

Reconciliation in the aftermath of violent conflict in Rwanda

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Reconciliation in the aftermath of the history of violent conflict in Rwanda is approached as part of a set of deeply interrelated issues, such as individual and social suffering, justice, remembering and forgetting, truth-telling, accountability, forgiveness, trauma therapy, socio-therapy, human rights, and development. The article is based on literature study, conversations with people of all walks of life in Rwanda, and six years of research experience in this country of one of the authors. A major challenge addressed is if, and to what extent, internationally oriented concepts and programs and cultural specific approaches in the field of reconciliation are in conflict with each other or whether they have the potential to reinforce each other.

Key words: Rwanda, violent conflict, reconciliation, justice, memory, therapy

Introduction

A major characteristic of modern violent conflicts are the massive traumatic events that affect people as much on the physical and mental, as well as, on the social and cultural level. Valued institutions and a way of life of whole populations are under attack. States of terror are created to penetrate and undermine the entire fabric of grassroots social relations and subjective mental life as a means of social control. Social bonds are ruptured, group identities destroyed, the

sense of community undermined, and cultural orientation is disrupted. Communities are turned against communities, neighbours against neighbours, friends against friends, and kinsmen against kinsmen, resulting in a social fabric that is frayed by distrust and betrayal. Violent confrontations between persons and groups who have some degree of prior social familiarity are associated with appalling physical brutality and indignity – involving mutilation, cannibalism, sexual abuse, and violence against civilian spaces and whole populations (Appadurai, 1999; Robben & Suárez-Orozco, 2000; Stover & Weinstein, 2004).

While massive war traumas leave entire communities and groups socially and emotionally stunned and defenceless, their social and cultural worlds still embody the capacity to somehow manage the suffering of survivor populations. Damaged communities have remained resilient and, in one way or the other, adapt and recover on a collective basis. How do they do it? How can survivors coexist with those who killed their most beloved kin? How can trust be restored in a community tainted by betrayal? How can the social fabric that once held a society together be reconstructed? How can the wounds to the social body and its cultural frame be healed? How does a

society succeed in coming to terms with its violent past? How do people re-form prior connections, both instrumental and affective, across the lines drawn by the warring parties? In other words, how does a society reconcile with its past and how do people reconcile with each other? While approaching the latter question as the main question in this article, we will look at reconciliation as part of a set of deeply interrelated issues – such as individual and social suffering, remembering and forgetting, truth-telling, witnessing, accountability, forgiveness, justice, trauma, healing, human rights and development. For the purpose of this article we use Kriesberg's (2001) definition of the concept of reconciliation as 'the process by which parties that have experienced an oppressive relationship, or a destructive conflict, with each other move to attain or to restore a relationship that they believe to be minimally acceptable'. We will explore various aspects of reconciliation processes as they take place in post-conflict Rwanda.

Rwanda is unique in the sense that a state orchestrated campaign for reconciliation is being implemented that attempts to be grounded in local traditions and practices, while at the same time the population is simultaneously finding its own ways to reconcile. Outside support is being welcomed to heal individuals and society from trauma generated by violence experiences and mediates in reconciliation. This raises the question if and how internationally oriented programmes and cultural specific approaches can reinforce each other in processes working towards reconciliation and the prevention of further violence. For us, this question has gained in relevance since, as the result of a study visit to Rwanda in July 2004; the first two authors became involved in a socio-therapy project.

The project started in September 2005 in one of Rwanda's provinces and is introduced towards the end of this article.

A major goal of the 2004 study visit to Rwanda was to try to understand, by being there, the way recovery processes were taking hold in a severely war traumatized society and what we could learn from them. Meetings with numerous people assisted us in putting into perspective our readings on Rwanda. Klaas de Jonge who at the time had lived and worked in Rwanda for six years accommodated the visit. The last few of those years he coordinated the international NGO Penal Reform International (PRI) research on gacaca, the local Rwandan tribunals. (See www.penalreform.org for the various research reports written by de Jonge and his team). The data on Rwanda we present in this article are partly based on this research. We made selective use of other literature on Rwanda, our main aim being to address developments in post-war Rwanda from a reconciliation perspective. Our approach to this highly complex subject is coloured by our respectively short- and long-term experiences in Rwanda. Interspersed in the text we make reference to what people from all walks of life told the first two authors in 2004, always within informal conversations.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994

Between April and July of 1994, during a period of 100 days, genocidal violence swept over Rwanda targeting primarily the Tutsis (a minority people who composed 10 - 15 % of the population of Rwanda), but also Hutu political opponents and civil society activists. A history of ethnic killings preceded this genocide. Massacres of Tutsis began in 1959 with the transfer of power in favour of the Hutu elite through political violence. This was followed by repression

and massacres of Tutsis in 1963-64 and 1973, reaching their pinnacle in 1994 (Prunier, 1995).

The start of the invasion by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an anti-government armed movement initially composed largely of Tutsis who had lived in exile for a generation from Uganda into Rwanda began on the first of October 1990. It was a power struggle began in the context of a civil war that the President Habyarimana regime was losing. In order to stay in power and to redirect the growing dissatisfaction among the population against them, the former government managed with great skill to devalue the minority group, making the Tutsis the 'out-group', or scapegoat par excellence. When the plane of President Habyarimana was shot down on the sixth of April 1994, it triggered the genocide. Eventually, the RPF gained a victory over the previous government and its army, ended the genocide, and established a new RPF-led regime.

Estimates of people who were brutally murdered during the 1994 genocide range from half a million up to one million. Over two million people were forced into exile, and hundreds of thousands of people were internally displaced inside the country. Rwanda was left with thousands of people who survived sexual violence and mutilation, orphans, and the detention of more than 100 000 individuals suspected of participation in the violence. The infrastructure was destroyed and social links were severed.

A major goal of the genocide aimed at the Tutsis, and those somehow associated with them, was cutting them out of the national collectivity and destroying them as a group. A substantial proportion of the Hutu population was mobilized for what came to be called a 'programme of civilian self-defence'. In the process, many foundations of Rwandan culture and morality were

destroyed. Destroying the fundamental values of the Rwandese people, such as those linked to family life and cultural reproduction, proved an efficient way of performing genocide. Children were killed by their teachers, other children saw their teachers kill the pupils they were supposed to protect and guide. The same can be said of mayors, Church leaders and even parents. Victims were denied any humanity by being forced to commit non-human acts assimilated with cannibalistic incest: disembowelled pregnant women were forced to eat parts of their foetus before dying, fathers to eat their own progeny. Bodies were cut into pieces in a culture where connectedness is both the paradigm of a human body and of a healthy society (African Rights, 1995).

Rwandan concepts of the body were frequently structured in terms of a root metaphor or (orderly) flow and (disorderly) blockage. Health and wellbeing depend upon proper bodily flow. In a variety of other domains blockage signified the antithesis of order, an obstruction that had to be removed to ensure personal and communal wellbeing. Hutu perpetrators displayed a tendency to carry out their brutal deeds in terms of this cultural idiom. These deeds included marking Tutsis as blocked beings by, for example; severing Achilles tendons, genital mutilation and breast ablations, impalement from anus or vagina to mouth, compelling Tutsis to rape and forced incest. Corpses were denied their humanity by throwing them into pit latrines or abandoning them to the dogs. Thousands of 'obstructing' Tutsis were dumped into rivers - signifiers of flow in Rwandan cosmology - and thereby acting as the body politics' organs of elimination, in a sense 'excreting' its hated external other (Taylor, 2002).

Both before and during the genocide,

complex sexual politics interacted with ethnic politics to demarcate social boundaries and achieve the racial purity that was seen as a necessary component of Hutu identity. Tutsi wives of Hutu men were considered 'limuloid beings', capable of undermining the categories of 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' altogether. They had to be eliminated. This fate also awaited a selection of Hutu women and girls; in particular, those who physically looked like Tutsi (Taylor, 1999). Again bodies were targeted in culturally specific ways. Sometimes assailants mutilated and chopped off body parts deemed characteristic of Tutsi women, such as thin fingers or long noses (Amnesty International, 2004). Killings and abuse by all parties involved in the conflict continued after the genocide, with the motive for Tutsis often being revenge. The collective result of all these horrendous deeds over the years could only be mistrust in all human ties, which make life meaningful, affecting all groups and leaving a society in disarray.

The Rwandan government policy of unity and reconciliation

Since the end of 1994, the new Rwandan government has made the promotion of national reconciliation central to its political program. This vast enterprise has included both judicial responses and non-judicial strategies.

With the help of the international community three judicial responses were implemented: the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, national-level domestic genocide trials, and local-level gacaca courts. A general amnesty was not seen as a solution. It was broadly accepted by the new Government, the people of Rwanda, and the international community that there should be accountability for the violence in order to eradicate the culture of impunity

and to reinforce respect for the rule of law and the principle of 'due process'.

The non-judicial strategies are the creation of a Government of National Unity and a National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, the public condemnation of the genocide, the promotion of a democratic culture, the creation of a socially responsible citizenry, the maintenance of memorial sites, the promotion of national rituals of commemoration, new national symbols to shape the collective memory of Rwandan history, an annual national Day of Heroes highlighting individuals who have fought ethnic division, the suppression of the mention of ethnicity on identity cards, school programs, re-education camps and the stimulation of trauma healing programs.

At the same time that the government is seeking to force the population to come to terms with the 1994 genocide however, it has dismissed accusations of its own engagement in war crimes and human rights abuses. This double standard has created political tensions and further divides the country.

In the following sections we single out two of the government approaches towards reconciliation for discussion: the judicial response in the form of gacaca and memorialization strategies. Although are both meant to contribute to reconciliation, they also have the potential to generate or increase health problems that may thwart reconciliation. Trauma counselling and socio-therapy will have to deal with these problems and where possible help to prevent them. This adds to the role these interventions have to play in the reconciliation process.

In order to understand the specificities of the Rwanda case better, we first briefly explore what is happening in terms of reconciliation, justice and memory in a few African countries.

Justice, memory, healing and reconciliation in various African countries

Over the past decade, the international community has in particular highlighted the close connection between justice and reconciliation, resulting in support on a grand scale for war crime tribunals and truth and reconciliation committees. A specific rhetoric about healing has accompanied many commissions' work, with the significant claim that truth heals the individual and social body (Hayner, 2001; Wilson, 2001; Hastrup, 2003; Ross, 2003). South Africa provides a powerful example of the use of metaphors of illness and healing in describing the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Commissioners and social commentators frequently compared, for instance, truth-telling and memorizing with the opening and cleansing of unhealed wounds caused by gross violations of human rights. Words like 'wound', 'fester', 'cleanse' and 'operation' were used to describe aspects of the Commission's work (Ross, 2003). But, as critiques argue, the very idea that individuals and nations can heal and ultimately recover from violence falls prey to inappropriate and impoverished medical and psychological metaphors; metaphors based on the assumption that after cleansing daily life and nation, building could begin afresh. The history of human violence teaches us, however, that there are few happy endings (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004). Another frequently made criticism of the work of the Commission is that talk of reconciliation and of restorative justice has sidetracked the legitimate demand for retributive, punitive justice (Wilson, 2001). According to the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, however, 'Retributive justice is largely Western. The African understanding is far more restorative – not so

much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew. The justice we hope for is restorative of the dignity of the people' (Minow, 1998).

Meanwhile, a basic forceful critique of the rise of human rights as the main universal standard against which to judge violence and suffering has been formulated. Hastrup (2003), for instance, argues that rights-based conceptions of justice distort our understanding of suffering and pare down social and moral narratives. Legal language cuts out the symbolic and expressive dimensions of violence. Instead of giving voice to people, victims of violence are often silenced by truth commissions. In her study of the South African TRC, Ross (2003) demonstrates the paucity of mechanisms the commission had available to give voice to suffering and receive acknowledgment for it. Another language of social suffering than that of the legal one, she argues, would be needed to permit the expression of the full range of experiences, admit the integrity of silence, and recognize the fragmented and unfinished nature of social recovery; a language that does not presume closure.

While public discursive spaces in the form of truth commissions and war crimes tribunals for healing have been created in many post-conflict countries around the world, governments in other such countries have shifted hurt out of the public domain. In post-war Nigeria, for instance, the underlying premise was that healing of post-war trauma can be done socially, and that the practice of such healing takes place at the level of the community (Last, 1999). Nigeria did not have a war crime tribunal and court records. The truth of the Biafran civilians, the defeated party, is the 'truth of the creative imagination in oral history and literature, which mostly are where the war experiences are being revisited and record-

ed' (Adamiame, 2000). At the end of the Biafran War, Nigeria was generally believed to have achieved a remarkable reconciliation. Thirty years later, however, that assumption is being challenged, as memories of Biafra are again central to questions of social justice and national security.

Also in the Mozambican case, the deafening silence of the state has rendered inter-subjective healing through public dialogues about a painful past exceedingly difficult (Hayner, 2001; West, 2003). People and communities are left to reconcile amongst themselves. Perhaps this is more effective than a reliance on international and national law and its institutions, because the latter are not designed to focus on the social and psychological processes that guide how people form attachments in groups and communities. One could argue that for the remaking of these attachments, justice has to be grounded in local traditions and practices and preferably be working in consort with other processes of social reconstruction.

Igreja (2003) describes how in the Gorongosa district of central Mozambique traditional healers contribute to healing and justice on a community level. In healing ceremonies it is the spirit who decides how justice and reparation can be best achieved in order to restore the health of patients and their family. This spirit-led type of justice follows socio-cultural and historical norms and practices. It is informed by a belief that in the case of an innocents' death, the spirit of the deceased person is capable of returning to the realm of the living to make justice. Therefore, existence of different forms of local justice is not the result of the failure of a secular system of justice, as suggested by Perera for Sri Lanka (2001). According to the Gorongosa perspectives on justice, the effectiveness of the secular justice system does not impair the spirits of the

innocent dead victims to pursue justice on their own terms (personal communication with Igreja). On the contrary, the various community sources available for the restoration of justice and healing interact with each other.

Gacaca and reconciliation

The Rwandan government, while recognizing the importance of justice for the rebuilding of society, came to the conclusion that the regular secular judicial system could never answer all the justice problems facing Rwanda. The Rwandan legal system was basically destroyed during the genocide. Of approximately 785 judges practicing before the genocide, only 20 survived (Borland, 2003). After extensive national-level discussions over the country's future, in the late 1990s, the proposal was put forward by the government of a unique Rwandan solution: an adapted form of state justice in the form of gacaca tribunals. These tribunals were to function in addition to and in conjunction with the other justice mechanisms available. Gacaca has been implemented gradually. It refers to a reinvented traditional way of participatory justice, which involves gathering information from the community and participatory judgment and punishment. It was proposed as a means to bring forth the truth about what happened, and to create a climate propitious for coexistence in Rwanda. As the Minister of Defence commented at the time; 'the problem of justice is not a simple problem of texts and courts. It concerns finding an intermediary way between classical justice, the reconstitution of the social fabric, and the prevention of another tragedy, another genocide' (Karekezi, et al., 2004). However, even gacaca, which is being promoted as a community-based initiative that will support reconciliation more effectively

than classical justice, remains one-sided and closely controlled by the government. Many Hutus feel frustrated because the system only deals with human rights abuses committed as part of the 1994 genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus, and not with all murders, rapes and other atrocities committed in Rwanda during the civil war, throughout the genocide and afterwards. According to Rombouts (2004) massacred Tutsis and moderate Hutus are regarded as victims of genocide, but the Rwandan government denies victim status to RPF victims and politicises such status. Because crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by RPF soldiers or by some Tutsi survivors against Hutu civilians are not dealt with in the gacaca courts, many Hutus do not consider the gacaca as a model of fair justice. Furthermore, although they know that they can press charges in the ordinary courts, they are generally afraid to take this step since they consider the justice system to be dominated by members of the ethnic group implicated or by the members of the party in power. Critics have also called on the government to incorporate more human rights protections into the gacaca system itself. Some witnesses are afraid they will be attacked if they speak the truth. No clear security system has been established to protect community witnesses who testify. In Rwanda we visited various groups of widows. The women of one group told us that after the genocide they had no place to go. They lost husbands, children and possessions. 'I had seven children and have three left', said one of the women. Another continued; 'we were all raped and we told our stories during a gacaca meeting. We don't have much trust in the outcome of the gacaca process because the perpetrators who caused us so much suffering are

unknown. We are still afraid for rapes and retributions. Other people disappeared after testifying or were murdered. Our testimonies are threatening to others, therefore we take turns in patrolling at night'. We are not sure to which cases of disappearance or killing the women referred. Three gacaca witnesses were indeed murdered in the previous year; two of them after they had said that they would testify in the gacaca courts (www.internews.org.rw). Even though it is uncertain whether the killings were indeed related to gacaca instead of being the result of personal animosity between individuals, they raised a lot of fear among witnesses.

It is generally acknowledged that the gacaca tribunals may open up further abuses of human rights as well as re-traumatization. The latter is also illustrated by the following story told to us. A man accused of various war crimes stated before the gacaca court that he had raped a woman whom he mentioned by name. She was present in the audience. After the genocide she had married, but concealed the rape to her husband. The result of the gacaca trial was not only that she relived the rape experience, but that she from then on had to live with the stigma commonly attached by Rwandan society to women who have been raped.

Another problematic aspect of gacaca is its hybrid character in terms of the kind of justice it represents. By design it is neither restorative justice nor retributive justice but a mixture of both (Borland, 2003; Karekezi, et al., 2004). Restorative justice focuses on healing the broader community through a restorative process. Community justice can be thought of as one possible type of restorative justice process, focusing on improving the quality of life of the community. The current system is not a form of restorative community justice, because it is

not focused on the root causes of the conflict (such as the issue of land distribution), nor on building the capacity of the community (Borland, 2003). Gacaca does not follow the classical retributive mode of justice either. This kind of justice is characterized by punishment of the guilty, representation of the community by the state, a secondary role for victims, and an adversarial approach in trials. Paradoxically, according to Karekezi, et al. (2004), the removal of the state from the gacaca process risks compromising the motivation for popular participation. In contrast, some observers worry that gacaca puts too much emphasis on punishing people within the local community and does not sufficiently address the needs of the communities for reconciliation. Besides, 'there is no punishment that could express the proper scale of outrage' (Minow, 1998). Despite its possible shortcomings, however, gacaca may have some potential to promote peace and reconciliation. It may do so through its truth-telling or testimonial component. Borland (2003) quotes a Rwandan official who states; 'the central issue here is truth, more than punishment. It is a cleansing mechanism. We will move the genocide from our subconscious to the conscious, and hopefully, at the end we will allow bygones to be bygones'. The problem with this statement, however, is that state officials only want a particular truth to come out, the truth from the perspective of the Tutsis, the party victimized by the genocide. In other words, what is at issue is whose stories are (allowed to be) told and whose are not? We raised this issue above when reflecting on the functioning of the TRC in South Africa. Also in that case, the critical question was, which stories are going to be part of the public record and which are not? And should there also be space for silence? Furthermore, how much memory can an

individual or a community take without getting overwhelmed again by traumatic stress reactions?

Memory and reconciliation

The Rwandan government has not only chosen against amnesty for perpetrators but also against amnesia of events that have occurred. Memorials at massacre sites and annual commemorations are used to preserve the memory of the genocide and to show the dangerous results of ethnic divisions (Longman & Rutagengwa, 2004).

According to the historical interpretation promoted by the government, it was colonial rule that transformed the Rwandan population into ethnic identities by dividing the people in Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. In the official government narrative, the ethnic divisions imposed on Rwanda by colonial rule are presented as the root cause of the 1994 genocide. Given this interpretation of Rwandan history and the sources of genocide, the current Rwandan government argues that reconciliation can only take place once the country recovers the national unity that existed in pre-colonial Rwanda. Since 1994, the government has introduced a variety of social programs to promote these ideas. Solidarity camps have been established for the 're-education' of politicians, entering university students, returned refugees, and released prisoners, among others, who have been required to attend for one to three months (Longman & Rutagengwa, 2004).

The case of Rwanda indicates that a government can effectively dominate the discourse on memory and reconciliation, thereby politicizing and instrumentalizing it. It remains yet to be seen, however, whether this domination can create a generally accepted collective memory or bring about reconciliation. A related question is how

much memory a society can take without losing itself in too much. As Borland (2003) has observed, societies that have suffered mass violence such as genocide must find ways to confront past atrocities in order to 'strike a balance between burying the gruesome past and burying themselves in the memory of it' (Shriver, 2001, quoted by Borland, 2003). In other words, the challenge is to find a route between too much memory and too much forgetting (Minow, 1998).

Longman and Rutagengwa (2004) conducted case studies in three local communities in Rwanda to get some insight in people's view on issues related to memorials. They found a widespread familiarity with the government's narrative about the genocide as having deep roots in Rwandan history. Study participants, however, were more likely to blame the genocide on immediate causes, such as bad politicians and greed. In the survey conducted, 49.2 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'Whoever is in power rewrites Rwandan history to serve their own interests'.

Study participants were deeply divided over the role that memorials and commemoration play in reconciliation. Many agreed with their function of keeping alive the memory of violence Rwanda had experienced. Others, however, expressed objections. Some felt that memorials were divisive, filling survivors (the term used in Rwanda for the Tutsi victims of the genocide) with anger and Hutu with fear and shame. There was also concern that constantly reminding people of what happened keeps injuries fresh and prevents victims and society at large from moving on. One woman, for example, claimed; 'the commemoration done each year could damage the process [of reconciliation]. Hearts

remain injured with this repeated commemoration'.

We listened in 2004 to a young woman who told us about the gathering at the Amahoro ('peace' in kinyarwanda) Football Stadium in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, on 6 April 2004 for a day of reflection on the horrors and pain of the genocide. This day started the hundred days of commemoration of the hundred days of genocide ten years previously. 'On both sides wounds have been opened carelessly through the program. Not only victims, but also repentant perpetrators were asked to speak to a multitudinous public. Especially the vivid story of one perpetrator was too much for the people'. According to a few other respondents about fifty people had such terrible flashbacks that they had to be carried away on a stretcher. A trauma counsellor added to this observation, 'Commemorations are positive if care and after-care is provided. But that care is not available. The commemorations this year have again released too many feelings without any good guidance in the form of, for instance, counselling. That is bad and risky'. Some respondents expressed their anger that people had been forced to participate in the gathering in the stadium on 6 April; 'it was all orchestrated'. Also those that did not participate could not escape the commemoration. 'Throughout these hundred days the media have thrashed people daily with the pain of the genocide. Every night on television one could see these heads chopped off. Every night that stadium. Every night the reburials', another respondent stated.

A European nun working in Rwanda told us that as a result of the commemorations, a class of fifty secondary school students got 'completely out of control'.

The teachers could not handle this and sent the whole class to the trauma office of the

nearby hospital. 'There is only one nurse trained in trauma care. She cannot do much more than prescribe tranquillizers. That is what happened'. From various sides we heard that whole schools were closed during the commemorations because students were not able to concentrate (Olij, 2005). Also people did not go to work for days on end.

Despite the negative effects, large memorial events in the Amahora stadium continue to be held. In the Rwandan newspaper *The Times* (28-30 January 2005), James Munyaneze describes such an event under the title 'Tears flow in stadium as genocide film is unveiled'. He writes that an estimated 5 000 people from all over Rwanda thronged to Amahoro National Stadium in Kigali to see the movie 'Sometimes in April' which centred on the genocide and was shown for the first time. 'The two-hour long film screened only under moonlight drew waves of tears and screams across the stadium, with some dozens of trauma cases ... Before the screening, organisers deployed several trauma councillors in various positions in the stadium who later struggled to avert grave trauma incidents facing the viewers. There were a few serious traumas during the show, but reports indicated that more traumas hit a number of genocide survivors in their homes after. ... Local people say the film does have short-term negative consequences to the viewers, particularly survivors, but they hope it will in the long-run heal the wounds as survivors feel that, through the movie, they will have been able to share their tragic experiences with the world'. The above quote indicates that trauma counselling gained ground in Rwanda and is recognized by the Government as something to support. We will return to this issue shortly.

More voices from below on reconciliation, loss of culture, and fear

The word for reconciliation in Kinyarwanda is *ubwiyunge*. It comes from the same root used to describe setting a broken bone. This Rwandan concept of bringing together people whose relations have been ruptured was widely shared among the people interviewed for the study by Longman and Rutagengwa (2004); a study introduced in the previous section. In one of the focus groups conducted as part of the study people said that 'reconciliation is the fact that those who did wrong ask forgiveness from those whom they offended and thus the two parties renew their social relations as before'. The vast majority of participants in the study wanted to avoid future ethnic conflict. Many felt that the population, if left to its own devices, would be able to achieve reconciliation and maintain peace. An older man stated; 'we folks in the countryside, we have already achieved our reconciliation. The survivors and the others share everything together and have even started marrying one another again. But at the same time, we see problems at the top ...'. The majority of respondents to the survey that was part of the study (76.7 %) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; 'If Rwandan leaders would leave the population to themselves, there would be no more ethnic problems'.

While nearly all participants in the Longman and Rutagengwa study said that Rwanda needed reconciliation, they disagreed sharply on how it could be achieved. An older man, for instance, did not agree with the government policy when he said: 'Reconciliation is part of Rwandan culture. It is for forgetting the wrong committed or suffered. Without this, Rwandans will arrive at nothing'. Also the attitudes toward *gacaca* were overall quite positive.

The same was found in a few other studies (Gabisirege & Babalola, 2001; Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace, 2002; Longman, et al., 2004). Respondents believed that *gacaca* would make a substantial contribution to reconciliation. People, however, were not united in their response to details and many expressed concerns about *gacaca* as proposed. Some of those concerns have been addressed above.

In a nation wide study conducted by the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP, 2004), some respondents believed as the old man quoted above that today there is harmony in interpersonal relationships. For others, however, it is only a front. In early Rwandan society, it was held that culture was a shield against evil. The question nowadays is if there still is a culture that defines the taboos that protect the fundamental values of society. In pro-colonial Rwanda, it was the ancestors who had the power to protect or curse their descendants still living on earth. For example, society considered it a sin to kill a vulnerable person. The ancestors punished anyone who broke this rule. The rules guiding protection, however, no longer exist. Today, Rwandan society needs to find a balance between the values enshrined in a modern culture based largely on Christianity (constituting behaviour with reference to the next world) and those of traditional Rwandan society (constituting behaviour with reference to the world of the ancestors). Rwandans from all sectors of society told the interviewers in the IRDP study that in the years since independence, successive governments gave little importance to the question of culture. The population suggested during debates on the issue that it might be a good idea to look to Rwandan culture for positive

values that could be used to build a more human, harmonious and peaceful society. One of these values is *umuganda*, as Mugarura (2005) argues. In 'the good old days' the Rwandan community would derive a sense of unity and togetherness from the voluntary community work *umuganda* refers to. This seems not to be the case anymore. While, as Gasamagera, et al., (2005) present it, the government does try to pay attention to traditional values in a number of institutional and policy measures, for the people on the ground these may be too enforced.

Fear and mistrust still pervade Rwandan society preventing the types of togetherness that forged social bonds known from former times. As someone in the Longman and Rutagengwa (2004) study said; 'we can't speak freely, only in whispers. It is this fear that stays in people's heart. They are afraid that if they speak about ethnicity, they may be accused of supporting hostilities'. We regularly encountered this fear in the conversations we had in Rwanda. Some men, for instance, told us that government representatives continually watch them. 'There is again oppression in Rwanda and we are being monitored. We have a pseudo-democracy. The full stadiums were all organized. We have a successful potato crop. It is thwarted however. Do you know how things fit together here?' One of the men took a piece of paper, and explained, without saying a word, the political relations. He wrote the names and percentages of the three ethnic groups down. 'It is not allowed to address this issue. If we do address it, we can be imprisoned tomorrow'. At the end of our meeting the man carefully cut the paper into pieces and told us that he would burn the shreds at home. 'That is how things are here'.

Re-humanization, forgiveness and reconciliation

Since interethnic violence in Rwanda was frequently intimate and relational, repair must (also) function on that level. In that sense, it is the interpersonal destruction that poses the greatest challenge for rebuilding society. Halpern & Weinstein (2004), among others, argue that what needs to take place is a genuine re-humanization of former enemies. Central to this normative ideal is becoming interested in another's distinct subjective perspective and to develop some form of empathy; meaning that one has to learn to see the world from the complex perspective of another person. This perspective of reconciliation does not necessarily entail forgiveness. The latter is often promoted, in particular, by people from diverse religious traditions as a key aspect of reconciliation. We tend to agree with Halpern & Weinstein (2004) that to equate emotional reconciliation with sympathy, and accompanying attitudes like forgiveness, idealizes personal relationships too much with possibly devastating consequences for the health and wellbeing of communities. However, this latter point of view may also be too ethnocentric and underestimate the potential for forgiveness in African societies. Lately, a growing body of literature has emerged addressing this issue. For some authors, reconciliation is not a matter of a confession and subsequent forgiveness once and for all, but rather the building of relationships through everyday life. This perspective is supported by, for instance, Victor Igreja, based on his fieldwork in post-war central Mozambique (personal communication).

In Rwanda, the ideal of forgiveness leading to reconciliation is constructed as a key element in the gacaca process. The idea is that the confession by the perpetrator must lead

to an apology from the person confessing and asking the victim for forgiveness. This then should lead to reconciliation. The empirical research done by PRI, however, reveals that the forgiveness requested is often artificial and without true expression of remorse, jeopardizing reconciliation. According to Hamber (2003), apologies, if they are sincere, can contribute to individual and community healing. If, however, they are 'not linked with the delivery of truth, justice and social change, they run the danger of being seen as a strategy to "buy off" the survivors' and will not lead to reconciliation.

The majority of genocide survivors in Rwanda perceive the confessions, made either in prison or before a gacaca court, as either insincere or incomplete. Consequently, they hesitate to forgive. They are often confronted with very strong social and political pressure to 'reconcile' with released prisoners who ask for it, in spite of everything. Under these circumstances, forgiveness is experienced as an obligation for the survivor and, in the same way that the sincerity of the confession is questionable the sincerity of the forgiveness accorded must also be questioned (de Jonge, 2004).

There is no doubt that the perception, shared by many survivors, of being obliged by the government to forgive while no real justice is being done, hampers reconciliation between the different groups. However, there are always exceptions. Sometimes, the contributions of the inmates and those released, in terms of confessions, are appreciated. A priest gave us the following example of forgiveness in practice; 'we know a man who killed a number of people. He confessed and asked for forgiveness. The woman whose family members were among the people killed, believed that the man had acted involuntarily. If the

pressure of the genocide had not been there, he would never even have thought of killing her kin. The woman concerned now supports the man in going through hard times'. The answer to our question to a community leader about what happens when people who caused each other so much suffering meet during gacaca meetings, explains the underlying reasoning for forgiveness. 'Most of the time the violence did not come from the people themselves. Much happened top down. People were forced'.

The problem however, remains that the verification of confessions, a requirement for seeking the truth, is lacking in the gacaca process; a process that is first and foremost a legal one. It can only contribute to healing and as such, to reconciliation when the sincerity of confessions and their verification are part of the process (de Jonge, 2004).

Out of fear that the mass introduction of gacaca could cause new psychological damage and a dangerous re-ignition of violence instead of reconciliation, programs were started in Rwanda to set the emotional groundwork for gacaca. One hopes that they will contribute to countering the potential negative side effects, which may be related to the introduction of gacaca. One such program is the Rwanda Reconciliation Communications Project developed and implemented by the NGO La Benevolencija. It consists of an ongoing radio drama series that covers trauma healing, reconciliation and violence prevention, and secondly, participatory communications activities through a nationwide network of existing local organisations and community workers. The latter activities are aimed at reinforcing the information conveyed through the radio programmes (www.labenevolencija.org).

The La Benevolencija project is supported

by the National Unity and Reconciliation Committee, set by the government, and builds on the work of Ervin Staub and Laurie Pearlman who conducted training programs on healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in Rwanda for NGO staff working with groups of people in the community. Staub and Pearlman (2003) see healing, forgiveness and reconciliation as deeply interrelated processes. Progress in one realm fosters progress in the other. Forgiving may be difficult but paves the way to reconciliation and furthers healing. The training had psycho-educational and experiential components. The result of both was that Tutsi survivors appeared more open to perpetrators whose actions, however horrible, seemed at least somewhat comprehensible, rather than simply evil.

Trauma counselling and socio-therapy

Data from Rwanda indicate that the openness to reconciliation is related to multiple personal and environmental factors, trauma being one of those factors. In a study by Longman, et al., (2004) it was found that those people who met the post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom criteria were less likely to support the Rwandan domestic responses (particularly gacaca) to the genocide, to believe in community, and to demonstrate interdependence with other ethnic groups.

The mental trauma concept (*guhahamuka*) is gaining ground in Rwanda. It is likely that it has been introduced from outside the country after the genocide and that people in Rwanda, through education and counselling activities by NGOs, have learned to list all perceived mental and emotional effects of the genocide under the category *guhahamuka* and not under the traditionally used category of *agahinda* for mental problems (Bolton, 2001). Most, perhaps all,

the trauma-counselling organisations currently operating in Rwanda have their headquarters in Kigali. They mainly operate within this city, having a minimum of outreach programs. However, spread over the country one can find a number of individuals providing counselling services. Most of the counsellors received their education abroad or were trained by international NGOs within Rwanda.

Following are statements from some of these counsellors, although the names used have been assigned and are not their real names.

Catherine, a member of one of the larger churches in Rwanda described to us how she, like so many others, struggled with the 'why question'. After she had shared her struggles with a few others, she took the initiative to start, shortly after the genocide, a reconciliation initiative. However, 'it did not work at all'. 'The scales fell from my eyes when I participated in a one year trauma course. If traumas are not recognized and tactfully approached, there is nothing to reconcile. I did not get much support from the church. Churches are unwieldy organizations. I therefore took the initiative myself to start trauma care on biblical foundation. I have full groups. There is much more need for help than we can offer. Many people don't know what the problem is with them. There are no words for the overwhelming experiences. And if people do have the words, they do not know the way. What has happened is beyond any imagination. Nobody could stop it'. To regain people's trust one should be very careful, Catherine explained. In her trainings she uses symbols people can understand, such as the symbol of the snail. 'If someone comes too close to the feelers of a snail, the feelers and the snail itself will withdraw in the shell'.

Beatrice, who is a medical doctor, went in 1996 with 30 others to Montréal for a two-year trauma training, also points to the specific cultural context in which she now practices trauma counselling and treatment. 'The culture in Montréal was very different from the one here. There we were taught to ask many questions, while here one does not ask questions. People here are used to it that they have to suppress feelings of anxiety, sadness and anger'. She continued; 'the scale and various dimensions of the trauma problem are grossly underestimated in this country. Many people believe that trauma is like malaria. People come to me for treatment a few times, and that is it. An additional reason for this lack of compliance is the transport costs people cannot afford. There is not much interest in my work from the side of the hospital, nor from the side of the church. People with trauma symptoms believe that they are mad and madness stigmatizes. That is another reason that people don't dare to see me, or stop seeing me'.

Margaretha, another female trauma counsellor trained by the Irish organization Troicar, told us that she tries to break through the silence of people. Her method is 'active listening, without early interruptions'. If her clients - mainly female Tutsi survivors - are seriously traumatised, Margaretha first has a series of individual talks with the people at their home. Having learned from the trauma training herself what a painful confrontation with past and present difficulties can bring in terms of healing effects, Margaretha slowly encourages her clients, all women, to speak about their suffering. When the women are ready, they are invited to join group meetings and to share their suffering with others. The main symptoms the women suffer from are nightmares and flashbacks. Margaretha advises the women to pray or sing after

they wake up from their nightmares. The aim of the group sessions is to motivate women to care for themselves again, to regain dignity and social justice, even if they have lost their whole family. 'Life goes on'.

Getrude, a female trauma counsellor of a social, financial, medical and psychological support project for widows, first told us that she gives support through counselling. After some time however, in response to our questions, she started to speak about the traditional ways people use to rebuild their lives and overcome their suffering. 'People start buying a cow again. Ritual meetings are held. This year there are many reburials because perpetrators increasingly confess what happened and who was buried where. The relatives who survived built a small house on the spot where their dead loved ones are reburied. They also brought food, drinks, flowers and the cow to this place. That helps people to work through their pain'. Getrude accepts what people do, but explains meanwhile that the flashbacks people experience are not caused by visits of the spirits but are a consequence of the genocide horrors. Here we touch on an issue of general importance: to what extent should 'traditional culture' be merely tolerated, left to flourish, officially supported, or actively integrated (in theory and practice) in trauma programs exported from abroad. A society-wide discussion like the one that led to the 'reinvention of tradition' in the form of *gacaca*, has not taken place in Rwanda with regards to the healing of associated mental problems resulting from the violence, at least not (yet) on a wide scale.

How can these various programs provide safety for the Rwandan people so that they can slowly regain some trust and self-respect, start to care for themselves again,

and are able to start to connect to each other again? The first two authors discussed this question with a small group of people actively involved in community activities run by the Church in one of the Dioceses in Rwanda. Our discussion resulted in a request by the Diocese for help in the form of training of volunteers in socio-therapy as practiced by Cora Dekker among traumatized refugees in the Netherlands. Before, the Diocese had approached a number of the trauma counselling organizations working in Rwanda, but received the reply that they could not handle more work. Also, the government had been asked for help. The government however, had already encouraged churches in Rwanda to find their own sources for trauma counselling. The sources that are available for this work cannot meet the apparently countrywide need.

In comparison to trauma counselling, socio-therapy pays less attention to the terrible memories of the past, and focuses primarily on the here-and-now situation. The past however, will not be neglected when people voluntarily bring it up. In these cases, the therapist will assist people in limiting the time spent on speaking about or turning back to the past. The main goal of socio-therapy is increasing safety and trust within a group, which should contribute to social cohesion and finding meaning in life again. The therapy makes use of daily events in participants' lives in order to achieve awareness raising, enhancement and re-socialisation with respect to social and personal functioning. It encourages participation and taking responsibility, using methods such as the implementation of democratic principles in the group, the stimulation of group interaction, the playing of games, and the provision of education. Regarding, for instance, democratization specific attention

is being paid to the way in which group participants used to make decisions in families, groups and communities. Questions discussed with group members are whether traditional ways of decision-making are still working, can be reintroduced, or should be replaced by alternatives that have to be developed. In all these and other activities, the past and present socio-cultural context (including animosities between groups in case the trainees themselves bring this issue in) is very much taken into account.

In meeting the request by the Diocese to contribute to the quest for meaning in life of the province in which the Diocese works through socio-therapy, we feel challenged to adapt the socio-therapy as practiced among refugees in the Netherlands, who fled from situations of danger such as exist(ed) in Rwanda, to the local context of Rwanda as described in this article, and within Rwanda to the specific problems and circumstances in the province in question.

Concluding remarks

In this article we approached reconciliation as part of a set of deeply interrelated issues. To some of these issues we paid more attention than to others. The issues we highlighted were: justice, insecurity, memorialization, culture, trauma counselling and socio-therapy. What did not get the attention it deserves is religion, which plays such a central role in Rwandan life. Also, traditional healing remained in the background. Furthermore, we did not discuss in detail the relation between democracy and economic prosperity to reconciliation. In various ways, however, we pointed to the current government's repressive tactics, which undermine attempts to democratize Rwanda's political culture and thus to reconcile. Economic problems people face is another key factor that weakens support for

opposition to violence and reconciliation. In a study of the perception by two Rwandan rural communities of the main problems caused by the genocide in 1994, poverty and lack of food were identified as the two priority problems. The mental and emotional effects of the genocide ranked number five on the list of problems (Bolton, 2001).

When preparing the requested socio-therapy project, we asked our contact persons how they would prioritize the project they had asked for – a project they previously referred to as a trauma healing project - in relation to social and economic development projects. Their first answer was that one should realize that all interventions take place in a post-conflict situation.

'Development activities can help to reduce mental health problems due to the war. On the other hand, trauma healing can help to strengthen people to contribute to development. It is difficult to see these issues in terms of cause and effect. Trauma healing should be an integral part of many activities in society'. On second thought, the answer was somewhat different. 'The first thing is to help someone to come out. The goal is to remove the curtain hanging over someone's thinking, to get someone out of the confusion of life. Secondly, biological needs (eating, drinking, dressing) need to be addressed. It is on the third level that development comes in, that the need of resource support is to be met'. Later again it was stated that 'it is not certain at what stages development comes in'. To paraphrase our discussion partners, what is needed is a kind of ecological approach (see, for instance, Fletcher & Weinstein, 2002), of which trauma healing is one of the elements.

The Kinyarwanda word for reconciliation, *ubwiyunge*, as we wrote above, refers to bringing people together whose relationships have been ruptured. This definition of

reconciliation corresponds with the one we used as a starting point in our introduction. What has to happen is the lifting of the disorderly blockages on an individual and social level, and a restoration of bodily, mental and social flows. One way to work towards this goal may be helping to overcome psychosocial problems or blockages by trauma counselling and socio-therapy, which are somehow adapted to 'Rwandan culture' and the specific problems people suffer from in the aftermath of the political conflict in Rwanda.

The ecological approach emphasizes that change in one part of the societal system causes reactions throughout. According to this approach, the best results would be achieved if every piecemeal approach towards reconciliation becomes part of an overall and coordinated strategy that is based on an ecological analysis of post-war Rwandan society. Under an ecological framework, the synergistic effects of interventions at multiple points in a system will lead to reconciliation as an intrinsic element of social reconstruction. Anchored to this ecological model, social reconstruction should consist of programs that promote justice, human rights, democracy, and economic prosperity. What we tried to argue in this article is that these programs should not merely be developed top down, but that there should be ample space for 'voices from the people', and that on the ground 'unplanned' reconciliation practices should be recognized.

In post-conflict Rwanda a very specific mosaic of planned and unplanned reconciliation activities can be distinguished. All of them have implications, whether positive or negative, for 'mental health, psychosocial work and counselling'. We pointed out that certain interventions, such as the government-led politicized and instrumentalized

memorials, and the lack of others, such as the lack of security policies, have the potential to undermine the development of a synergy of effective interventions leading towards reconciliation. This brings us to the conclusion that trauma healing and socio-therapy as one of the possible interventions which may contribute to reconciliation in Rwanda, should not only be implemented on an individual and community level, but also on other levels in the society. One of the challenges we are facing in the socio-therapy project we introduced is the study of the impact of such a project on all these various levels. Reconciliation will be one of the issues of the intended impact research. The results of this research and possibly new insights on the issues presented in this article based on learning experiences with the socio-therapy project, we hope to report in the near future.

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