide based on the narratives of individuals convicted of genocide crimes, though we briefly summarize research on the causes of perpetration prior to addressing, in much more detail, existing work on how people explain and narrate their genocidal crimes.

Turning first toward the causes of perpetration, genocide researchers have drawn upon extensive fieldwork and analysis of archival documents to generate theories regarding why people participate in genocide.⁶ While early work in the field centred on evaluating the personality correlates or psychological profiles of those who perpetrate genocide,⁷ decades of research have revealed that ordinary people commit genocide under circumstances that reshape conceptions of morality and decision-making processes through a variety of mechanisms. Such studies have highlighted the importance of contextual factors and social dynamics at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels in influencing ordinary people to engage in mass atrocity.⁸

Engaging with this complexity, researchers' explanations for why people participate in mass violence generally emphasize the interplay between internal and external factors, with internal factors typically tied to someone's character or mindset (e.g., personality, beliefs, disposition) and external factors tied to group dynamics, circumstantial pressures, and other aspects of the social situation.⁹ Research on the various mechanisms that cut across disposition and situation to influence perpetration dynamics has drawn from numerous case studies around

6 For example, Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Fujii; Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia In the Shadow of Genocide* (University of California Press, 2004); Alette Smeulers, *Perpetrators of Mass Atrocities: Terribly and Terrifyingly Normal?* (Routledge, 2024); Straus; James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Williams.

7 Theodor W. Adorno and others, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Harper & Row, Inc., 1950).

8 For overviews, see Maureen S. Hiebert, 'Theorizing Destruction: Reflections on the State of Comparative Genocide Theory', *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 3.3 (2008), pp. 309-339, doi:10.3138/gsp.3.3.309; Evgeny Finkel and Scott Straus, 'Macro, Meso, and Micro Research on Genocide: Gains, Shortcomings, and Future Areas of Inquiry', *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 7.1 (2012), pp. 56-67, doi:10.1353/gsp.2012.0008.

9 To be certain, scholars use various terms as they discuss the interplay of internal and external factors, with sociologists often alluding to agency versus structure, for instance: Peter B. Owens, Yang Su and David A. Snow, 'Social Scientific Inquiry Into Genocide and Mass Killing: From Unitary Outcome to Complex Processes', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39.1 (2013), pp. 69-84, doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145650 and Susanne Karstedt, Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Laura C. Frizzell, 'Genocide, Mass Atrocity, and Theories of Crime: Unlocking Criminology's Potential', *Annual Review of Criminology*, 4 (2021), pp. 75-97, doi:10.1146/annurev-criminol-061020-022050.

the globe.¹⁰ For example, studies of the Holocaust have elucidated how conformity, comradeship, masculinities, and organizational dynamics impact perpetration.¹¹ Others have studied the diverse motives and social drivers of membership and participation in armed groups, paramilitaries, and militias involved in atrocity perpetration worldwide, elucidating important aspects of social polarization, class formation, organized crime, state-sponsorship, and ideological factors.¹² Researchers have also underscored the importance of peer pressure, social ties, and norms and structures that enable perpetration of genocide.¹³ Taken together, this vast literature points to the importance of evolving models of decision-making during genocide which seek to account for the complex interaction between both internal and

10 A single article cannot provide a comprehensive review of the many complicated factors that shape participation in genocide. However, we suggest referencing recent works that summarize this robust literature. For example, Williams's book on the *Complexity of Evil* summarizes the numerous factors that coalesce to shape decisions to participate in genocide. Specifically, Williams highlights the importance of ingroup motivations (e.g., obedience, peer pressure), outgroup motivations (e.g., ideology, emotions), and opportunistic motivations (e.g., economic motivations, personal conflict). He pairs such motivations with facilitative factors, including ideological frameworks and moral disengagement, as well as contextual factors, ranging from the role of the state to the impacts of culture, ideology, and economics. Additionally, Alette Smeulers's work *Perpetrators of Mass Atrocities* examines various atrocity crime types across case studies to articulate a typology of perpetrators that takes into account both internal and external factors. Smeulers argues, 'The typology of perpetrators acknowledges the power of the social environment in which the perpetrators find themselves but also stresses the role of the individual in how he or she operates within this environment. It takes both dispositional and situational factors as well as the interaction between the individual and the environment into account' (p. 6).

11 For example, Browning; Thomas Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship: Hitler's Soldiers, Male Bonding and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Edward Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (University of Kansas Press, 2005); *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, ed. by Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber (Oxford University Press, 2002); Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford University Press, 2009); and Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

12 For example, Robert S. Barrett, 'Interviews with Killers: Six Types of Combatants and Their Motivations for Joining Deadly Groups', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 34.10 (2011), pp. 749-764, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2011.604830; Iva Vukušić, *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: State Connections and Patterns of Violence* (Routledge, 2022); Uğur Ümit Üngör, 'Shabbiha: Paramilitary Groups, Mass Violence and Social Polarization in Homs', *Violence: An International Journal*, 1.1 (2020), pp. 59-79, doi:10.1177/2633002420907771; and Clemence Pinaud, 'South Sudan: Civil War, Predation and the Making of a Military Aristocracy', *African Affairs*, 113.451 (2014), pp. 192-211, doi:10.1093/afraf/adu019.

13 Straus; Fujii; Anderson; Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006); Omar Shahabudin McDoom, *The Path to Genocide in Rwanda: Security, Opportunity, and Authority in an Ethnocratic State* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

external factors, as well as how factors shaping participation may shift over time, even within a single episode of mass violence.¹⁴

While many of the aforementioned studies utilize primary source testimonies or accounts from individuals who perpetrated genocide to draw conclusions about why they committed violence, other scholars study testimonies and accounts of violence with an emphasis on the narratives that are told and retold about mass atrocities. Put another way, researchers also pay attention to how governments, organizations, schools, and even individuals shape the narratives and memories of genocide, with some emphasis on trial testimonies.¹⁵ For instance, some researchers have analysed the narratives that governments put forth to explain past violence, including how they narrate the causes of the violence and where they locate blame for what transpired.¹⁶ Others have examined how narratives of blame during ongoing conflict can perpetuate conflict cycles and impact social divisions,¹⁷ as well as how 'justificatory narratives' provide the ideological foundations for mass killing.¹⁸ These macro-level narratives intersect in vital ways with the narratives that participants in genocide recount about their own roles within the violence.

Still more scholars have examined the post-hoc explanations and excuses posited by direct participants in genocidal violence, seeking to understand how they try to rationalize or excuse their actions.¹⁹ Much

14 For studies on dynamic and contradictory behavior during genocide, see: Bradley Campbell, 'Contradictory Behavior During Genocides', *Sociological Forum*, 5.2 (2010), pp. 296-314, doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01177.x; Aliza Luft, 'Toward a Dynamic Theory of Action at the Micro Level of Genocide: Killing, Desistance, and Saving in 1994 Rwanda', *Sociological Theory*, 33.2 (2015), pp. 148-172, doi:10.1177/0735275115587721; and Erin Jessee, 'On the Margins: Role-Shifting in Atrocity Crimes', in *The Oxford Handbook of Atrocity Crimes*, ed. by Barbora Holá, Hollie Nyseth Nzitira and Maartje Weerdesteijn (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 329-50.

15 Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Nicole Fox, 'Narrating Genocide: Time, Memory, and Blame', *Sociological Forum*, 32.1 (2017), pp. 116-37, doi:10.1111/socf.12319; Timothy Longman, *Memory and Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Hilary Earl, *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945-1958: Atrocity, Law, and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Alexander Laban Hinton, *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* (Duke University Press, 2016).

16 Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide*; Susan Thomson, *Rwanda: From Genocide to Precarious Peace* (Yale University Press, 2018); and Nicole Fox, *After Genocide: Memory and Reconciliation in Rwanda* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2021).

17 Cobb; Daniel Bar-Tal, 'Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50.11 (2007), pp. 1430-53, doi:10.1177/00027642073024.

18 Jonathan Leader Maynard, *Ideology and Mass Killing: The Radicalized Security Politics of Genocides and Deadly Atrocities* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

19 Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide*; Anderson; Bryant and others; Alexander Alvarez, 'Adjusting to Genocide: The Techniques of Neutralization and the Holocaust', *Social Science History*, 21.2 (1997), pp. 139-78, doi:10.2307/1171272; and Linda M. Woolf and Michael R. Hulsizer, 'Psychosocial

of this work builds upon foundational research in criminology on the neutralizations (or linguistic devices) that those convicted of a crime deploy to alleviate their guilt and/or make their actions appear more acceptable to others.²⁰ Specifically, criminologists Gresham Sykes and David Matza²¹ identified five techniques of neutralization that people commonly employ: 1) denial of responsibility, or claiming that one is not responsible for one's own actions; 2) denial of injury, or claiming that no one was injured by one's actions; 3) denial of the victim, or claiming that the injury inflicted was, in fact, retaliation or punishment, thus transforming the victim into the wrongdoer; 4) condemnation of the condemners, or attacking one's critics, claiming that their own condemnation is unjustified; and 5) appeal to higher loyalties, which involves invoking the preference for fulfilling obligations to close social relations rather than larger society.

Extending neutralization theory to genocide, Kjell Anderson²² drew upon interviews with 68 Rwandans (including 59 men and 9 women) who had participated in the 1994 genocide to theorize ten neutralizations for their actions. These included the five neutralization techniques theorized by Sykes and Matza as well as five new techniques, including claim of normality, claim of inevitability, claim of relative acceptability, claim of inner opposition, and denial of autonomy. Anderson argues that these techniques stem from the state, peers, and the individuals themselves, and he highlights how they align with propaganda that was common during the genocide.

In a similar vein, Emily Bryant and coauthors²³ analysed transcripts from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to assess how 27 men neutralized their actions when they testified. They found that the defendants employed Sykes and Matza's original techniques, especially denial of responsibility and condemnation of condemners. They also

Roots of Genocide: Risk, Prevention, and Intervention', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7.1 (2005), pp. 101–28, doi:10.1080/14623520500045088.

20 Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza, 'Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency', *American Sociological Review*, 22.6 (1957), pp. 664–70, doi:10.2307/2089195; Shadd Maruna and Heith Copes, 'What Have We Learned from Five Decades of Neutralization Research?' *Crime and Justice*, 32 (2005), pp. 221–320, doi:10.1086/655355; Shadd Maruna and Ruth E. Mann, 'A Fundamental Attribution Error? Rethinking Cognitive Distortions', *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 11.2 (2006), pp. 155–77, doi:10.1348/135532506X114608; and Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman, 'Accounts', *American Sociological Review*, 33.1 (1968), pp. 46–62, doi:10.2307/2092239.

21 Sykes and Matza.

22 Anderson.

23 Bryant and others.

identified two new techniques: victimization (in which defendants emphasized their own victimization and Hutu victimizations more broadly) and appeals to good character (in which defendants emphasized how they engaged in rescue or other good deeds).

Finally, Erin Jessee interviewed 27 Rwandans who were incarcerated for genocide crimes. While Jessee did not examine techniques of neutralization, her analysis likewise emphasized post-hoc narratives regarding why people participated in genocide. Specifically, Jessee found that respondents underscored Tutsi harms of Hutu in the many years prior to the genocide, often 'demoniz[ing] the Tutsi monarchy for enslaving the Hutu masses and subjecting them to a range of human rights violations'.²⁴ As such, their accounts often involved excuses for engaging in the genocide.

In this article, we likewise examine how people who committed genocide account for their own actions. However, we extend these previous studies by simultaneously addressing how Rwandans who perpetrated genocide account for others' actions during the genocide. To do so, we turn toward a body of social-psychological research on accounts and attributions.

Accounting for Actions and Attribution Errors

Social scientists have long been interested in how people explain why they commit crimes and other untoward actions.²⁵ A host of studies across contexts have found that people tend to put forward excuses when they do something stigmatized or criminalized,²⁶ ranging from murder²⁷ to rape²⁸ to sex trafficking.²⁹ Some research has explored the link between excuse-making and enabling the commission of crime in the first place,³⁰

24 Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide*, p. 158.

25 Maruna and Copes; Scott and Lyman.

26 C. R. Snyder and Raymond L. Higgins, 'Excuses: Their Effective Role in the Negotiation of Reality', *Psychological Bulletin*, 104.1 (1988), pp. 23–35, doi:10.1037/00332909.104.1.23.

27 Ken Levi, 'Becoming a Hit Man: Neutralization in a Very Deviant Career', *Urban Life*, 10.1 (1981), pp. 47–63, doi:10.1177/089124168101000103.

28 Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla, 'Convicted Rapists' Vocabulary of Motive: Excuses and Justifications', *Social Problems*, 31.5 (1984), pp. 530–44, doi:10.2307/800239.

29 Lauren Copley, 'Neutralizing Their Involvement: Sex Traffickers' Discourse Techniques', *Feminist Criminology*, 9.1 (2014), pp. 45–58, doi:10.1177/1557085113501849.

30 Sykes and Matza; Alvarez; Frank Neubacher, 'How Can It Happen That Horrendous State Crimes Are Perpetrated?: An Overview of Criminological Theories', *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 4.4 (2006), pp. 787–99, doi:10.1093/jicj/mql047.

while other work has emphasized how people explain or excuse their actions in the aftermath as a means of deflecting blame that might emanate from themselves or others.³¹ In particular, much research has found that these excuses tend to externalize blame and evade personal guilt.³²

Social-psychological research has observed how a tendency to cite external causes for one's own wrongdoing is often coupled with a tendency to cite internal causes for the wrongdoings of others. This tendency is called the Fundamental Attribution Error, or the FAE, and researchers have found that people often underestimate the role of external factors in impacting others' behaviour or circumstances as compared to one's own behaviour or circumstances.³³

Researchers have observed the FAE in how people explain criminal activity and perceive others who have committed crimes.³⁴ For instance, Spencer Headworth found that fraud investigators typically identified welfare clients' rule-breaking as intentional and based on dispositional factors.³⁵ Hence, fraud investigators emphasized internal factors by constructing narratives of blameworthiness and culpability. Yet, rule-breaking clients often described their actions as accidental and shaped by situational factors, such as the complexity of welfare programs' rules. Further, there is some evidence that the FAE varies by crime. Gisli Gudjónsson and Hannes Pétursson, for instance, found in part that individuals who engaged in other violent offenses were more likely to point to external factors when explaining their actions when compared to sex offenders.³⁶

31 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Polity, 2001).

32 Maruna and Mann.

33 Ross; Edward E. Jones and Victor A. Harris, 'The Attribution of Attitudes', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 3.1 (1967), pp. 1-24, doi:10.1016/0022-1031(67)90034-0.

34 Spencer Headworth, 'Broke People, Broken Rules: Explaining Welfare Fraud Investigators' Attributions', *Punishment & Society*, 23.1 (2021), pp. 24-46, doi:10.1177/14624745209281; Colleen M. Berryessa, 'Modeling "Remorse Bias" in Probation Narratives, Examining Social Cognition and Judgments of Implicit Violence During Sentencing', *Journal of Social Issues*, 78.2 (2022), pp. 452-82, doi:10.1111/josi.12508; Robert A. Beatty and Mark R. Fondacaro, 'The Misjudgment of Criminal Responsibility', *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 36.4 (2018), pp. 457-69, doi:10.1002/bsl.2354; and Cassandra Flick and Kimberly Schweitzer, 'Influence of the Fundamental Attribution Error on Perceptions of Blame and Negligence', *Experimental Psychology*, 68.4 (2021), pp. 175-88, doi:10.1027/16183169/a000526.

35 Headworth.

36 Gisli H. Gudjónsson and Hannes Pétursson, 'The Attribution of Blame and Type of Crime Committed: Transcultural Validation', *Journal of the Forensic Science Society*, 31.3 (1991), pp. 349-52, doi:10.1016/s0015-7368(91)73167-8.

What is the impact of this tendency? Some scholars have observed that attributing one's wrongdoing to external factors may facilitate coping processes.³⁷ Narratives about one's own or others' crimes also have implications for the possibility of recidivism and/or future criminalized activity. Shadd Maruna,³⁸ for example, found that formerly incarcerated people who referenced negative internal factors (such as conceiving of themselves as inherently violent) were more likely to commit crime in the future. Yet, when formerly incarcerated people separated their past criminal behaviour from their 'core self', they were more likely to cease committing crimes. When it comes to the impact of attributing others' actions to internal factors, prior research has shown that this tendency can lead to support for harsher punishments and less openness to rehabilitation toward those who offend.³⁹

Social identity theorists have long studied how members of groups view others from different groups and examined the willingness to demonize the other and glorify the self, fuelling intergroup conflict.⁴⁰ A group-based tendency, known as the ultimate attribution error, describes how people tend to excuse their own and their ingroup members' actions by pointing at external factors while simultaneously emphasizing internal factors when explaining outgroups members' harmful acts.⁴¹ This theory has been applied to understand intergroup

37 Maruna and Mann.

38 Shadd Maruna, 'Desistance From Crime and Explanatory Style: A New Direction in the Psychology of Reform', *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 20.2 (2004), pp. 184–200, doi:10.1177/1043986204263778.

39 Russell J. Webster and Donald A. Saucier, 'Demons Are Everywhere: The Effects of Belief in Pure Evil, Demonization, and Retribution on Punishing Criminal Perpetrators', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 74 (2015), pp. 72–77, doi:10.1016/j.paid.2014.09.041; Milica Vasiljevic and G. Tendayi Viki, 'Dehumanization, Moral Disengagement and Public Attitudes to Crime and Punishment', in *Humanness and Dehumanization*, ed. by Paul G. Bain, Jeroen Vaes and Jacques Philippe Leyens (Routledge, 2014), pp. 129–146; Shadd Maruna and Anna King, 'Once a Criminal, Always a Criminal?', "Redeemability" and the Psychology of Punitive Public Attitudes', *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 15 (2009), pp. 7–24, doi:10.1007/s10610-008-9088-1; Adam Trahan and Kaleigh Laird, 'The Nexus between Attribution Theory and Racial Attitudes: A Test of Racial Attribution and Public Opinion of Capital Punishment', *Criminal Justice Studies*, 31.4 (2018), pp. 352–67, doi:10.1080/1478601X.2018.1509859; Deborah F. Hellman and Amina Memon, 'Attribution of Crime Motives Biases Eyewitnesses' Memory and Sentencing Decisions', *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 22.10 (2016), pp. 957–76, doi:10.1080/1068316X.2016.1207768.

40 Bar-Tal; *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. by Richard D. Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (Oxford University Press, 2001); and Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

41 Thomas F. Pettigrew, 'The Ultimate Attribution Error: Extending Allport's Cognitive Analysis of Prejudice', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 5.4 (1979), pp. 461–76, doi:10.1177/014616727900500407.

relations after genocide or related mass violence.⁴² For instance, surveys of Germans, Poles, and Jewish Israelis found that Germans were less likely than the other two groups to explain the Holocaust with internal attributions to the character of German people. Instead, they were comparatively more likely to point toward Germany's poor economic conditions and high unemployment rate as external causes of genocide.⁴³

We rely upon the case of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to explore how individuals account for their crimes, as well as the crimes of others, after genocide. At least one other study has documented differing responses when participants in the Rwandan genocide were asked directly versus indirectly about reasons for participation in genocide, pointing to the FAE.⁴⁴ This study expands on this prior work by further exploring the FAE among those convicted of genocide.

Case Background: The 1994 Genocide in Rwanda

In 1994, the Hutu majority ethnic group—which dominated the Rwandan government at the time—waged a campaign of extermination that resulted in the death of some 800,000 Tutsi people.⁴⁵ This was preceded by decades of contentious ethnic politics and episodes of violence in the country. When Rwanda gained independence in 1962, a Hutu-led government came to power, leading to violence and discrimination

42 John Hunter, Maurice Stringer, and R. P. Watson, 'Intergroup Violence and Intergroup Attribution', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 30.3 (1991), pp. 261-66, doi:10.1111/j.2044-8309.1991.tb00943.x; Bertjan Doosje and Nyla R. Branscombe, 'Attributions for the Negative Historical Actions of a Group', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 33.2 (2002), pp. 235-48, doi:10.1002/ejsp.142; and Rezarta Bilali, Linda R. Tropp and Nilanjana Dasgupta, 'Attributions of Responsibility and Perceived Harm in the Aftermath of Mass Violence', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 18.1 (2012), pp. 21-39, doi:10.1037/a0026671.

43 Roland Imhoff and others, 'Explaining the Inexplicable: Differences in Attributions for the Holocaust in Germany, Israel, and Poland', *Political Psychology*, 38.6 (2016), pp. 907-24, doi:10.1111/pops.12348.

44 McDoom, pp. 334-35. Further, Woolfe and Hulsizer highlight how the fundamental attribution error may have influenced the lead-up to the commission of genocide.

45 Death tolls are highly unreliable and politicized. Commonly cited death estimates range from a low of 500,000 to over 1,000,000. For more, see Meierhenrich's opening article for the *Journal of Genocide Research* forum on death tolls from the genocide and civil war. Jens Meierhenrich, 'How Many Victims Were There in the Rwandan Genocide? A Statistical Debate,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22.1 (2020), pp. 72-82, doi:10.1080/14623528.2019.1709611.

against the Tutsi minority. In the following years, tens of thousands of Tutsi fled the country.⁴⁶

On October 1, 1990, an armed liberation movement formed primarily by Tutsi refugees in Uganda, called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), attacked across the Rwandan border, spurring further armed conflict. Amidst civil war, economic decline, intragroup tensions, and a planned power-sharing deal with the RPF, Hutu elites began preparing for genocide.⁴⁷ On April 6, 1994, the Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana, was shot down in an airplane returning from international peace negotiations with the RPF. This triggering event was followed by the assassination of political moderates, the establishment of road-blocks, and the rapid escalation of violence against Tutsi civilians.

During the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Hutu civilians joined killing groups at the direction of the government, which targeted the Tutsi as an 'enemy' of the state. Killing groups were commonly organized by community leaders, and many groups went door-to-door to forcibly recruit members. Membership in killing groups was often transitory, but characterized by social rituals that encouraged participation in violence. Many Hutu were also exposed to propaganda that employed euphemistic language to incite violence, such as calling Tutsi 'cockroaches.' For example, messages from government-run media sources and local leaders mobilized Hutu civilians through fear, suggesting that they or their families would be harmed by Tutsi if they did not take up arms to protect themselves.⁴⁸

In total, an estimated 240,000 people engaged in violent crime during the genocide.⁴⁹ The average participant was a 34-year-old man, though tens of thousands of women perpetrated genocide as well. For some, this involvement included wielding a machete and physically

46 Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch, 1999); Helen M. Hintjens, 'Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37.2 (1999), pp. 241-86, doi:10.1017/S0022278X99003018; and Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

47 Straus; McDoom; and Andre Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

48 Fujii; Christopher C. Taylor, 'A Gendered Genocide: Tutsi Women and Hutu Extremists in the 1994 Rwanda Genocide', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 22.1 (1999), pp. 42-54, doi:10.1525/pol.1999.22.1.42; and Charles Mironko, 'Igitera: Means and Motive in the Rwandan Genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 6.1 (2004), pp. 47-60, doi:10.1080/1462352042000194700.

49 Hollie Nyseth Nzatitira, Jared F. Edgerton, and Laura C. Frizzell, 'Analyzing Participation in the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda', *Journal of Peace Research*, 60.2 (2023), pp. 291-306, doi:10.1177/00223433221075211.

committing violence. Others joined killing groups and supported the violence, meaning that while they did not personally kill someone, they often enabled genocidal acts in a variety of ways. For the vast majority, they had never committed crimes before the genocide.

After the RPF took control of the country in July 1994, organized killings subsided. In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, the new RPF-led government incarcerated thousands of suspected genocide perpetrators, leading to a massive increase in the prison population. Faced with trying so many cases with a destroyed legal system, the RPF-led government created a court system—called the *gacaca* courts—to try people who were suspected of participating in the genocide. Other major perpetrators of genocide crimes were tried by the ad-hoc International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The *gacaca* court system was derived and heavily adapted from a dispute resolution mechanism from precolonial Rwanda. Elected judges (*inyangamugayo*), many of whom had limited to no formal legal training, presided over trials within their communities. Community members attended *gacaca* trials and testified about what they had witnessed during the genocide. The *gacaca* courts also created space for those who committed crimes to publicly account for their actions during the genocide, and the *gacaca* system was designed to reward confessions with less severe sentences.⁵⁰ While the performative and incentives-based aspects of *gacaca* may have influenced the construction of these narratives, the courts provided an opportunity for those who committed violence to develop explanatory narratives.⁵¹

There were three categories of cases in the *gacaca* courts based on the nature and severity of different crimes.⁵² Category 1 trials involved organizing and inciting violence, or committing sexualized violence,

50 Phil Clark, *The Gacaca Courts, Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice without Lawyers* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Anuradha Chakravarty, *Investing in Authoritarian Rule: Punishment and Patronage in Rwanda's Gacaca Courts for Genocide Crimes* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Bert Ingelaere, *Inside Rwanda's Gacaca Courts: Seeking Justice after Genocide* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

51 For critical works on the *gacaca* courts, which address their exclusion of crimes that occurred during the civil war, the influence of the state in their creation and implementation, and their limited conflict-resolution capacities, see Chakravarty; Timothy Longman, 'An Assessment of Rwanda's Gacaca Courts', *Peace Review*, 21.3 (2009), pp. 304–12, doi:10.1080/10402650903099369; and Max Rettig, 'Gacaca: Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation in Postconflict Rwanda?', *African Studies Review*, 51.3 (2008), pp. 25–50, doi:10.1353/arw.0.0091.

52 Initial laws prior to the implementation of *gacaca* courts set forth four categories of genocidal crime. Subsequent laws reclassified the categories to three such that all crimes that were tried in the *gacaca* court system were eventually placed in one of the three categories.

and some Category 1 cases were tried within ordinary courts. Category 2 trials involved direct killing or being an accomplice to murder. Hundreds of thousands of individuals—including at least 10,000 women—were convicted during Category 1 or 2 trials and incarcerated in prison and community service camps (known as *Travaux d'Intérêts Généraux*, or TIG) across the country. Average sentences ranged between 10 and 25 years. Category 3 trials involved participating in property crimes, and those convicted in Category 3 were fined.⁵³

While incarcerated, many individuals had limited access to their family members and community, aside from occasional visits (or annual visits, for those in TIG). Most were able to take educational classes and participate in religious services while incarcerated. Many also faced hard work and health issues while incarcerated and had time to think and reflect on their pasts. Over the past decade, many of these individuals have been returning home, often to the very same communities where they committed violence during 1994.⁵⁴ As they return, they share narratives regarding their crimes and the crimes of others, especially with their family, friends, neighbours, and community members. It is in this context that we conducted our research.

Methods

This study relies upon 165 interviews with Rwandans who were incarcerated for genocide. Prior to detailing our interviewing procedure and analysis, it is important to underscore that we focus on a single case. Like all genocides, the case of Rwanda has some elements that align with other episodes of mass atrocity, while also having its own unique particularities. Most notably, many genocides are planned by people in positions of power but are enacted by individuals in organized paramilitary groups or armed militias who carry violence out on the ground. While the genocide in Rwanda was orchestrated by political and military elites, this case saw particularly high levels of civilian

53 Sara Brown, *Gender and the Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Rescuers and Perpetrators* (Routledge, 2018); Barbora Hola and Hollie Nyseth Brehm, 'Punishing Genocide: A Comparative Empirical Analysis of Sentencing Laws and Practices at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Rwandan Domestic Courts, and Gacaca Courts', *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 10.3 (2016), pp. 59–80, doi:10.5038/1911-9933.10.3.1428.

54 Hollie Nyseth Nzitirira, and John Gasana Gasasira, 'Identities and Interactions: Reentry and Reintegration after Incarceration for Genocide', *American Journal of Sociology*, 129.4 (2024), pp. 1136–1171, doi:10.1086/728786.

participation, which makes the 1994 genocide in Rwanda what social scientists term an exceptional case.⁵⁵ There is much theoretical merit in analysing exceptional cases, although the limits of generalizability must also be kept in mind. Further, many studies of why people commit genocide have taken place in Rwanda,⁵⁶ meaning that studying how Rwandans in particular narrate their crimes in the aftermath is an important area of inquiry that expands understanding in the field of perpetrator studies.

INTERVIEWING PROCEDURE

The interviews we draw from are part of a broader study focused on reentry and reintegration following genocide implemented by the second author.⁵⁷ The interviews used specifically for this study were conducted by the second author, along with a small team of Rwandan and foreign research assistants in November and December 2017 (see the footnote for more regarding researcher positionality).⁵⁸ The research team conducted significant preparations prior to interviews, including pre-testing questions on the interview guide with individuals who had

55 Ivan Ermakoff, 'Exceptional Cases: Epistemic Contributions and Normative Expectations', *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 55.2 (2014), pp. 223-43, doi:10.1017/S0003975614000101.

56 For example, Fujii; Straus; Anderson; Brown; Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide*; McDoom; Cyanne E. Loyle, 'Why Men Participate: A Review of Perpetrator Research on the Rwandan Genocide', *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies*, 1.2 (2009), pp. 26-42, doi:10.5038/2325-484X.1.2.2; Marijke Verpoorten, 'Leave None to Claim the Land: A Malthusian Catastrophe in Rwanda?', *Journal of Peace Research*, 49.4 (2012), pp. 547-63, doi:10.1177/0022343312437773; Philip Verwimp, *Peasants in Power: The Political Economy of Development and Genocide in Rwanda* (Springer, 2013); Hollie Nyseth Brehm, Christopher Uggen and Jean-Damascène Gasanabo, 'Age, Gender, and the Crime of Crimes: Toward a Life-Course Theory of Genocide Participation', *Criminology*, 54.4 (2016), pp. 713-743, doi:10.1111/1745-9125.12122; and Cyanne E. Loyle and Christian Davenport, 'Some Left to Tell the Tale: Finding Perpetrators and Understanding Violence in Rwanda', *Journal of Peace Research*, 57.4 (2020), pp. 507-520, doi:10.1177/0022343319885173.

57 This project is sponsored by the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace and was approved by Rwanda's National Council for Science and Technology and the National Ethics Committee (as well as a blinded U.S.-based IRB). For more, see Hollie Nyseth Nzitatira and John Gasana Gasasira.

58 The interviewing team was comprised of foreign (white) and Rwandan interviewers. Rwandan interviewers were men and women, and they also represented diverse backgrounds with respect to conflict identities. Specifically, some were survivors (or descendants of survivors), and others were not. We did not see any difference in themes reported in this article across interviewer identities.

been incarcerated for genocide, as well as translating and back-translating each question from English to Kinyarwanda.⁵⁹

For Rwandans to participate in these interviews, they must have 1) been found guilty of genocide, 2) been incarcerated in a prison or a TIG camp at that time, and 3) had a release date in 2018.⁶⁰ Researchers visited every prison and TIG camp in Rwanda,⁶¹ where the second author was given a list of all individuals incarcerated for genocide who were set to be released in 2018. In TIG camps, researchers were also able to address the entire incarcerated population in case anyone had been left off these lists.

This procedure resulted in the identification of 183 eligible participants, including several who were sick, unavailable, or otherwise declined requests for interviews. Ultimately, 150 men and 15 women participated in interviews for this study. Among these, 110 people were interviewed in a prison, while 55 were interviewed in a TIG camp. While most respondents were tried in gacaca courts, 18 were tried in ordinary courts. With an average age of 55, participant ages ranged from 35 to 84 years old at the time of the interview. The vast majority were farmers (86 percent), and most were married (79 percent). Over 120 respondents were convicted of killing and/or participating in a killing group. Examples of other crimes within this dataset include committing rape, failing to intervene, burying bodies, and leading Tutsi to their death. Sentences spanned from 3 to 30 years, with a median of 19 years, and sixty-one percent of respondents served pre-trial detention. Many respondents did not know their formal category of crime under Rwandan law. However, based on their sentences, it is likely that about two-thirds had Category 2 trials and one-third had Category 1 trials. Approximately 20 percent discussed having a second trial for a violent crime, while 35 percent discussed Category 3 property crimes. Notably, approximately one-third of respondents maintained their in-

59 The interview team invited members of a collaborative of people who had been released from TIG to participate, and they received the equivalent of \$3 USD for their time.

60 The selection of the release date coincides with the research methods of a broader study intended to trace the reintegration experiences of Rwandans convicted of genocide crimes. For individuals sentenced to 25–30 years of incarceration from the time of the genocide in 1994, the date of 2018 allowed for the selection of some interviewees in advance of their release in order to capture aspects of the reintegration process before, during, and after reentry. For more information regarding the research methods, see Hollie Nyseth Nzitatira and John Gasana Gasasira.

61 The team conducted interviews in the following prisons: Bugesera (Rulima), Gicumbi, Huye, Mageragere (Nyarugenge), Muhanga, Musanze, Ngoma, Nyamagabe, Nyanza, Rubavu, and Rwamagana. TIG camps included Gicumbi, Mageragere, Mamba TIG, and Muhazi.

nocence, typically by suggesting that they were accidentally present when a crime was committed and claiming that they were not involved in the crime itself, as we further address below.

Lasting between two and four hours, interviews in the prisons and TIG camps were conducted in small rooms or private outdoor spaces, and researchers ensured that guards were never within earshot to maintain participant privacy. Given the authoritarian nature of the country during the time of the interviews,⁶² interviewers began all interviews by ensuring that respondents felt as comfortable as possible, explaining that interviewers and the sponsoring nonprofit were not associated with the government. Researchers obtained informed consent for each individual and also stressed that carceral staff were not invested in who was participating in interviews and that pseudonyms would be used in reporting results. During interviews, participants spoke about their lives before and during the genocide, as well as their trials, incarceration experiences, and hopes for reentry and reintegration.

ANALYSIS

Following interviews, discussions were transcribed and (for those conducted in Kinyarwanda) translated. Our qualitative analysis procedure followed leading practices of the grounded theory approach.⁶³ The second author developed a codebook based on prominent themes from the interview questions and initial discussion. Then, a team of researchers coded interviews in NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. After assessing this coding, approximately one-third of the interviews were coded a second time by the first and second authors to ensure that relevant data was captured across interviews and definitions were applied consistently.

In the results that follow, we analyse respondents' narratives regarding their crimes and those of others. Some of their stories stemmed from particular questions, including, 'Would you be willing to tell me about the crimes of which you were accused?'. If participants did speak about their actions, interviewers then asked questions to better understand their motivations and reasons for participation such as, 'Would you be willing to tell me more about your participation in the violence itself?' and 'What was going through your mind at the time?'.

62 Longman, *Memory and Justice*; Thomson, *Rwanda*.

63 Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Sage Publications, 2006).

Out of the 165 respondents, 55 people maintained that they were innocent; therefore, they did not provide reasons for their participation in the genocide. In most cases, this involved their acknowledgement that they were present for a crime by accident but denial that they participated in any way. If respondents maintained their innocence, interviewers instead discussed the crimes of which they were accused. Seven other respondents evaded the question about personal participation or provided unclear responses, meaning 105 people provided a reason (or multiple reasons) for their own participation.

Interviewers also asked participants why they thought *others* participated in the genocide. In most instances, this question was: 'Why do you think other people participated in the violence?'. However, this question followed a general question about why the genocide happened. If respondents discussed individual reasons for participation in response to the question of why the genocide happened, we included those responses in our coding for reasons cited for others' participation. Of the 165 respondents, 147 people provided reasons for others' participation. Those that did not provide a reason for others' participation either refused to answer (often by stating 'I don't know') or were not asked the question.⁶⁴

We conducted a subsequent round of coding to identify themes and patterns in how participants narrated their own actions versus those of others. Specifically, we categorized responses into attributions to internal factors (e.g., personality, personal beliefs/attitudes, character traits) and external factors (e.g., the influence of community members, government policy, incitement by the radio). While some participants simply provided one reason, others cited multiple reasons, such as various internal and external factors in combination, to explain participation. To account for the complexity of these responses, we coded each reason given for participation, understanding that some participants cited several reasons. Collectively, participants cited over 115 reasons for their own participation and 200 reasons for the participation of others. These reasons were spread across the 105 respondents who provided reasons for themselves and the 147 respondents who provided reasons for others (including 90 respondents who provided reasons for both).

Accordingly, our analysis proceeds in two main parts. We first qualitatively analyse all reasons that participants provided for their own participation in the genocide (drawing upon 105 applicable interviews) and for others' participation (drawing upon 147 applicable interviews).

⁶⁴ This often happened if the prisons or TIG camp closed earlier than expected, meaning the interviews would need to end earlier than planned and some questions were therefore skipped.

In doing so, we describe and illustrate the most common reasons people cited, as well as the frequency with which these reasons are attributable to internal or external factors. By comparing the relative frequency of internal versus external attributions between reasons tied to the self and others, we look for evidence of the FAE. Next, we expand on these results by restricting our sample to the 90 interviews in which people provided reasons both for their own participation and for others to perform a paired t-test, which compares the means of two related groups to determine whether there is a significant difference between them. In this case, we examine whether the difference between attributions of external factors to explain one's own participation as compared to others' participation is significantly different, which essentially means that observed patterns cannot be attributed to random chance. Taken together, these analytical methods allow us to closely examine the frequency and content of participant attributions through qualitative analysis, while looking across our entire dataset to observe statistically significant patterns in attributions tied to the FAE.

Findings: Accounting for Participation in Genocide

Regarding the first part of our analysis, qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed evidence of the FAE in the narratives of those convicted of genocide. When it came to explaining their own actions, participants' reasons skewed heavily towards external factors, with approximately 80 percent of cited reasons locating blame outside of the self. The most prominent explanation (about 55 percent) was that the participant was directly forced or coerced into participating in the genocide, with respondents often claiming self-defence as a motive. Importantly, these reasons for participation in the violence usually centred on interpersonal encounters with other Hutu who they claimed had compelled them to participate in the killing, whether they were friends, acquaintances, or government leaders. Thus, the self-defence argument most often hinged on intra-ethnic fears, rather than fear of Tutsi. Other common external explanations (representing about 26 percent of reasons) included being influenced by government propaganda or internalizing a genocidal ideology propagated by external forces. Internal explanations, though far less common when describing the self (about 20 percent of reasons), included attributions to one's own youth, ignorance, greed, or curiosity.

When considering explanations for why *others* committed violence, however, these attributions shifted noticeably. Although external forces were still cited the most often to explain others' participation, the frequency dropped to 59 percent (as compared to 80 for oneself). As such, about 41 percent of reasons located blame for others' participation in the genocide on internal factors (as compared to 20 percent for oneself).

The most common external reason was that others were forced to commit genocide by 'bad' leadership or government policy, constituting roughly 39 percent of reasons. These explanations often focused less on coercion or duress compared to explanations for the self, instead pointing to the macro-level socio-political environment by placing blame on the country's political leadership more generally and the after effects of the president's plane crash. Other external reasons for others' participation (constituting about 20 percent) included (in no particular order) the influence of the devil, peer pressure, incitement by the radio, learning a genocidal ideology from others, or the context of ethnic political tensions.

Internal factors were cited far more often with regards to others than to the self, as participants located blame with the personalities or characteristics of others. In particular, greed or the desire to loot others' properties was cited as about 24 percent of reasons for why others participated. Other internal reasons for others' participation (constituting about 17 percent) included claims that others were ignorant, evil, had bad mindsets, or that their personalities were changed during the violence to make them want to kill. In what follows, we provide a more detailed account of the reasons cited in the respondents' own words.

PERSONAL REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN GENOCIDE

'Whoever dodged [the killing groups] was punished; heavily punished. They charged him, and—without money—you would even die. I joined just for saving my life'.⁶⁵ Marcel's description illustrates the most common explanation among respondents for why they committed genocide—they claimed to have been forced to choose between their own life and another's. As they narrate it, participating in genocide was considered necessary for self-defence. As Anastase also explained, 'We used to join killing crews. And when you didn't go with them to kill the Batutsi, they used to come back and cut you, saying that you are the

65 JB Ndikubwimana. *Interview with Marcel* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

same as them'.⁶⁶ Patrick echoed Anastase's fear of being categorized as an enemy along with the Tutsi for refusing to participate; he said: 'The leader of the sector used to come and say that "a person who doesn't come to hunt the Tutsi, include him too"'.⁶⁷

Jean Paul described a similar dynamic when explaining his involvement with a killing group:

The reason why I decided to go with that group, it's because they asked me to come with [them], to join. And [at] that time when you refuse, they were thinking that you are [the] enemy, like an enemy you are not with them and then something may happen to you. And I decided to go with them to show them that I'm clean, I'm not the enemy.⁶⁸

Andrew also described fearing what would happen to him if he refused to participate or engaged in rescue efforts. When asked why he joined a killing group, he said:

If you didn't go to see what was happening and support them in words and actions, they could turn back on you and kill you. In that time, the mistake was to find a Tutsi hiding in your land. If you were unlucky, they could kill you. And we used to go there just to save our lives.⁶⁹

Beyond the general perception of being threatened for non-participation, some respondents claimed to have agreed to commit violence under duress. Felix recalled his response to a Tutsi man begging him for mercy at the moment of the killing. In his words:

When he [the victim] asked me that and because I was under someone who was menacing me to finish it—or if I am not able, they will do it and after he will kill me—I just did it with no hesitation.⁷⁰

Per this story, Felix felt as if he needed to participate in killing to preserve his own life. Similarly, Pascal narrated that he was intimidated by a group of soldiers. When one of his comrades refused to participate in killing, Pascal said, 'A soldier slapped him, and there was blood

66 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Anastase* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

67 JB Ndikubwimana. *Interview with Patrick* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

68 Loes van der Velde. *Interview with Jean Paul* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

69 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Andrew* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

70 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Felix* (Pseudonym). November 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

on his face. It really scared us. We cut the trees⁷¹ in a hurry...We were thinking that if we didn't do what she [one of the soldiers] asked us, we would die'.⁷² Many participants described being on the receiving end of threats leading up to their participation in genocidal violence. When describing why he joined a killing group, Donath said, 'It's because I saw them beating my fellow. He had refused to go, and they killed him. And I decided to go with them'.⁷³

In addition to claiming self-defence, several participants also employed the appeal to higher loyalties neutralization technique by asserting that they participated to save others, like their family members. As such, they claimed to have participated out of defence of others. For example, Patrice told us:

So, during the midnight, I was in bed. A killing group came. They knocked at my door and told me, 'You're in bed. You want to be like your dad. We are going to kill you if you don't join.' I told them, 'I'm not leaving my kids alone.' They told me, 'If you don't join, we are going to kill you with your kids.' So, they forcefully took me, and I joined them.⁷⁴

In these and many other situations, participants pointed to the actions of others—specifically other Hutu—as the cause of their involvement in the genocide. They avoided their own intentionality for committing genocide crimes by implying that they would not have committed such crimes if no one had forced them to do so. In turn, they externalized blame rather than focusing on internal reasons for their participation.

While descriptions of force, coercion, and duress made up about 55 percent of reasons for personal participation, they were not the only external reasons identified by participants for engaging in killings. Others pointed to the dissemination of a genocidal ideology by the government. Specifically, they claimed that the government and state-run radio stations like *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM)

71 Chopping or cutting trees was a euphemism for killing Tutsi. This euphemism stems from the Hamitic myth, an idea rooted in 19th-century European colonial thought that incorrectly claimed that certain African groups, including Rwandan Tutsi, were descendants of a superior, non-African 'Hamitic' race that was taller and had smaller noses than more 'African' counterparts. See Mamdani.

72 JB Ndikubwimana. *Interview with Pascal* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

73 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Donath* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

74 Hollie Nzitatira. *Interview with Patrice* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

convinced them that the Tutsi were the enemy of the people and that Tutsi must be exterminated. For example, Leonard recalled:

What they were saying, like on RTLM, they used to say those are *inyangarwanda* — literally enemies of Rwanda. We have to exterminate them and do whatever. We could feel they are enemies, and we thought we could fight them if possible... They [state-supported radio broadcasters] said no one is allowed to remain home. We could go and feel it was supported by the government, and we had no other option except being part of them. That's how we engaged in the killings, and it is how we changed...⁷⁵

Such explanations hinged on internalizing a genocidal ideology that was—per their stories—originally produced or scripted by an external source. Respondents were careful in framing this explanation in terms of what others told them to believe rather than what they believed themselves or came to believe on their own. For example, when asked about what he was thinking when he committed his crime, Mathias replied that he participated, 'Because everyone was saying that the enemy is Tutsi. It was in our minds. All people were told that the enemy is Tutsi'.⁷⁶ The use of the passive voice to describe one's own actions by foregrounding the actions of others was a common narrative device that indicates neutralization. Similarly, Xavier noted that this genocidal propaganda increased after the assassination of the president: 'After the plane crashed, Habyarimana's plane, that's when they told us, "Oh, Tutsis are your enemies."' And when I was in attacks, in my mind, it was like Tutsis are enemies'.⁷⁷

Beyond saying that they internalized an image of the Tutsi as 'enemies', some participants described how they were taught dehumanizing stereotypes about the Tutsi. For example, Alfred narrated, 'We didn't know what [the] Inkotanyi [RPF] were. They used to tell us that they were animals, that they even had tails. So, they were dehumanizing them like that'.⁷⁸ Bernadette echoed the role of dehumanization as a neutralization technique, saying:

75 JB Ndikubwimana. *Interview with Leonard* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

76 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Mathias* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

77 Loes van der Velde. *Interview with Xavier* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

78 Hollie Nzitatira. *Interview with Alfred* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

I felt as if we were killing snakes because we know that they are no longer people. They are no longer human beings. They are just snakes, and so these were the people that would kill us. And this was even taught [on] the radio. We heard it from the radio.⁷⁹

Among the remaining reasons for personal participation, several internal motivations were proffered. Some, like Oscar, described a combination of being impulsive and ignorant to future consequences, saying, 'We never knew that things were to change and that all these people were to be arrested after that. We knew that there were no consequences'.⁸⁰ Ignace pointed to his youth, ignorance, and curiosity. In his words: 'I was just going to see what was going on. And usually young people don't think, [there was] nothing going on in [my] mind'.⁸¹ Beyond this, however, it was very rare for participants to attribute to themselves negative characteristics that might make them appear more culpable, like hatred, desire for revenge, bad temperament, greed, or malice. However, as will be detailed below, these internal explanations were far more frequent when discussing the crimes of others.

REASONS FOR OTHERS' PARTICIPATION

'I told you that genocide was committed by greedy people who could say that if I kill [someone], I will take his land and his motorcycle'.⁸² Martin's statement is one of many attributing others' participation in the genocide to internal factors. In fact, the proportion of reasons attributed to internal factors rose to 41 percent when respondents were asked why other people participated in the genocide, when compared to narratives about the self.

A significant percentage (about 24 percent of reasons for others) were attributions to greed. For example, Privat's explanation for why people participated in the violence hinged on seeking profit; he said, 'Mostly it was greed. The genocide happened during a period of poverty. It happened in April when people were waiting for crops to get ready from lands. So many wanted to take the belongings [of Tutsi]'.⁸³ Naphtal similarly explained, 'Greed made them do it. They were thinking that

79 Loes van der Velde. *Interview with Bernadette* (Pseudonym). November 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

80 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Oscar* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

81 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Ignace* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

82 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Martin* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

83 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Privat* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

if they participate, they would get a cow to eat or something else from the attacked houses then use it'.⁸⁴

While some respondents spoke about greed relating to property crimes, others directly cited greed as a motivation for killing, as Vianney described:

[For] some, it was just [the] hunger of taking things that you didn't work for. [For] others, it was that hunger which turns into killing. Even the leaders in the village used to tell people, if you rob these people, what will you tell them when they come back? So, it is good if you first kill them. All that used to be said and made people kill.⁸⁵

Vianney connects the internal motivation of greed to external mobilization by community leaders, essentially arguing that the external factors created the opportunity for people to act on their inner desires or 'hunger'. Sebastian echoed this explanation, noting, 'They participated for their own profits, saying that the property of this person will immediately be mine; I will take also those cars. If you can understand, it is only profits that made them kill other people'.⁸⁶ Per these explanations, it was the internal characteristics of the killers—their desire for profits—that chiefly led to their participation, though the environment of genocide created the context for acting on opportunistic impulses.

Beyond greed, other internal attributions centred around how other people were considered bad or evil. When discussing those who were incited to kill, Christian said, 'They were bad human beings. It was in them, and some of them were trying to find means of stealing. So, it was their character, and the radio just encouraged what was already inside them...'.⁸⁷ Theoneste similarly explained, 'They were already monsters in their hearts'.⁸⁸ The motif of the inherently bad quality of someone's 'heart' was repeated by others. For instance, when asked why people participated in the violence, Assiel explained, 'It was because of their stone hearts and hearts of animals'.⁸⁹ Andre simply stated, 'They were just evil'.⁹⁰ Notably, this language was only used in reference to others—

84 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Naphtal* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

85 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Vianney* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

86 Cecile Kirk-Smith. *Interview with Sebastian* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

87 Jessica Fonzi. *Interview with Christian* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

88 Cecile Kirk-Smith. *Interview with Theoneste* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

89 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Assiel* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

90 Jessica Fonzi. *Interview with Andre* (Pseudonym). November 2017. In-person at the prison.

no one claimed that their own participation was because of their own 'bad' heart or evil nature.

Nonetheless, participants did not exclusively attribute internal explanations to others. Similar reasons emerged surrounding the influence of the social situation, especially the role of the government and 'bad' leadership as key external factors. About 39 percent of reasons for why others participated in the violence were attributed to the macro-level political circumstances in the country, especially the president's plane crash and the imposition of a genocidal policy by local leaders. For example, Alfred described:

It's because of the influence, because killing someone, you are not arrested, or being held accountable for that... Citizens do what the government, or top leaders tell them. They do whatever they are told to do. It's the government to blame.⁹¹

Alfred references direct orders from government leaders to commit genocide, combined with a permissive environment characterized by impunity. Participants often expressed that others committed violence because they felt they were being forced to follow orders. For example, Dominique explained, 'Usually a citizen does what the leader says. Maybe the leader has a reason behind his/her mind, and you don't know that reason. But you have to do it like a blind person'.⁹² Vestine similarly addressed blind obedience, claiming:

People were doing what the leaders were asking them to do... Let us suppose that I am dog and my master tells me 'go' by indicating the direction that I have to take. For this, I will follow this direction. This means that we have been corrupted.⁹³

In these and other ways, participants centred the actions of leaders and described how a genocidal agenda was pushed from the top-down onto people—an external attribution. Other external explanations for the participation of others included the influence of ethnic politics. For example, Peter explained how some Hutu claimed the need to defend themselves against Tutsi. In his words:

91 Hollie Nzitatira. *Interview with Alfred* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

92 Diego Dushime. *Interview with Dominique* (Pseudonym). November 2017. In-person at the prison.

93 Cecile Kirk-Smith. *Interview with Vestine* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

In general, many people of this country and mostly the Bahutu loved President Habyarimana. Then when they heard that his plane was downed and that the President died—killed by the same Batutsi who attacked the country—they started to think that the Batutsi were going to kill them as well. That’s when they started to kill people. So, according to me, I can say that the downed plane was the trigger of the killings.⁹⁴

Fidele echoed this explanation, centred on the broader environment of political instability, saying, ‘When Habyarimana died, they started thinking: Habyarimana has died. Our father has died, and the Batutsi are exterminating us. And it motivated people to decide to kill.’⁹⁵ Thus, in contrast to self-defence claims relating to in-group sanctions imposed by other Hutu, some emphasized the need to defend the country against Tutsi. However, references to intergroup threat perceptions were minimal across the dataset, a finding we address further in our discussion.

Another external explanation referenced by a small minority of respondents was attributions to the devil or evil spiritual forces. While external—as participants often personified the devil as a being acting on an individual—these explanations often intersected with internal attributions. For example, Jean Pierre argued:

When the war broke out, all the people changed [and] mostly the people who killed. For instance, if he killed like one person today, you could meet him in the evening when he has turned into something else (savage). He’s like an animal, and you find he’s not the same person you knew before... We can say that it’s the devil who made them to be like animals.⁹⁶

Immaculee echoed this explanation, saying, ‘According to me, it was the devil which controlled people and made them kill others. Because if you have love, you can’t be able to kill people like an animal’.⁹⁷ Such responses clearly indicate intersections between demonization and dehumanization, as others who committed violence were perceived as different from the self. While a few respondents invoked the role of the devil in explanations for either their own crimes or the crimes of others, this was a minority response overall, outnumbered substantially by attributions to ‘bad’ leadership or the government.

94 JB Ndikubwimana. *Interview with Peter* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

95 Eric Sibomana. *Interview with Fidele* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

96 JB Ndikubwimana. *Interview with Jean Pierre* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the TIG camp.

97 Cecile Kirk-Smith. *Interview with Immaculee* (Pseudonym). December 2017. In-person at the prison.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

Thus far, we have demonstrated through our qualitative coding and analysis of participant narratives that the frequency and distribution of attributions to external and internal factors varies when participants were asked about their own reasons compared to those of others. While participants predominantly cited external reasons for both the self and others, the relative percentage was considerably different, such that internal reasons—though still the minority—were cited more often for others than for the self. This, in and of itself, constitutes partial evidence of the FAE.

However, to more rigorously determine whether the differences in these attributions are random or statistically significant, we specifically look to the sub-sample of our participants (90 in total) who provided reasons for participation in genocide for both themselves and others. This enables determination of whether participants were more likely to attribute external factors to themselves *while at the same time* attributing internal factors for others, which specifically aligns with the definition of the FAE (rather than, for example, citing internal reasons for both themselves and others or external reasons for both).

Among these respondents, 7 percent provided internal reasons for their own participation but not for others' participation, while 36 percent provided internal reasons for others' participation but not for their own. An additional 14 percent provided internal reasons for both themselves and others, with the remainder not citing any internal reasons. By contrast, 17 percent provided external reasons for themselves but not for others, and 7 percent provided external reasons for others but not for themselves. An overwhelming 71 percent provided external reasons for themselves and for others.

A paired t-test comparing the means of external reasons given (external reason given for oneself versus external reason given for others) is significant at the .05 level. A paired t-test comparing the means of an internal reason given for oneself and an internal reason given for others' participation is significant at the .001 level. As such, the differences are statistically significant, and our findings cannot likely be attributed to random chance. We find especially strong evidence that respondents attributed internal reasons to others' participation more so than to their own. When comparing responses among only those who provided answers to both questions, we see stronger evidence of the FAE.

Discussion

This paper has drawn upon 165 interviews to explore how people who were found guilty of genocide in Rwanda account for their own crimes compared to the crimes of others. Respondents' reasons for their own participation skewed heavily towards external factors, with approximately 80 percent of cited reasons locating blame outside of the self. Fifty-five percent of these reasons were tied to narratives that people were directly forced or coerced into participating in the genocide, with respondents often claiming self-defence as a motive. With respect to explaining others' participation, about 41 percent of reasons referenced internal factors. Most commonly, this included narratives about others' greed or evil nature—two reasons that rarely surfaced for one's own explanation. However, external reasons were still commonly provided for others' participation. The most common external reason was that people were forced or influenced to commit genocide by 'bad' leadership or government policy, constituting roughly 39 percent of reasons for others. Interestingly, this reason centred less on intra-ethnic ties with Hutu and more on the general role of the government.⁹⁸

We conclude that these differences in the distribution of attributions relating to the self and others—specifically, the increased likelihood of attributing internal reasons to others than to the self—provide partial evidence of the FAE in these post-hoc narratives. We qualify this evidence as only partial, since it was still quite common for participants to cite external reasons for both the self and others. Our further quantitative analysis using a paired t-test of the 90 participants in our sample who cited reasons for both the self and others revealed that these differences in attribution were statistically significant, providing stronger evidence of the FAE. Our analytic approach aligns with others who have relied on in-depth interviews to evaluate the FAE among those convicted of

98 Respondents were free to interpret the question about 'others' as they saw fit. For some, they may have been thinking about specific 'others', like people they knew who participated with them or in their killing groups. Others may have been referring to an abstract idea about 'others' who were perpetrating crimes across the country during the genocide. Unfortunately, we did not ask probing questions to ascertain the degree of social proximity or closeness that individuals had in mind when accounting for the actions of 'others'. For those who invoked reasons like 'bad' leadership or government policy, they may have—to some extent—conflated their explanations for why individuals participated in genocide with their overall narrative for why the genocide happened. We recognize that such narratives are likely intricately interconnected and that our interview questions may have prompted different narratives for different people.

crimes and observers.⁹⁹ Following prior work,¹⁰⁰ we rely upon tests of statistically significant differences to assess evidence of the FAE. Such analyses enable us to say, with relative confidence, whether the differences we found are due to random chance or represent a real relationship.

Notably, the high prevalence of external reasons cited by Rwandans for participation in genocide aligns with prior research observing the centrality of intra-ethnic fears among Hutu who compelled others to participate in the killing¹⁰¹ and a tendency to deny responsibility for actions during the genocide.¹⁰² For example, Scott Straus found that 64.1 percent of respondents' stated motivations referenced 'Intra-Hutu coercion', or the fear of negative consequences stemming from their non-participation by fellow group members.¹⁰³ Omar McDoom similarly found that authority and coercion were the most commonly cited rationales when participants were asked about their direct participation in genocide, whereas indirect questions about the participation of others evoked responses related to vengeance, threat, material opportunism, and authority.¹⁰⁴ Our findings affirm and expand on McDoom's observations of 'self-serving bias' reflected in participants' divergent responses when being asked about themselves and others, further illustrating the FAE in Rwanda's case.¹⁰⁵

While interpreting our nuanced findings on the FAE in the context of post-genocide Rwanda, we suggest that the government's collective memory efforts may have shaped a general narrative of participation in the genocide focused on external factors. Specifically, Rwanda's RPF-led government has constructed the 1994 genocide as a cultural trauma by designing commemorations, memorials, and education endeavours, among other initiatives.¹⁰⁶ Most of our participants were also required to take history classes or participate in *ingando*, a government-support-

99 For example, Headworth and Scully and Marolla.

100 For example, Gisli H. Gudjonsson and Ian Bownes, 'The Attribution of Blame and Type of Crime Committed: Data for Northern Ireland', *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 2.3 (1991), pp. 337-41, doi:10.1080/09585189108407668.

101 Straus; Fujii.

102 Anderson; Bryant and others.

103 Straus, pp. 135-36.

104 McDoom, pp. 333-36.

105 Ibid., pp. 334-35.

106 Longman, *Memory and Justice*; Fox; Chi Mgbako, 'Ingando Solidarity Camps: Reconciliation and Political Indoctrination in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 18 (2005), pp. 201-24; Andrea Purdeková, *Making Ubumwe: Power, State and Camps in Rwanda's Unity-Building Project* (Berghahn, 2015); and Elisabeth King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

ed re-education camp while incarcerated, which may have impacted their narrative formation. Generally, these memory projects paint a picture of pre-colonial harmony and blame the genocide on colonial institutions, as well as on Hutu-led governance.¹⁰⁷ Recent studies have found that Rwandans reference factors cited in the government's narrative, including colonialism and 'bad government', as they narrate the causes of the genocide,¹⁰⁸ and our research suggests that such ideas extend to the causes of *participation* in the genocide as well.

Despite these government efforts, we still found that many individuals attributed the causes of others' participation in genocide to internal factors. We argue that the FAE has a role in this. However, this also accords with previous research indicating that decision-making about perpetration, desistance, or rescue during genocide is a complex combination of both internal and external factors.¹⁰⁹ It is important for both the individuals impacted by past genocides and the collectives that remember them to grapple with this complexity and not overemphasize one set of factors over the other, at risk of distorting reality and failing to address some of the causes of genocidal violence. While our study specifically pertains to the case study of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and is not necessarily applicable to perpetration across other cases, we encourage other researchers to explore the prevalence of the FAE in other accounts of perpetration and analyse their context-dependent sources and impacts.

The passage of time must be kept in mind when interpreting our results as well. Specifically, it is important to underscore that our data provide retrospective assessments of participation provided over twenty years after the decision to participate. Given that we are focused not on truly understanding why people participated but on how they *explain* their participation, the issues tied to retrospective interviewing are less salient here. Nonetheless, our data also provide information regarding retrospective assessments long after the violence ended, meaning that respondent answers may have been different had they been interviewed in the first few years after the violence ended. Longitudinal studies addressing how attributions change over time would thus provide valuable additions to the literature.

107 Susan Thomson, *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

108 Longman, *Memory and Justice*; Nyseth Brehm and Fox.

109 On perpetration, see, for example, Williams and Smeulers. On rescue behaviors, see Jamie D. Wise, Hollie Nyseth Nzitatira, and Nicole Fox, 'Examining Moral Decision-Making During Genocide: Rescue in the Case of 1994 Rwanda,' in *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality*, vol. 2, ed. by Steven Hitlin, Shai M. Dromi, and Aliza Luft (Springer, 2023), pp. 246–57.

Future research should further consider the gendered nature of these narratives. This specific analysis has not addressed gendered differences in reasons provided (for oneself or for others); however, given that excuses rely upon social norms, it stands to reason that explanations for participation may also vary significantly by gender and based on socially-constructed ideas about gender roles in society. For instance, it was not as typical for killing groups in Rwanda to coerce women to physically commit violence,¹¹⁰ meaning that this reason may be less commonly provided by women. Gendered stereotypes of men and women also likely shape discussions of why others participated.

A notable limitation of our work is that not everyone in our sample provided reasons for their own participation. Participants may have refused to provide a reason to hide their true motivations out of fear of judgement or consequences or because they simply lacked an articulable explanation. The most common non-reason was that respondents claimed their innocence. For instance, some claimed that they were accidentally present and were subsequently implicated in the crimes of a killing group. We excluded these claims from our analysis, though claims of accidental presence could be conceived of as external excuses for participation, meaning that our results provide a conservative assessment of the FAE.

Additionally, our study has important methodological implications. For example, some genocide scholars have suggested that interviewers need not ask why someone engaged in violence directly and can instead ask respondents why they *believe* others did so as a proxy for understanding personal motivation.¹¹¹ While we do not discredit this approach, our findings suggest that researchers must consider how the FAE impacts their research. At the same time, we encourage genocide scholars to apply our strategy of examining both reasons for one's own and others' participation across other cases, since our findings are specific to the Rwandan case. Scholars could take an interview-based approach as we have or examine archival documents left behind by perpetrators to further illuminate how the FAE manifests across episodes and contexts of mass violence.

As for the broader implications of our findings, we contend that the post-genocide narratives of those who perpetrated crimes have consequences not only for how violence is remembered, but also for how

¹¹⁰ Brown.

¹¹¹ Williams.

social relations are understood in the aftermath. We find that Hutu participants in the genocide generally do not continue to demonize Tutsi in their narratives, but rather demonize fellow Hutu who were part of their in-group—even their own killing groups. We suggest that this reaction may be a result of the reintegration and coping processes of these individuals who, after being incarcerated for genocide crimes, may wish to re-conceptualize their identities by distancing themselves from the members of their former in-group. By essentializing the negative characteristics of those they no longer desire to associate with, they might re-affirm the belief that they are a different kind of person, one who is not—by nature or inevitably—a criminal or killer.

Such narratives matter for peace between people who committed violence. While many reconciliation initiatives focus on victim-perpetrator relations, we challenge the field to consider the need to repair relations among former perpetrators. For example, Rwanda's *gacaca* courts caused tensions to emerge between some people who confessed and others who did not, perhaps fuelling some of the in-group animosity we observed. Our findings that some former perpetrators attribute negative characteristics, such as greed and evil, to their peers presents a potential obstacle—so far underacknowledged—for sustainable peacebuilding at the interpersonal level. We suggest that practitioners of reconciliation and memory initiatives seriously consider the impacts of self-exonerating narratives at the expense of others, which can embed negative perceptions and perpetuate conflict.

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