

Chapter 11 Rwanda: Repentance and Forgiveness – Pillars of Genuine Reconciliation

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In less than a hundred days from April 7th to July 4th, 1994, more than 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus of Rwanda were massacred in one of the worst genocides of the century. Up to date, people are still trying to process the causes of this madness. How could such a thing happen? How to explain such madness?

The Hard Questions

From time immemorial, Rwanda has been populated by Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas, three groups that have been and are still frequently mistaken for ethnic groups or tribes. The three groups speak the same language without even a distinguishing dialect, and they share the same culture and live in the same villages next to each other, thus defying any scientific delineation into tribes and ethnic distinctions. Even physical traits are not a reliable reference for the distinction. We have the same skin color and the height and facial traits that are at times presented as undeniable distinctives, but are also presented as misleading stereotypes.

Then come the hard questions – “if it be so, then how do you explain that the Hutu hated the Tutsi so much that they tried to wipe them out in one of the worst human tragedies of the century, namely the genocide of 1994?” “If it is impossible to distinguish between a Hutu and a Tutsi, how did people know who to kill and who to spare?” As the major focus of this chapter is to give an analytical answer to the first question, I will first clear the second one in one sentence: Ethnically marked identity cards made it easy to know who was Hutu and who was Tutsi. As for the why, many factors have been identified such as ethnic hatred, bad politics and power struggle, colonial and neo-imperialist manipulations, as well as socio-economical frustrations. Most of the root causes of collective violence like structure-based inequalities, difficult life conditions, destructive intergroup ideologies (Staub, 1989) were all there and the climate was ripe for a genocide. But this was the culmination of four decades of “episodic violence” against the Tutsis – including killings in the period 1959–1963 and in 1973, deprivation of rights through institutionalized injustice called “ethnic equilibrium,” and an “incriminating ideology” making of them the former oppressors. The genocide against Tutsis in 1994 came as another historical evidence that “memory, one taproot of civic peoplehood, can also be a time bomb ready to explode into political conflict” (Shriver, 1995, p. 4).

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In the first part of this chapter, I will look at wounded collective memory as the laproot of the long lasting ethnic animosity, my major contention being that collective hurts of the past, if not healed, will fester into future social sores. Unhealed social wounds in the Rwandan history born out of bad group relationships between the two major social groups – the Hutus and the Tutsis – motivated the politics of hatred and exclusion that eventually culminated into the genocide. This explains the importance of forgiveness, reconciliation, and long lasting measures aimed at peace building in areas that have known group tensions and conflicts.

In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on the challenges of peace building through structural transformation, the role of restorative justice through the Gacaca Community Courts, and the importance of repentance and confession, healing and forgiveness as prerequisites for genuine reconciliation. Drawing from different experiences in my personal life and from the daily practice in the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, on which I served as a commissioner since 1999, my conclusion is that peace building must be a multidimensional exercise at the group level. Drawing from the experiences with the Gacaca Community Courts (whose motto is "Justice for Reconciliation"), my second contention is that reconciliation at the interpersonal level is only possible when, on the one hand, the perpetrator has come to terms with his evil deed, has repented from it, and confessed and asked for forgiveness; and on the other hand, the victim has healed from the wounds and is ready to forgive. Forgiveness alone will not lead to reconciliation though it may help the offended to get release and healing from the pain of past wounds. Forgiveness alone will heal the individual, with lots of difficulties if the offender refuses to recognize and acknowledge the evil, but it will not restore group harmony and cooperation. Even by its very etymology, reconciliation is a reciprocal process. It is the restoration of a broken relationship. And for that to happen, you need a change of heart and behavior on the part of the offended (through healing and forgiveness) and of the offender (through repentance and confession). Forgiveness is only one part of a two-way give and take process.

The chapter is presented under the form of narrative for three major reasons. First, it is just a cultural bias, ours being an oral culture that favors narrative over analysis. Second, narrative is factual and lends itself to possibilities of multiple reinterpretations. But the main reason is that I am simply more of an amateur practitioner of forgiveness and reconciliation than a trained psychologist and analyst of trauma. My conclusions will thus be directly drawn more from daily examples and practices than from academic interpretation.

Understanding the Madness

From Father to Son: Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

Peace psychologists have tried to identify systemic and cultural origins of violent episodes. "Violent events are viewed as manifestations of interactions among a host of destructive inputs that are embedded in social, cultural and historical factors" (Christie, 2006). These factors include social injustices, bystander passivity,

militarism, globalization, and "a range of cultural narratives that support violence including, for example, ideologies that normalize social exclusion and violence" (Christie, 2006, p. 6). What were the factors and cultural narratives that led to the 1994 Rwanda genocide?

In 1993 when Rwanda was tense with all types of conflicts I asked one young militiaman "Interahamwe" (the youth wing of the MRNDD party in power that was later on turned into a killing machine) why he was doing what he was doing, hating and persecuting Tutsis indiscriminately. "How old are you?" I asked him. "Nineteen", he answered. "Now, you were not even born when the Tutsis lost their power. What have they done to you?" I asked again. "Dava yarabamwiye (My father told me)." Very revealing words. This is a clear case of generational transmission of trauma. "My father, my grandfather, they... have told me." Manipulated history, past wounds kept on the heart and not dealt with, become like a hidden landmine on which future generations will step to be blown up. Unlike physical wounds, inner wounds are transmitted from father to son, from generation to generation, becoming worse and more irrational the further down the line away from the original offense.

Most of our Rwanda present social misfortunes are the sour harvest of our national past, an unfortunate legacy of psychological scars, social injustices, economical and political/ideological ills. Our fathers sowed the wind and we reap the tempest! As one old prophet put it "our fathers committed sins and they are no more, and we bear their iniquities" (Lamentations 5:7). Manipulated history taught to children has become "leftover debris of our national past that continue to clog the relationships of diverse groups" (Shriver, 1995, p. 4). And Shriver concludes, "the debris will never get cleaned up and animosity will never drain away until forgiveness enters these relationships in some political form" (p. 4). The cultural narratives that our generation inherited from the parents and from opportunistic politicians have been stories of intergroup mistrust, hatred, and exclusion – continuously poisoning the stream of our group relationships.

Sowing the Wind: Rwandan History as I Learned it in School

Social and cultural narratives are transmitted from generation to generation through stories and anecdotes parents tell the children, through the media, and through school lessons. Research done in 2006 by a Commission of the Rwanda Senate, the IRDP, one of the institutions working on peace building in Rwanda, showed that racial prejudices were learned from parents (12.8%), teachers and school curriculums (75%), peers and political party rallies (42.3%), and through the media and other means (27.4%). This obviously was for the recent times because there was a time when the media was the greatest channel of hate propaganda (1990–1994). This part of the chapter looks at how intergenerational animosities were transmitted through history teaching, as an example of transgenerational transmission of past group trauma.

Rwanda history as taught to us in school had it that Rwanda is populated by three ethnic groups: The Batwa (1%), the Bantisi (14%), and the Bahutu (85%),

commonly referred to as Twas, Tutsis, and Hutus, respectively, in English and French. The Twas, we were taught, were the first to occupy the land but they were only nomadic hunters who belonged to the short pygmoid group. They initially had their dwellings in forests and trees, feeding on animals they killed, fruit they picked from the trees, and roots they dug from the ground. Even then, they are said to have been very small in number and have remained so. No one ever told us where the Twas came from. They have always been despised, not allowed to share from the same pot of drinks as our social customs have it, and they do not intermarry with the two other groups. No wonder even today they are almost invisible in our social spheres.

When I was appointed as a commissioner on the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 1999, I took time to analyze the roots of our problems and I was amazed to find out how blind I had been to the plight of that small group. I had simply accepted and taken for granted that they do not belong because they do not like to belong! But the memory of one incident in my early school years in primary school flashed back in a revelatory way. One day, our teacher was telling us about the origins of the three Rwandan groups. The first thing he did was to ask those who belonged to each group to stand up. "The Hutus, stand up." They proudly stood up. "The Tutsis, stand up," we hesitantly stood up, a smaller number. "The Twas, stand up." No one! Then the teacher called out "Mukabubwe, why are you not standing up, you are a Twa, aren't you?" The girl called by that name stood up, shyly, as if ashamed of being who she was. We all turned in her direction, looked at her, and laughed. The teacher reprimanded us for the behavior and did something I will never forget. He turned to us and asked, "Why do you behave like that? Do you despise the Twas?" Then he asked, "Who of all of you cannot share from the same drink with a Twa?" All of us, Hutus and Tutsis alike, stood up like one man! The girl had remained sitting, alone. Then all of a sudden she broke into tears, stood up, and dashed out of the classroom, weeping. For a whole week she did not come back to school. The teacher shrugged it off, scolded us a little, and just went on with his teaching on our origins. That was another way of forming a destructive social narrative. The more I work with issues of healing and reconciliation, I have come to understand why the girl left school that day and stayed away for a whole week. I have come to understand why the Twas are not with us in the church, in the army, or in politics. We have rejected them. Wounded as they are, they keep away from our contempt, afraid to be rejected again. Who would like to sit next to a person who despises him? When a social group has been despised for a period long enough to get to a point of believing the lie, their spirit becomes like a broken spring that will not bounce when pushed down. We all tend to shy away from places where we are made to feel rejected.

The Hutus, we were told, came second from somewhere around the Lake Tshad and settled in different places under different names according to different countries and they make up what is called the "Bantur" group. They were mainly cultivators and were consequently sedentary by nature.

The Tutsis came last after many centuries and found the Hutus well established. They came in small numbers and were very well received by the Hutus. They

came from Abyssinia somewhere around Ethiopia and Somalia and belong to the "Nilotic-Hamitic" group. They came with cows. Later on they started conquering the land of their hosts and enslaved them.

Disension Step-by-Step

This is a summary of the narrative of the origins of the three groups in our land. A close look reveals how the seeds of disensions were sown.

First, the way the Twas are presented explains why we have never given them any recognition: after all, their ancestry was less than human, they were just "next to the monkeys." Despising the Twas was just normal from that perspective. In the 1980s the government tried to amend their lot but it was done in such a condescending way that it did not bear any tangible fruit. Small brick houses were built for them in some places and in other places they were given iron sheets for roofing their houses, but this was just a way of appeasing the feeling of guilt on the national conscience. But there was no confession, there was no effort to change the prejudices, and even the above efforts seemed to reinforce them. During our first-term on the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (1999-2002), one of the commissioners was a Twa. The first day of our meeting I went to him and told him I wanted to apologize for the way we had treated his group. He was amazed and he did accept the apology and since then we have been friends and mutual admirers!

Second, the way the relationships between the Hutus and the Tutsis are presented reveals an undercurrent of intentional manipulation. The narrative runs as if the country belonged to the Hutus who were sedentary agriculturalists, who were the first comers and toiled to cut the forest to turn the forest into a habitable country. The Hutus are presented as naive and good-hearted hosts who welcomed the Tutsis into their land. Then the Tutsis are presented as the bad guests - "ucumbikira mu mufuruka bakaguca mu mbere" (you give them a sleeping place in the guest room and the following day they have chased you out of your bedroom), as goes the popular saying that reflects that stereotype.

So all the historical conquests by Tutsi kings are not considered in their real value but rather as usurpation of "Hutu Power." The traditional Rwanda kingdom started as a small chiefdom in the Northeastern part of the present Rwanda territory under the leadership of Tutsi leader and slowly expanded by the conquest of other chiefdoms. The conquests were not discriminatory: regions under pastoralist (later on called Tutsis) and agriculturalist (referred to as Hutus) chiefs were all subjected to attacks and conquests in the non-stopping expansion of the kingdom that went on until the arrival of the white colonialists in the region at the end of the 19th century (1890). In the presentation of our history, however, the conquests have always been interpreted as a kind of usurpation of "Hutu power," passing in silence over the fact that chiefdoms under pastoral leaders (Tutsis) were also conquered. No wonder "Hutu Power" became the leitmotiv theme of the songs and slogans used before and during the genocide. One of the songs says, "hangaba abaturu batubuka,

ngo bibuke Nyagakerecu mu Bisi bya Huye, ngo bibuke N'ice Mpandahande, m'ire Ruhande rimwe, ngo bibuke Nzira ya Muramira. Iyo bazize se n'umukizi?" (I hate Hutus who do not remember, Hutus who do not remember the conquest of Bisi near Huye the kingdom of Nyagakerecu, Hutus who do not remember the invasion of the land of Mpandahande who lived in Ruhande, who do not remember Nzira son of Muramira. Will you ignore the cause of their fall? The story of the renowned conqueror Tutsi King Ruganzu as presented in that song reflects how the Tutsis were presented in the eyes of the younger generation in our schools: tacful usurpers. This idea of Tutsi being foreigners from Abyssinia who came to usurp the Hutu Power was exploited by demagogues and propagandists of the genocide. Many people were killed and thrown into the Akagera River, one of the rivers feeding the Nile River as "a shortcut back to their homeland of Ethiopia." Why was the hate propaganda so successful? Simply because the unhealed wounds of the past served as a detonator for the ethnic bomb that unleashed the genocide of 1994. But where did the bitterness come from?

Rwanda Before the Arrival of the Europeans

Nostalgies will always look at the past as a lost paradise. Today, a certain reading of history has glamorized our past before the arrival of the whites and all the misfortunes are simplistically blamed on the white colonialists. Listening to some people, you would think our ancestors lived in a paradise without social blemishes. This is another dangerous narrative -- scapegoating only the white colonial powers for all the ills of our nation.

The first whites arrived in Rwanda around 1896 and found the Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas all living together under the leadership of an uncontested monarchy. All were servants to the same king, who was said to be above "the mêlée," although he belonged to the Tutsi group. In his enthronement ceremony he was always reminded that "umwami ntaba umubutu, ntaba umututsi, ntaba umutwa" (the king is never a hutu, a tutsi, or a twa). He was the unifying element of the people and was supposed to be impartial to all. But this is only partly true as promotion in the system often came from family relationships and the scheming traffic of influence. In actual fact, the power was in the hands of one clan -- the Abanyiginya -- which gave the king with few satellite clans who gave the queen mothers and thus waged great power and influence. Nevertheless, it was possible for anybody from the three groups to access higher positions through personal achievements and performance (military, economic, artistic, and even personal service to the royalty).

Although it is true that no single clash or war on an ethnic basis is recorded in our history, it is clear that a bitter root was already there poisoning the relationships between our three groups. The Twas, as already seen, were despised by the two other major groups. The relationships between the Hutus and the Tutsis were twisted by many factors. The aristocratic system was built on stereotypical myths that made everything beautiful and good to be Tutsi and everything bad and ugly to be Hutu. A close analysis of our social stereotypes as reflected in our proverbs, popular jokes,

and sayings shows that our standards of beauty and handsomeness favored the tall height and the fine facial traits that in many cases came to be identified with the Tutsis. During the genocide, the paranoia on this physical appearance was so high that even statues of the Virgin Mary in Catholic churches were cut into pieces simply because "they looked Tutsi!" The Tutsis were thought to be refined in behavior while it was expected and acceptable for Hutus to be raw, rude, and gluttonous. The word "imfura" used by Tutsis to talk of themselves refers not only to physical beauty but also to nobility of character and behavior. The rough, the uncouth, the glutton, and the uncultured were referred to as "Hutu."

The wounds created by this kind of rejection, negation, and belittlement of the other in its humanness, breed bitterness that will eventually explode into destructive behaviors. A good reading of history will show that all violent atrocities committed against aristocratic nobilities in social upheavals and revolutions (like the French Revolution) have always been fuelled by this undercurrent of emotional woundedness. Stories collected during the genocide and before show that resentments based on ethnic rejection was one of the deep roots of the genocide. Some of the killers mutilated Tutsi women saying "Umva ko muri beza, tuzareba ko uzongera kaba mwiza" (you are said to be beautiful, let us see if you will be beautiful again after this). Others raped Tutsi women saying "reka twumve uko unututsikazi amera" (let's taste how it feels to have sex with a tutsi woman).

1900-1959: The Colonial Period

Rwanda was first a German colony; then it became a Belgian protectorate when Germany lost World War I. The Germans had not had enough time to leave their fingerprints on the slate of Rwandan history as the Belgians did. With their firm hand on the administration of the country, the Belgians changed many factors in the social equation. First, the king lost his unifying role when promotion was taken over by the Belgians who promoted exclusively the sons of Tutsi chiefs who were considered as born leaders at the expense of the two other groups. They created what the African American activist Malcolm X once called the "House Negroes" and the "Field Negroes":

There were two kinds of negroes. There was that old house Negro and the field Negro. And the house Negro always looked out for his master. When the field Negroes got too much out of line, he held them back in check. He put them back on the plantation.

The house Negro could afford to do that because he lived better than the field Negro. He ate better, he dressed better, and he lived in a better house. He lived right up next to his master in the attic or the basement. He ate the same food his master ate and wore his same clothes. And he could talk just like his master--good diction. And he loved his master more than his master loved himself. That's why he did not want his master hurt. If the master got sick he'd say "what's the matter, boss, we sick? When the master's house caught a fire, he'd try and put the fire out. He didn't want his master's house burned. He never wanted his master's property threatened. And he was more defensive of it than the master was. That was the house Negro.

And then you had some field Negroes, who lived in huts, had nothing to lose. They wore the worst kind of clothes. They ate the worst food. And they caught hell. They felt the sting of the lash. They hated their master. Oh, yes, they did. If the master got sick, they'd pray that the master died. If the master's house caught fire, they'd pray for a strong wind to come along. This was the difference between the two.

And today you still have the house Negroes and the field Negroes. I'm a field Negro. If I can't live in the house as a human being, I'm praying for a wind to come along. If the master won't treat me right and he is sick, I'll tell the doctor to go in the other direction. But if all of us are going to live as human beings, as brothers, then I'm for a society of human being that can practice brotherhood." (quoted in DeYoung, 1997, 22-23)

The Tutsi chiefs, "born leaders," were used like the "House Negroes": adulated, sent to the colonial school, taught to speak like the master, and even given some advantages over the others. And they were used for the tasks of keeping the others in line. And this created obvious jealousies. With their new system of administration, the Belgians introduced tough measures of forced labor, fines, imprisonments, lashings, and other systems of punishment and exploitation that had never existed before. These were resented by the population and all was blamed on the Tutsi chiefs who were the policy implementers! This myth of the "Tutsi born leader" was to be exploited against the Tutsis during the period of "Hutu Regimes" after independence. Nobody loves to sit next to a "born leader" who makes you feel little and threatens to take your place! And the fact of having been collaborators with the colonial system was to be later exploited to identify their leadership with colonialism. During the "Hutu Regimes," they always spoke of "ingoma ya gihake na gikolonizite," "the leadership of feudalism and colonialism," one referring to the Tutsi (feudalism) and the other referring to the whites (colonialism). This formed another social narrative based on the wounds of colonial leadership.

1959-1994: The Ethnic (Hutu) Regimes - Politics of Revenge

Miroslav Volf (1996) writes that when victims do not heal from their wounds, with time they tend to "mimic the behaviour of the oppressors, (they) let themselves be shaped in the mirror of the enemy" and they "will become perpetrators tomorrow who in their self-deceit, will seek to exculpate their misdeeds on account of their own victimization" (p. 117). This should serve as a warning, as history over and over again shows that the oppressed of yesterday will become a worse oppressor when opportunity comes for him to seize power. "The factual-moral claim is: absent forgiveness and its twin repentance, political humans remember the crimes of ancestors only to entertain the idea of repeating them" (Shriver, 1995, p. 6). Wars of revenge, politics of revenge are all "debris of the past" that are still visible in many events all over the world. Who would have believed that the battle of Kosovo in 1398 would still be remembered in the minds of ordinary Serbian soldiers in 1993? But "constantly watered with intergenerational resentment, the memory of past horrors prepares the ground for their repetition in the future" (Shriver, 1995, p. 67). And that is what happened in Rwanda.

From 1957, Hutu activists started claiming for equal treatment while the Tutsi leadership was asking for independence for the country. The Belgians simply exploited the situation and turned the two groups against each other. From 1959 to 1962 the country went through a period of social turmoil that has come to be known as the "Social Revolution" that overthrew the monarchy and established a "Hutu Republic." It was unfortunate that all Tutsis, even those who had never ruled, were corporately tagged and banded with former rulers and exploiters and were all subject to the same fate. Some were killed, others were beaten, all lost property. Many decided to leave the country and settled in refugee camps in the neighboring countries. Many went to Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Congo, and even beyond. The killings, the looting, the cruelties were all justified on the basis of former grievances. As if the killings and other atrocities had not been enough, the Hutu politician put in place "politics of revenge" camouflaged under the acceptable colors of "affirmative action." All the policies on education and power sharing were based on the false assumption that all the Tutsis had had their share of the national power cake and now was time for the Hutus to take their turn. Ethnic belonging had become a criterion for access to political power during colonial rule and unfortunately the Rwandan takeover did not change the trend but rather exacerbated it by perpetuating it as a system. From this misconception and all the former stereotypes came the following policies.

Subordination. The Tutsis were not allowed in the army leadership except in a "tokenist" representation: only one senior officer in the army. More than once when discussing with friends, they would say "what do you want, you are well represented in the army. It's simply that you are never satisfied when you don't have everything." The system was even pushed further and it was later on explicitly forbidden for Hutus in high army and political positions to marry Tutsi women.

Restricted Social Positions. The Tutsi were not allowed in high positions of leadership in the government and other institutions (even the church!). But some token representation was always there again to muzzle every claim for justice. This tokenist representation in power position is another formula for the House Negro and Field Negro syndrome. It is enough to recruit someone who is harmless and inoffensive by his submissive character, someone you will use to endorse your line and even defend it to outsiders and even to people of his own group. The psychology of this approach is to treat that person well but the loss of his job being always a possibility when he is no longer loyal or when he becomes openly vehement on injustices he may see being done to his group. The token representative remains in position as long as he does not see and talk about the problems in the system. The Tutsi who lived in the system know what it means when you have to keep silent and back up the party line because you cannot afford to lose your security (being put in jail), your job, or even your life. I often remember grumbling and cursing under my breath when asked to sing the slogans of the MRND (one) party calling President Habyarimana "umubeyi w'igihugu" (the father of our nation) even when he was oppressing us with his ethnic equilibrium policies.

Limited Access to Education. The Tutsis had limited access to education and this was established into a system since 1973. The policy of "équilibre ethnique" (ethnic

quotas) could not be explained and when challenged, the proponents of the system were always fast to remind you that "Tutsis have had their time, this is time for the Hutus." In normal situations, ethnic quotas systems are used to protect a minority that may be overlooked because of its small size. They may as well be applied as a measure of affirmative action in contexts where a minority has held the power monopolizing all the political, economic, and educational privileges (like during the apartheid system in South Africa). In the Rwandan situation, however, Tutsis, Hutus, and Twas live in the same neighborhoods, go to the same schools, markets, and churches, and share the same miseries. It cannot be proved that by 1959 Tutsis had achieved a level of life standard beyond Hutus in the same social category. A few Tutsis belonging to the aristocracy had enjoyed the privileges of power but not everybody was the son of a chief!

Ethnic Division. The narrative of ethnic division was not only translated into national policies but was equally enshrined in our symbols like the national anthem, logo, and flag, all exalting the victory of one group (Hutus) against the other (Tutsis). There was for instance one stanza of our national anthem I always jumped because it exalted what the Hutus called the "exploits" of the liberators while for some of us it was the killings of our fathers and relatives. This is the dilemma of a polarized nation: the heroes of one group are villains for the other and their exploits are villainies.

Guilt. The refugees who were outside in foreign countries since 1959 kept claiming for their right to come to their homeland but they were constantly reminded that they had been the former exploiters, and the population inside was told that if they came back "you will be back to forced labour." This guilt creation in the oppressed helped the oppressors to feel at ease in their injustices even during the perpetration of the genocide. Another example of "perpetrators exculpating their misdeeds on their misdeeds on account of their past victimisation" (Volf, 1996). When the second generation of exiles organized themselves into a political front (Rwanda Patriotic Front) cum army (Rwanda Patriotic Army) and attacked the country in 1990, those accusations became the main slogan lines to incite the population not only against them but also against every Tutsi wherever he may be in the world, this eventually culminated in the genocide. Literature coming from some of the groups of perpetrators and their foreign supporters are still trying to explain away that horrible act by the same accusations that it was the RPP that attacked first and supposedly shot down the plane of the Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana, thus sparking off "Hutu anger."

Episodic Violence. The genocide was in actual fact the culmination of "a widening gyre" of episodic violence against Tutsis since 1959. Killings were carried out every time the refugees in neighboring countries attacked the country as a reminder of their presence in refugee settlements. In 1963, 1967, 1973, and 1990-1994 there were killings and property destruction accompanied by propaganda exploiting the same old fears and accusations. The victims were always presented as the cause of their own demise!

Peace psychology identifies two types of violence: "episodic violence" where direct violence occurs from time to time and kills or harms people directly through

bodily insult and "structural violence" with social inequalities resulting in slow death by depriving people of basic human need satisfaction (Christie, 2006). This brief overview shows an insidious combination and interplay of both types of violence, eventually culminating into a remorseless genocide.

Rebuilding on the Ruins of the Past

The genocide of 1994 and the war that followed to stop it left us with a nation shaken from every fiber of its foundation. The Hutu regime crumbled under the weight of its criminality, and when the RPF took power in July 1994 only the shell of the nation had survived. Everything in the country was like a ghost—people, cities, the whole country. Most of the physical infrastructures, roads, schools, hospitals, private houses, and properties had been looted and/or destroyed. The genocide had claimed more than 1,000,000 human lives in less than 3 months, while causing other grave consequences in the social fabric. For more than 2 years, more than 3,000,000 Rwandese, mainly Hutus, were trapped into the refugee camps in the neighboring countries of Burundi, Congo, and Tanzania. Many of them died of outbreaks of diseases like cholera, others died of fatigue and malnutrition on their long trekking, others got separated from their families, etc. By the end of 1994, more than 500,000 children inside the country were counted as unaccompanied, i.e., orphans or separated from their parents.

But more than anything else, the most destructive lasting effect of that man-made human tragedy is the way it affected the relationships and the emotions of people. The genocide left deep wounds on the minds and hearts of all people, the victims suffering from trauma, bitterness, anger, and hopelessness, while the perpetrators were overburdened with the guilt of having done something that was initially presented to them by their leaders as acceptable but eventually ended up condemned by the whole world.

The new government put in place in July 1994 had to come up with solutions to all those problems in the context of a very confused international opinion. Some came with compassion and understanding, others came with criticisms and judgments; but all in all, everybody saw the future with justified apprehension. The victims of yesterday had become the victors of today. Will they adopt the Churchill principle of "magnanimity in victory" or will they go for "eye for eye, tooth for tooth?" Will the Tutsis get over the hurts and wounds of the past and live peacefully with the Hutus? Will they be magnanimous enough to forgive such evil? Will the Hutus get over the burden of guilt and shame to live peacefully next to their a Hutu and a Tutsi land, so deep was the divide that many feared it could not be bridged. Some Hutus and even Tutsis were exploring and adopting the option of leaving the country to live somewhere else, echoing the musings of Jurgen Moltmann about living in Germany after World War II: "How could one belong to a nation on which such a burden of guilt lay? Should not one renounce it and make a fresh start somewhere else?" (quoted by Shriver, 1995, p. 85). Questions were fusing from

everywhere, all wondering how to get over the evils of the past and transform the society for the better.

Systems Approach

Peace psychologists recommend that in the aftermath of man-made social tragedies the rebuilding of society should be made through the interplay of multiple constructive inputs such as peacekeeping, conflict resolution, reconciliation, peace education, nonviolent social justice movements, trauma reduction, and societal reconstruction. This requires a "systems approach that promotes changes in human relationships across levels of societal complexity from interpersonal to intergroup" (Christie, 2006).

In the case of Rwanda, the first signs of hope for change came with the appointment of the transition government in July 1994. The Rwanda Patriotic Front had opted for a "Broadbased Government of National Unity": Hutus and Tutsis were well represented. Not only was the new government bent on shaping more equitable structures, it was also determined to change the social narratives and the national symbols. The government started calling back and resettling the refugees and consented great efforts and financial expenses to visit refugee camps, encouraging all to repatriate. The ethnically marked identity cards were soon banned and the ethnic quota system was replaced by a more just system based on performance. Today access to secondary education, university scholarships, and jobs is solely based on performance. This does not mean that ethnicity is dead and buried in our communities but the seeds of change have been sown. Laws that had served as the foundation of ethnic divisions have been revised, our symbols (national logo, flag, and anthem) that exalted one ethnic group against the other have been changed, all in a general attempt to create a Rwanda where all the Rwandans will feel equal, united, and reconciled. A Commission for National Unity and Reconciliation, a Commission for the Human Rights, and the Office of the Ombudsman have been put in place to see to it that we do not go back into the old paths. Reconciliation has been enshrined as a non-negotiable value for the survival of the nation. At this moment, our National Unity and Reconciliation Commission is working at producing a National Policy on Reconciliation that will help keep the country focused until the nation is healed. Programs of civic education for the general population and the youth in and out of the schools have been put into place to inculcate the ideals of unity and peace. Different stakeholders are coordinated to bring about total healing for all. While all these processes were going on, one thorny question remained: What policy to adopt for justice?

The survivors of the genocide were claiming for justice and compensation while the international community was calling for clemency and amnesty because of the great numbers of perpetrators. Some survivors had started even committing acts of revenge while at the same time some hardhearted perpetrators were still bent on "finishing the job" of eliminating the Tutsi survivors in their neighborhoods and even beyond. The challenge was how to punish and at the same time restore and forgive

a group that has either committed atrocities or just stood by and watched. The general consensus was well summarized by these words by the then Vice President Paul Kagame: "the problem of justice is not just a problem of texts and tribunals. We need to find a way in-between the classical justice, the rebuilding of the social tissue, and the prevention of another tragedy, of another genocide."

Reconciliatory Justice: Gacaca Courts

The prison statistics show that the number of imprisoned suspects of the genocide has been fluctuating between 128,000 and 115,000 between 1998 and 2001. This happened at a time when all the government and judicial infrastructures had been shattered and grounded to a halt. The killing of many judges and other justice administrative employees, the exile of many others, and the imprisonment of another number because of their participation in the genocide had contributed to a total paralysis of the judicial system. It was necessary to recreate the system while at the same time a large number of people were being put in jail in an attempt to eradicate the culture of impunity and to defuse a certain hunger for revenge from the survivors of the genocide. During most of 1994 and 1995, everybody thought justice would be our healing solution. By 1996, we already knew it would not work! That is when "reconciliation" became the word of the day. That is when came the idea of resurrecting our traditional system of reconciliatory justice called Gacaca.

The name Gacaca comes from a short grass commonly found around the compounds of traditional Rwanda. When the name is applied to courts, it represents the space with gacaca grass where people sat to listen to different problems of the community in order to find solutions together. In the traditional context, Gacaca was not a court in the modern sense of the term because it did not have written laws and it did not have prisons. The Gacaca assembly was usually made up of "people of integrity" (Inyangamugayo) and recognized as such by the community because of their honesty, age and experience, wisdom, and even political or economic influence. All the members of the community around were allowed to take part and to give their views although the final decision was made by the Inyangamugayo by consensus and in public.

The major role of the "people of integrity" was to listen to the case, to hear both antagonistic parties, and to pronounce a sentence establishing clearly the culpability of the offender on the one hand and the reparation to be paid on the other. The offender was always asked to ask for forgiveness and the case was always terminated by a celebration of the recovered unity by sharing a pot of local beer that was given by the family of the offender. The penalty was always a matter of all the family although the fault may have been individual. When the offense was judged too big to settle in the Gacaca, it was referred to the higher authority, usually the chief of the area and rarely the king. The objective of Gacaca has always been to rebuild the social tissue and to restore right relationships.

The new system kept the same spirit but it was readjusted with borrowings from other systems, mainly the Nuremberg Courts and the South African Truth and

Reconciliation Commission. From Nuremberg, they borrowed the idea of "the most guilty and the less guilty" (Shriver, 1995, p. 81), making the distinction between the leaders and the mere participants (implementers) of the genocide. From the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission came the idea of forgiving and reducing the penalty of those who accepted to speak the truth, confess, and ask for forgiveness. Other elements like written laws and punishments were borrowed from formal justice.

The new legislation as applied today categorized the genocide perpetrators into three categories. Category 1 is made up of those who masterminded the genocide by planning, organizing, and supervising the genocide as well as those who became famous for their cruelty and those who raped women and/or engaged in crimes of sexual torture or mutilation. Category 2 is made up of those who killed or wounded the victims with the intention of killing. Category 3 is made up of those who committed infractions to property (looting or destroying). This new legislation already offers the reduction of penalties in exchange of truthful confession and asking for forgiveness from the victims and the community.

Gacaca courts are today on the final phases; the collection of information is finished, and the judgments have already started in some areas. Without going into detail about the procedures and their evolution, let me highlight some lessons the process has taught us in the area of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Bring Parties Together. For real reconciliation to happen, both parties need to be together. Gacaca courts bring together the families of the survivors of the genocide and the families of the perpetrators who live in the same neighborhood. It serves as a social platform for talking again and sharing as a community. We have noticed that people leave the place in the right mood when there is consensus, when both sides agree on the truth of what happened without any cheating. When that happens, we become community again. We are together. This confirms the idea that "as repair of broken social relations, forgiveness has to be learned in a community." . . . "You can do it but you are not to try to do it alone" (Shriver, 1995, pp. 34-35).

Confessions. It is not enough to recount the truth to bring real healing and reconciliation. We have noticed that the survivors of the genocide start feeling released when somebody not only confesses his evil deed but does so with a contrite heart and readiness to ask for forgiveness. Truth is not enough to heal. People want to feel and see that the offender is really sorry for what he did. Without contrition and remorse, the confession is often resented as mockery and cynicism and instead of healing it "rubs salt in the wound" and irritates.

Psychological Freedom. Confession is difficult but those who have done it have acquired great release and psychological freedom. I remember one day when I was preaching in one prison and one man became fidgety on his bench. By the time I finished he stood up and asked "is it really true that God can forgive all sins?" I was puzzled by the question but I answered "yes." Then he said, "do you really mean it is all sins?" Then I answered, "that is what the Bible says. God forgives us of all sins when we repent." The man started confessing all types of crimes he had committed: people he had killed, women he had raped, property he had destroyed. At the end of the confession, he looked peaceful when he concluded "now, it is all over. I have said

it. I feel released, I feel at peace. Let them do with me what they want, but I have peace." I have heard many similar confessions and seen similar releases in many similar occasions. And it is happening in many Gacaca courts situations. It is true that "a person who thus admits his guilt and complicity renders himself defenseless, assailable and vulnerable. He stands there, muddled and weighed down. Everyone can point at him and despise him. But he becomes free from alienation and determination of his actions by others; he comes to himself, and steps into the light of a truth which makes him free and brings him into a new comradeship with the victims-readiness for reconciliation" (Jurgen Moltmann quoted in Shriver, 1995, p. 85).

Trauma Reduction. Forgiveness comes easy when the offended has gone through a process of healing from the inner wounds. Trauma reduction and healing play a great role in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Today we have witnessed many wonderful stories of forgiveness and most, if not all, come from people who have accepted to come to terms with their inner wounds. . . . Wounds that have been inflicted on us, particularly through mass tragedies like a genocide, tend to be "sacralized" and people like to hold on to them, not daring to desecrate them. This refusal to let go of the wounds of the past is a sure road to an eternal state of victimhood. In that case, the offender is still controlling your life. Lewis Sneddes (1996) put this so well when he wrote "it would give us some comfort if we could only forget a past that we cannot change. But the ability to remember becomes an inability to forget when our memory is clogged with pain inflicted by people who did us wrong. If we could only choose to forget the cruelest moments, we could, as time goes on, free ourselves from their pain. But the wrong sticks like a nettle in our memory. The only way to remove the nettle is with a surgical procedure called forgiveness. It is not as though forgiving were the remedy of choice among other options, less effective but still useful. It is the only remedy" (p. xi).

I will illustrate this with a personal testimony. I grew up hating the Hutus because they killed my father and many other members of my family during the 1959-1963 social upheaval. Then they kicked us out of school in 1973. In 1983 I lost my job with the university because of the "ethnic equilibrium" policy. Then when I was 35, I was thrown into the furnace of the genocide. Every 10 years of my life (at my ages of 5, 15, 25, and 35) I had to go through a traumatic event from the hands of the Hutus. All throughout those years, every sad event triggered sad remembrances and I blamed everything on the Hutus that had killed my father. Many times I found myself thinking about them, judging them, wishing them misfortunes. I was a victim. Many nights I went without sleep. Many days I went without food. Every time I remembered what they had done to us, it sparked off a negative response. When you remember your hurts just for the sake of ruminating them without any intention of letting them go, you are crucifying yourself on the cross of your past suffering. And you suffer more. That does not bring any healing at all. When I was 26, I accepted Jesus as my savior. It was his prayer for his tormentors when he was on the cross - "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" - that turned my life back into the right position. My faith not only enabled me to forgive and love my enemies, it did sustain me through the fire of the genocide and I came out still forgiving. Forgiveness is not just another gift from God, it is not a character predisposition

although a well-balanced character is an enabling factor. Forgiveness is a reasoned decision! For more details about my personal pilgrimage in woundedness and forgiveness, see my book *Out of the Fire: Stories of Healing, Forgiveness, Repentance and Reconciliation*, to be published in the near future. It is only when you choose to let go of your right to hate that it becomes easy to forgive your enemies and to live with them at peace.

Repentance. Forgiveness alone is not enough to bring reconciliation: you need the offended to heal and forgive but you also need the offender to be contrite, to repent and confess, and ask for forgiveness. Reconciliation happens when the repentant offender meets the healed offended and they restore their community of mutual friendship and trust. We are witnessing so many cases of that and I have collected such stories in the book mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Gacaca courts are bringing people together to find the truth about what happened, we are presently studying how to involve the faith communities in the next step of bringing the offenders and the offended together to achieve real reconciliation. The journey may be long, but at least we know where we are going and how to get there. Reconciliation is possible – when the offender has confessed and the offended has forgiven.

Conclusion

From the experience of Rwandan history, it is easy to see the importance of forgiveness not only in individual lives but also in the building of our nations. When wounds of the past have not been well processed and healed, they will come back like ghosts to haunt the future. Wounds of the heart do not heal with time, they simply sink deeper into the individual or collective psyche and come back in disguised forms, influencing perceptions of people and reality and shaping in a twisted way individual and collective convictions, character, and conduct. And as Lewis Smedes (1996) puts it, “forgiving is not the remedy of choice among other options, less effective but still useful. It is the only remedy” (p. xii). It is only through the release that comes with healing and forgiveness on the part of the offended and the repentance and contrite confession of evil on the part of the offender that individuals and even nations can start living real freedom from the shackles of a wounded past. In nations that have suffered from inequalities and mass crimes, it may be wise to first dismantle the reinforcing systems often found under the form of laws and national symbols and also to put in place systems of education that help groups and individuals to heal from their past wounds. This process of trauma reduction and healing is often left out in the process of peace building and reconciliation.

The big challenge remains of extending forgiveness and confession beyond the interpersonal level to the group level. In our traditional Gacaca system, the guilt and shame was carried out by the family of the offender and they corporately confessed through the mouth of a family elder (spokesman). But in the political context, it

is not easy to find a spokesman for a given group to speak with collective consent on their behalf. Confession means vulnerability and it is not a popular stand mainly in politics. The same applies to forgiveness. Can somebody express forgiveness on behalf of a whole group? Forgiveness is often associated with religion. Can it become a political agenda? As Shriver (1995) puts it so rightly, forgiveness needs to “escape its religious captivity and enter the ranks of ordinary political virtues” (p. 7), or is it that scientific researchers need to rediscover religion as “an extremely potent source of values for individuals as well as cultures?” (Park, 2005)

Recommended Reading on Rwanda

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Psychotherapy, Vol. 3: Interpersonal, Humanistic, and Existential (2002, Wiley). Her specialization is on how trauma arrests human development how reconciliation and forgiveness can facilitate recovery.

Augustine Nwoye, PhD, is full Professor in the Department of Psychology of The University of Dodoma, Dodoma, Tanzania. He had previously served as Chairman, Department of Psychology, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. Professor Nwoye has developed an African paradigm for mental health and, in particular, for family and couple therapy. He also has experience in dealing with stress and multiple losses, especially surrounding HIV/AIDS and other traumatic experiences within an African context.

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Antoine Rutayisire, MA, received one Masters degree in Applied Linguistics in the UK, North Wales, in 1986, and another in Modern Literature and Curriculum Development from Rwanda University. Since 1999 he has been on the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, serving as Vice-Chairman from 2002 to 2008. His books are *Senga, Uhindure Uhindure Gakondo Yawe (Pray to Conquer and Transform your Inheritance)*, *Abarinzi b'Inkike (Watchmen on the Walls)*, and *Umuyobozi Mwiza, Urugero rwa Mose (The Portrait of a Good Leader: the Example of Moses)*. He also published *Faith Under Fire, Testimonies of Christian Bravery* based on the 1994 Rwanda genocide. *Out of the Fire: Testimonies of Healing, Forgiveness, Repentance and Reconciliation* is also forthcoming.

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