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Reconciliation in Rwanda through the *Gacaca* Courts

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Abstract

Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, Rwandan leaders as well as the international community sought to find a way for both justice and reconciliation. Although various non-governmental organizations, faith-based initiatives, and government projects worked toward goals for healing and unity, no approach reached as far as the transitional justice courts, otherwise known as *gacaca*. Through *gacaca* courts, victims and perpetrators of the genocide gathered to address the happenings of the genocide, which never occurred before the government mandate. This paper seeks to understand the underlying sociological mechanisms used in the process of reconciliation through *gacaca* specifically in light of its historical, ethnic and colonial context. Theories of emotion-management and symbolic interactionism will be used in this critical analysis of the interpersonal relations in post-genocide Rwanda.

Reconciliation in Rwanda through the *Gacaca* Courts

On the evening of April 6, 1994, President Juvénal Habyarimana's private jet was shot down while returning to his home country of Rwanda. This assassination would come to trigger one hundred days of genocide within the small African nation. The world watched in horror as neighbors killed neighbors, culminating in the massacre of more than 800,000 Rwandan citizens. More often than not, the perpetrators knew their victims. They lived near them and worked alongside them. Even their children played together. Today, nearly twenty years after the conflict, victims, perpetrators and their families seek peace and reconciliation within their communities. This proves to be the most difficult aspiration of all. How does one let go of the past in favor of the future, especially in the context of genocide?

Rwanda seeks to address the question of reconciliation, both on a personal and national level, through a transitional justice system called *gacaca*. *Gacaca* attempts to tackle the challenge of justice and healing for families involved in the genocide through public truth telling as well as allocating prison sentences for those found guilty of genocide. Emotions prove to be an important part of the process of reconciliation and justice through the *gacaca* courts, as it requires both victims and perpetrators to acknowledge the wrongs and display emotions involved in order to move forward. Although obstacles to reconciliation exist, such as stigma, communication, or the desire for vengeance, emotion proves to be the most difficult to manage.

Emotions vary depending on the situation and the individual; no step-by-step program exists to change the emotions of a person as there may be in issues of communication, for example. This paper seeks to critically analyze sociological theories of emotional management on a personal and political level to help one to understand the progress of reconciliation in Rwanda through the transitional justice courts, called *gacaca*.

Introduction

Before seeking to understand the current emotional state of Rwandan citizens and the progress of reconciliation between the genocide victims and perpetrators, it is first important to understand the history of the rift between the ethnic categories of mainly the Hutu and Tutsi.

A Brief History of Rwanda

Ethnic tensions did not always exist to the extreme extent of genocidal ideology in Rwanda as it did in 1994. But rather, ethnicity as seen today has been taught through the telling of history. According to Alison De Forges—a respected historian specializing in Rwanda—elitism did exist, but it did not manifest itself as racism. This early form of elitism certainly did not equate to the racism that brought the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the twentieth century (Des Forges 1995). Rwanda was colonized first by Germans in 1897; then the Belgians obtained

control of the region in 1919 (Westberg 2011). Before the arrival of Germans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the elite leaders, a diverse ethnic group now identified as Tutsi, enjoyed a sense of superiority over the region as a result of their vast knowledge and control of cattle. Many looked down on those people unskilled in the ways of ownership or handling of the cattle, those referred to as Hutu. The foragers of the region were called the Twa (Des Forges 1995). In other words, superiority in the hierarchal system revolved around status and wealth, not by race or ethnicity. This select group of Africans' power was largely connected to the aristocrats' sense of what they owned and what kind of power these societal possessions gave them rather than racial characteristics. In fact, entering into this privileged group was flexible; social mobility existed because Rwanda's social system was hierarchical rather than racial (Schillington 2005). From the Hutu perspective the Tutsi sense of superiority to Hutu populations seemed more like elitism than racism, although both groups' attitudes toward the Twa, or the hunters and gatherers of the region, can be considered racist, as they refused to live near or intermarry with the population (Des Forges 1995, Schillington 2005). This kind of denial of community denotes racism because of the sense of "otherness" and dehumanization it creates for the Twa.

When the European colonizers came, specifically the Germans then Belgians, they imposed a new kind of social relations that revolved around race rather than wealth or status. These changes would come to change relations within Rwanda forever. According to Des

Forges, colonizers formulated the “hamitic hypothesis,” an ideology that allowed for “white Africans” to bring civilization from the northeast to the rest of the continent. Colonialists found the Tutsi of Rwanda the perfect Hamites, as they were “tall, elegant, and narrow featured. Tutsi even wore togas, surely proof of a remote connection with Roman colonies of North Africa”(Des Forges 1995:45). Simply put, colonial powers equated the elite of the region to be the equivalent of dark-skinned Europeans. The colonizers achieved far more than simply labeling physical characteristics, but even went so far as to ascribe stereotypical intellectual and moral qualities to the people of each category (Des Forges 1995). As a result, Tutsi were seen as more intelligent and born to govern while Hutu were seen as brainless and submissive. As colonizers gained more control over the region, they were able to put these ideas into practice by limiting job opportunities in administration to Tutsi. This classification preferential treatment was kept in check through a system of population registration, which identified each person as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. After two generations of colonial rule, ethnic identities became engrained into social life and defined the ways in which Rwandans interacted with one another. The Tutsi used European racism imposed upon them through colonialism to their advantage; the system of discrimination and racism set by the colonial powers only served to exaggerate their control over the Hutu. In other words, they united with the Europeans to create the framework needed to

justify their exploitation of privilege. Thus was the shift from elitism to racism, an ideology fostered by colonial powers (Des Forges 1995).

Eventually Rwandans desired independence from Belgium, and the fight for sovereignty was ethnically based from the beginning. Instead of finding Hutus and Tutsis working together for freedom, the Tutsis fought to secure their privileged position of control (Schillington 2005). Hutus, making up the majority of the population, argued that they deserved control of the revolution because they represented greater part of Rwandan people. As ethnic tensions increased over the debate, Belgian colonizers replaced Tutsi leaders in government with Hutus with the hope of stifling any uprising or overthrow of government that may take place (Schillington 2005). Once in a place of power, the Hutu leaders began to persecute Tutsi regardless of status. A series of ethnic cleansings took place between the years 1959 and 1960. Hundreds of Tutsi citizens were killed and thousands were driven to find refuge in surrounding countries (Westberg 2011). These refugees would come to launch attacks on the government until after the genocide. (Schillington 2005:399)

Although there were multiple episodes of ethnic cleansing between Rwanda's independence in 1962 and the genocide in the spring of 1994, one of the notable changes in the ethnic climate in Rwanda was when the Tutsi-based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by Paul Kagame, initiated an attack on Rwanda. President Habyarimana maintained ethnic divisions

through identity cards and other discriminative practices to keep domination over the Tutsi, but found his nation steeped in escalating violence. At this time the Hutu militia called *Interahamwe*, meaning “those who stand together,” were trained to keep the RPF from gaining control of Rwanda (Shillington 2005). The United Nations stepped in to mediate the hostility and the president met for peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania. Unfortunately these talks were not genuine, as the Hutu government began distributing weapons in secret throughout the nation. When the President’s plane was shot down on April 6, 1994, the bloodshed began, obviously a planned intent as important political figures and UN peacekeepers were strategically eliminated (Schillington 2005). *Interahamwe*, the army, and state personnel directed the killings and convinced community members to “cleanse the country of the Tutsi threat and maintain Hutu power,” murdering somewhere between 800,000 and 1,000,000 innocent lives (Westberg 2011). The identification card carried by each Rwandan citizen made the process of extermination all too easy, as killers knew exactly where to find their victims. The identification card system enacted by President Habyarimana provided a list of those to be sought out and killed rather than the killers having to guess at an individual’s ethnicity. The genocide finally reached an end after one hundred days of genocide through RPF occupation of Kigali, Rwanda in July 1994 (Schillington 2005).

Crowding of Prisons

In the one hundred days that passed between April 6 and July 4 of 1994, somewhere between 800,000 and 1,000,000 Rwandan lives were lost in the genocide, approximately twenty percent of the population (Schillington 2005). The majority of the perpetrators were simple, ordinary citizens, not soldiers. As soon as the RPF took control of the government suspects were gathered and imprisoned (Westberg 2011). Retributive practices did not seem to work well, as the infrastructure in Rwanda did not allow for fair living conditions or access to legal representation, issues that will be addressed farther along in this analysis. Furthermore, the overcrowding of Rwandan prisons quickly provided an obstacle to justice. Many were imprisoned without trial and forced to live in unsanitary and cramped living conditions. According to Ari Kohen, a political philosopher, the government continued to make arrests and put suspected perpetrators in prison despite the fact that Rwandan courts were inoperable following the genocide and the massive numbers of *génocidaires*, otherwise known as perpetrators of the genocide, would overflow the capacity of the prison (Kohen et al, 2011: 86). By 1999, “courts had only tried 5,000 of 120,000 suspects. At this rate, it would take over a century to try all the cases” (Westberg 2011:1). By May 28, 1995, the Rwandan government found that it did not have room for all the prisoners, and began collecting those considered serious offenders (Westberg 2011). There were an estimated 125,000 people imprisoned by the

year 1997, and, by 1999, it became apparent that a different mode of justice needed to be put into action (Westberg 2011; Kohen et al 2011). After such an immense loss, it would be inexcusable and unjust to carry out trials in such an ineffective way.

Not only were Rwandans not granted fair trial, but also prison conditions were not ideal. Phillip Gourevitch, author of *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we be killed with our families*, reported that at one prison more than six thousand men were placed in a space built for seven hundred and fifty. Due to cramped conditions, the prisoner's feet, ankles, and on occasion even legs would swell, eventually leading to rot and infection (Gourevitch 1998, as cited by Kohen 2011:86). Hundreds of prisoners began to require amputations as a result of poor living conditions (Kohen, Gourevitch, 2011). It was not long before the government faced the cries of protest from human rights advocates. Its response was to release mass numbers of *génocidaires* who were not found to be the masterminds of the genocide. Kohen notes that "since 2003, between fifty and sixty thousand inmates have been set free . . . 'to ease overcrowding in prisons and to foster reconciliation'" (Kohen,2011: 86). This would prove to be a challenge to peace in communities, as many did not welcome the reintegration of these supposed criminals into society.

The Judicial Systems

There are three types of efforts to deal with the perpetrators of the genocide in Rwanda, each of which receives international support in kind. The first is the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, or the ICTR. It is fully funded by the international community, but is not warmly accepted by the Rwandan government. The inefficiency of the tribunal led to its dislike, as the ICTR has spent 540 million USD while only serving eight convictions and one acquittal over the span of seven years (Uvin 2003). The second, the domestic justice system, has also been restructured and is partially effective in handling genocidal offences within Rwanda, as they handled approximately 1,000 cases a year. At this rate, it would take over a century to finish all the cases (Uvin 2003). The last approach is *gacaca*, as it mixes traditional, Rwandan restorative practices to justice with western-inspired approaches. Through *gacaca* it has become possible to address smaller-scale crimes of the genocide of 1994 sooner by involving the judgment of the community (Uvin 2003). Although each justice approach plays a role in finding justice in Rwanda, no justice system has more opportunity for reconciliation than the *gacaca* courts because it involves truth-telling, communication between genocide perpetrators and victims, and a verbal apology, among other aspects of forgiveness (Uvin 2003).

Gacaca Courts

Little is known about the practice of *gacaca* before 1994. Findings have suggested that traditional forms of *gacaca* existed prior to and during colonial times to solve small-scale conflicts between community members on the local level, such as marital relations, property disputes or inheritance (Kohen et al 2011). In traditional *gacaca*, *inyangamugayo*, directly translated to mean “those who detest disgrace,” came together to mediate parties involved with the grievance brought before them. *Inyagamugayo* were generally respected elders within the community (Human Rights Watch 2011:17). Those who gathered for the trial were “community elders, the disputing parties, their relatives, and immediate neighbors” (Human Rights Watch 2011:17). Basically, anyone who had any emotional tie or investment in the gathering was expected to be present. *Gacaca* also emphasized the importance of living in peace and harmony, as the “punishment of the perpetrator and compensation to the victim being of lesser importance [in the process]. Punishment was not individualized, meaning that family and clan members of the accused were also responsible” (Human Rights Watch 2011:17). In this way, the health of the community’s relationships was named as the priority.

Furthermore, the conclusion of *gacaca*, reconciliation, was the most important part. In the words of Rusesabagina, a man whose efforts to save those persecuted during the genocide were made famous by the film *Hotel Rwanda*, the restoration of the offender to the community was the goal of *gacaca*:

The two aggrieved men were required to share a gourd of banana beer as a sign of renewed friendship. . . whether you were the victim or the aggressor you had to strip yourself of pride and recognize the basic humanity of the fellow with whom you were now sharing a banana beer. . . Everyone who showed up to hear the case was invited to sip the banana beer too, as a symbol of the accused man's reconciliation with the entire people (Rusesabagina 2006, as cited in Kohen et al 2011:92).

Instead of retribution, healing and unity was found through a heartfelt apology. In order to engage in this kind of reconciliation, emotional management must be put into action, which will be addressed in the next section.

Today, *gacaca* has been modified to both bring closure to those afflicted by the genocide and to bring about justice in a more efficient way. Before sending *génocidaires* to *gacaca*, they were first put into categories. Category 1 held those truly in charge of orchestrating the genocide, such as the leaders, organizers, well-known killers or rapists. According to the Human Rights Watch, “category 2 included persons who committed homicide; category 3 included those who killed or inflicted bodily harm without the intention to kill; and category 4 included those who stole or damaged property” (Human Rights Watch 2011:19). The law required capital punishment for those in category 1 (Human Rights Watch 2011), and oftentimes there were even public executions (Westberg 2011). *Gacaca* handled all cases that were not of category 1; those cases were under the control of the conventional court or ICTR. According to the Human Rights Watch report in 2011, the *gacaca* were to operate at two local levels, the cell and the sector, in

each jurisdiction. According to the Human Rights Watch, “Cell level courts handled the information-gathering phase and classified suspects . . . all other genocide-related trials . . . occurred at the sector level”(Human Rights Watch 2011:19-20).

The difficulty with the *gacaca* model is that victims must put much of their emotions on the line—both mentally and spiritually, so to speak. The truth and pain of what occurred is laid bare for all to hear; *gacaca* requires vulnerability. The killers, on the other hand, provide physical restitution or words of apologies (Uvin 2003). The cost of these two actions emotionally is very different, as it appears that the victims must do emotion work in a very different way. There does not appear to be much of a reward for those that do choose to forgive, and there is always the chance that the perpetrator is not genuine in his attempt to reconcile.

Emotion-Management

Emotions play a major role in how we act in professional situations, relaxed moments with friends, or moments of anger or grief in the unexpected conflicts life brings. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s theory on emotion-management seeks to understand the “efforts to alter the intensity or type of feelings one is experiencing,” otherwise known as “emotion work” (Appelrouth 2011:237). Hochschild argues that people consciously work to induce or restrain particular emotions depending on what has been determined as socially acceptable, otherwise

known as “feeling rules”. One molds initial emotions through interacting with others in order to best fit the task presented to them. (Appelrouth 2011). For example, one may talk oneself into excitement or attempt to be happy for an upcoming party if one does not feel especially keen on going.

Emotion work applies to the case of Rwanda as well. Just as going to a party requires emotion work of an individual that may not feel “in the mood” for, so does engaging in the *gacaca* courts. Although it requires more energy to take part in the *gacaca* proceedings, both victims and perpetrators engage in a kind of emotion work when they encounter one another. A perpetrator may pretend to be more apologetic than he or she actually is in order to achieve their goal, or a victim may behave outwardly in such a way that indicates boldness when he or she actually feels quite afraid. Rwandans employ emotion work when they engage in reconciliation. Through emotion work, victims and perpetrators alike must manage to align their feelings and emotions with the values of their communities as well as deal with the physical and emotional harm that has been done to them; which is no small feat.

Theory and Political Thought on Reconciliation

Although the lessening of genocide prisoners has improved prison populations, it is less clear how well the Rwandan government facilitates reconciliation initiatives. Reconciliation

remains the aspiration of the Rwandan government yet not surprisingly, the mass discharge of many *génocidaires* has been the source of unrest in many Rwandan communities (Kohen et al 2011:86). Kohen and his colleagues argue that much more can be done to heal the rift between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. Kohen sees reconciliation as “more than the absence of violence between former agonists . . . reconciliation [is] a process that leads to developing a normative interaction between ethnic and political opponents based on mutual acceptance as distinct but equal co-member of the same, larger community” (Kohen et al 2011: 87). Kohen goes even further to point out two ways of achieving reconciliation, namely through the personal and the political realm. Personal reconciliation refers to the connection between victim and offender, while political reconciliation focuses on rebuilding “broken trust between hostile groups in the aftermath of international or intrastate conflict” (Kohen et al 2011: 88). But reconciliation is more complex than stated previously; “the political” exists because of the issues in which individuals find value and common understanding. Kohen expands thoughts on personal and political reconciliation by stating:

The important distinction between political and personal realms applies similarly to the concept of reconciliation. Personal reconciliation, simply stated, involves a common understanding among individuals, a particular victim, or co-victim, and a particular offender. It is limited to the boundaries of the private sphere and is not inherently related to, nor does it affect, others on a broad public level. Considering reconciliation at the political level is perhaps a bit more difficult to isolate, however. Most broadly, political reconciliation is a moral consensus, as it involves a common understanding and

recognition of an event that took place between two conflicting sides. It is a prevalent and accepted 'disposition,' finding commonality in a world that is 'constituted by diverse and possibly incommensurable perspectives.' (Kohen et al 2011:88).

For Rwandans, much healing must occur in the personal realm, but these personal resolutions also relate to broader political and public spheres. Rwandans must be able to band together and come to a common understanding of what happened in 1994 through unification of memory as well as truth.

Reconciliation involves more than just working and living together, but requires a people to recognize a unique identity in the other person. According to Kohen, political forgiveness is:

not founded on the development of reason, but on the recognition of coexistence within a particular space and time. Importantly, it does not ignore the judgment of the wrongness of an act; instead, it disregards the judgment that an action obligates one to consider the other as an enemy in the present" (Kohen et al 2005:89).

At the moment, political reconciliation may not be occurring because the relationship between the victim and the offender is not seen as an important problem. Today, an incongruence of memory and the lack of truth telling provide an obstacle for genuine political reconciliation.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Herbert Blumer's sociological theory on the motivations for human action also lends some insight into how reconciliation and forgiveness may be possible in a society that lived unimaginable suffering. Blumer seeks to bring attention to the ways in which disciplines of thought exclude the importance of meaning in social life. Many fields seek to explain human behavior through cognition, conscious or unconscious motives, institutional organizations or social roles. But, symbolic interactionism asserts that human behavior is in part determined by the meaning individuals project onto the world and the things that inhabit the individual's environment—from physical objects, loved ones, or even ideals. Because it is difficult to measure or describe something as abstract as meaning, it oftentimes gets “swallowed up” by being “merged into the initiating or causative factors” (Blumer 1963, cited in Appelrouth 2011:184). In other words, meaning is recognized as a part of human activity, but it is rarely seen as a motivating factor in and of itself. In Blumer's own words, “to ignore the meaning in favor of factors alleged to produce the behavior is seen as a grievous neglect of the role of meaning in the formation of behavior” (Blumer 1963 cited in Appelrouth 2011:184). The broader picture of human behavior will be missed if meaning is not taken into account for social action.

Perhaps the best depiction of symbolic interactionism at work can be found in the testimonies of genocide survivors who encounter *génocidaires* unexpectedly in public. Joseph Sebarenzi, author of *God Sleeps in Rwanda*, recounts a moment where he runs into a man he

knew personally and was well recognized for crimes committed during the genocide. Instead of reacting with fury, Sebarenzi turned to the perpetrator with compassion. Sebarenzi states:

“As we talked, all the anger and bitterness I had felt for the last year sat idle as another emotion slowly rose to the surface: compassion. . . . I couldn’t explain it, but there it was all the same. Despite what he had done, I felt sorry for him” (Sebarenzi 2009:84).

After talking to this man for a bit, Sebarenzi gave him some money for food and walked away.

Reflecting on the oddity of the moment, Sebarenzi states: “It wasn’t a heroic gesture. I wasn’t trying to prove a point or demonstrate a holier-than-thou piety. In truth, I didn’t really think about it at all. I saw another human being in need and offered help—nothing more, nothing less” (Sebarenzi 2009:84). Because Sebarenzi was able to see the man who committed the worst kind of betrayal to his neighbors as first and foremost a human being. The meaning Sebarenzi attributed to him in that moment, the perpetrator’s humanity, allowed Sebarenzi to act in a compassionate way rather than a vengeful way. The encounter could have played out much differently were Seberenzi to find himself defining the man in a different way.

Perhaps what is most difficult about the importance of meaning is the fact that it is always being put into action and is therefore always changing. Meaning arises out of social interaction, which allows it to be modified based on the influences of people and situations.

Human beings are not simply molded based on their environment; but change occurs because of the interpretation the individual places on the situation (Blumer 1963 cited in Appelrouth 2011:183). Human beings are active in creating the world they live in; they should not and cannot be reduced to an organism that simply responds to various stimuli. In the words of Blumer:

Instead of being merely an organism that responds to the play of factors in or through it, the human being is seen as an organism that has to deal with what it notes. It meets what it so notes by engaging in a process of self-indication in which it makes an object of what it notes, gives it a meaning, and uses the meaning as the basis for directing its action. Its behavior with regard to what it notes is not a response called forth by the presentation of what it notes but instead is an action that arises out of the interpretation made through the process of self-indication. (Blumer 1963, cited in Appelrouth 2011:184)

In this way, the symbolic interactionism perspective demands much more responsibility from human beings than perhaps other theories on social action. For example, think again of Sebarenzi's encounter with a genocide perpetrator. Sebarenzi's actions changed because of the way in which he interpreted and placed meaning on the situation. Once he saw the physical toll the suffering took upon this man's body, he could not find it within himself to treat the man with contempt (Sebarenzi 2009). Through an actual interaction with a *génocidaires*, he was able to discover a compassionate response rather than the hateful confrontation he had always imagined.

The kind of freedom in human action through symbolic interactionism comes with great responsibility and open possibilities. With a deeper understanding of the power and fluidity of meaning, it becomes possible to achieve the improbable. In order to conceive of this potential, consider Blumers's reflection on the way in which we interact and interpret the world:

From the standpoint of symbolic interactionism, social organization is a framework inside of which acting units develop their actions. Structural features, such as 'culture,' 'social systems,' 'social stratification,' or 'social roles,' set conditions for their action but do not determine their action. People—that is, acting units—do not act toward culture, social structure or the like; they act toward situations. Social organization enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations. (Blumer 1963, cited in Appelrouth 2011:184)

Social structures do not determine social action, but individuals and groups that act upon situations. Culture may provide structure, but society alone does not determine behavior.

Meaning determines what an individual is able to extract and interpret from their personal world, which produces action. Once freed from the idea that certain situations determine particular actions in every instance instead of perceiving each circumstance as an opportunity for a new way to behave and put symbolic meaning into practice, something as seemingly impossible as forgiveness and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda may be attainable.

Although the symbolic interaction approach works well in the theoretical realm, it does not look neat when the reality of emotions gets thrown into ordinary human action. In a sense, one has to step back from the atrocities of genocide and ask: what is the source of social tension, why is there a need for justice and retribution? What drives an individual, or a nation, to the point of desiring reprisal rather than forgiveness? According to sociologist Jack Barbalet, violations of individual and collective human rights will elicit a rational, emotional response that translates into action in order to reintegrate harmony into social life. In Barbalet's perspective, one cannot separate social action from human emotion, as "emotion is central to and not deviant in the everyday operations of social processes" (Bartlett, 2001:3). Emotions exist to facilitate social interactions; they do not serve as a byproduct of humanity. Because emotions play such an important role in social action, they must not be forgotten in the process of reconciliation.

Sympathy may be one of the first emotions to come to mind when considering potential curative emotions in society, and in fact it does have some use in holding communities together. Simply put, sympathy allows a person to see their own misery in the witness of others. In the words of German philosopher and social theorist Max Scheler, sympathy "provides a sense of the reality of others equal to our own reality" (Barbalet, 2001:129). This can be applied on an individual level, but also on collective level. If this is found to be true cross-culturally, sympathy could be used as a tool to re-build the emotional and relational health of Rwandan citizens.

Instead of generalizing hate to either all Hutus or all Tutsis, it may be possible for Rwandan citizens to see one another as just Rwandans if the right emotions are managed well.

Although this is a pleasant thought, it is far too simple. Emotional management exists because individuals and social action do not live within a vacuum. Barbalet argues that although sympathy may be useful, it is not in and of itself sufficient to mend relationships broken by a violation of rights. Sympathy is concerned with ensuring the rights of others, not oneself—it is the emotion of the observer, not the victim. This is no truer than in the context of Rwanda, where each individual suffered differing degrees of loss in multiple capacities. Some have lost property, loved ones, limbs—the list could continue on. Even the perpetrators of the genocide are victims of suffering, as they may experience shame in their families and communities or undergo separation from loved ones. Oftentimes these violations of rights occur as a result of a lack of sympathy and understanding of the person or group upon which he or she inflict damage (Barbalet 2001:129). Sympathy is the “ethic of the spectator rather than of the person as such” (Barbalet 2001:129). In other words, sympathy alone does not move an individual to sacrifice his or her own desires or needs for the sake of others.

If sympathy alone cannot reconcile individuals caught in a violation of rights, what other emotions serve to inspire social action? And, furthermore, how can the two parties involved be reconciled? Oftentimes when the abuses of human rights occur, different emotions play into

social action. Two emotions Barbalet notes as having a significant role in management of public wrongs are namely vengefulness and resentment. Because emotions are found in the context of social relationships, and humans need social existence in order to thrive, emotions are crucial in facilitating social existence. For these reasons, the boundaries of collective values and basic human rights cannot be broken, or there are severe consequences in intrapersonal relationships between friends, neighbors, or perceived ethnicity groups.

If a violation of basic human needs occurs, certain emotional patterns will be set into motion, whereas the “injured actor [works to restore] their social standing” (Barbalet 2001:148). This is where vengeance and resentment come to play, as these supposed “negative” emotions emerge as the individual perceives a social violation or the denial of satisfaction of a need (Barbalet 2001:126). Vengeance can be defined as “the active apprehension of both injury and a desire for retribution” (Barbalet 2001:134). It is an emotion of action directed at setting things right, or asserting one’s dignity (Barbalet 2001:135). Resentment, on the other hand, is the passionate sentiment that pairs with vengeance that brings the individual to action (Barbalet 2001:135). The problem with resentment, according to philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, is that it “deaden[s] pain by means of affects” rather than “prevent any further injury” (Barbalet 2001:134).

Vengefulness can also be seen as an emotion of power relations, while the object of resentment is social order (Barbalet 2001). In Barbalet's view:

The injury inflicted by power in the first stage of the formation of vengefulness may take a number of possible forms. Personal physical injury, financial disadvantage or being cheated, political out-maneuvering, social neglect, and so on, are all consequences of an exercise of power in which the subject may lose an aspect of what they regard, in the context of their social interactions, as a self-defining attribute. The second stage of the formation of vengefulness is the subject's emotional disposition to restore their previous position substantively and also in the structure of power relationship. This is not only to undo the injury itself but to inflict an analogous injury or punishment on those who wielded power against them. (Barbalet 2001:136)

Vengeance and resentment, from this point of view, evens the playing field, but it does not make meaningful reparations. These emotional motivations seek to restore life as it used to be, or serve a way to express moral anger that are founded in cultural definitions and innate human rights. But, in the case of Rwanda and many other post-conflict societies, resentment and vengeance do not serve a beneficial purpose. Instead of power controlled by either the Hutu or Tutsi, both must share the power. For these reasons, resentment and vengeance cannot be enough to achieve reconciliation. Resentment and vengeance do not allow Rwandan victims and perpetrators to live well together. Instead of creating a brighter future, resentment and vengeance serve only to aggravate the deeply rooted contempt they have for one another.

Rwanda's genocide paired with a complex history filled with power-conflicts requires the nation to go beyond retribution. It must restore the unity of the community and redefine power

relations. Power does not belong to Hutu or Tutsi, but to the citizens of Rwanda regardless of ethnicity. In order to build this, resentment and revenge must not be the mode taken for healing and reconciliation. If Rwanda wants a better future without hateful ethnic discrimination, the satisfaction of a need through vengeance is not adequate in making meaningful social changes, just like sympathy. The goal must be toward community; and, in order to build community, trust must form between its members. The realization of community building will be discussed in the following sections.

The Symbolic Politics Trap

One aspect of community building that must be addressed relates to the use of meaningful symbols in society. An obstacle to achieving true reconciliation and conflict resolution, according to peace researcher Stuart Kaufman, cannot be found simply in the interests of the competing groups but in the symbolic politics that are heavily burdened with emotions (Kaufman 2006:202). Effective mediation of ethnic conflicts, therefore, requires an appraisal of how the emotional and symbolic processes influence the ways in which areas of conflict are perceived and how they play out politically (Kaufman 2006:202). Before seeking to understand what Kaufman means by “symbolic politics,” one must first define ethnic identity. In Kaufman’s political perspective, ethnic identities are “socially constructed by intellectuals and other elites,

who develop a theory identifying the group, its membership, and what it means to be a member” (Kaufman 2006:204). This development and differentiation of self through ethnicity can grow into something Kaufman and other social theorist call the “myth-symbol complex,” which can be defined as “a combination of myths, memories, values and symbols that define the identity” (Kaufman, 2006:204). In this way, symbolism serves as the core of ethnic identity.

If this type of negative ethnic identity serves as the foundation of social organization, leaders may be able to manipulate emotions in spite of obvious economic or social reprisal (Kaufman, 2006:204). When an opportunity arises, a national leader, or rising leader, may play on group symbols to evoke feelings of hatred, resentment, or fear (Kaufman 2006:205). These heightened fears intensify in-group hostility toward the out-group, which in turn leads to the support of extreme policies (Kaufman 2006:205). For these policies, from this false line of thought, are meant to protect the people. These leaders that exploit these existing mythical symbols to rally the support of people oftentimes have trouble if they wish to reverse these policies (Kaufman 2006:205). This is what Kaufman calls the “symbolic politics trap,” as peace becomes nearly impossible if a politician’s identity is steeped in symbols. To say yes to peace and reconciliation could equate to a political death (Kaufman 2006:205). It is the interaction of symbols and myths that serve as an obstacle to reconciliation, and these must be eliminated before any progress in ethnic conflict can be made.

The alteration of these myths and symbols do not come easily, but must be changed through a few steps. Kaufman suggests that an effective peacemaking strategy may include four phases: setting the stage for negotiation, de-escalation of groups involved in the conflict, deal-making and political mobilization, and then implementation. The first phase, setting the stage for peace, requires both parties to stand on equal ground; neither should be able to benefit from continuing violence or war. This is where the breakdown of mythic beliefs may begin to breakdown. The aim of this phase could “replace mythic beliefs about the other side with better information and replace their hostility and fear with enough understanding to make a compromise peace look attractive and attainable” (Kaufman 2006:208). This could even begin to build trust between the warring groups in this case the Hutus and Tutsis. The following phases include more than just interaction and talk, but involve a change in the emotional atmosphere regarding ethnicity. In this phase, media may work to “humanize the enemy” to reduce bias in the population. This is also a good time for “leadership acknowledgement of the other side’s suffering and of their own side’s partial responsibility” (Kaufman 2006:209). Yet this of course proves to be difficult for many leaders who are stuck in the symbolic politics trap, for they oftentimes have to retract their ethnic statement and symbols in order to build peace.

Obviously a “one-size-fits-all” approach does not work effectively for all ethnic conflicts, as supporting evidence for reconciliation initiatives are not strong. But, it may provide a firm

starting point for many post-conflict societies. Kaufman's research implies that support and promotion of reconciliation may erode the "support base on which spoiler groups depend," which can keep the conflicting groups, such as the Hutu and Tutsi, out of continuing violence (Kaufman 2006:213). Spoiler groups utilize negative symbols, such as terms like "cockroaches," in order to build a stronger in-group and out-group mentality. The goal of reconciliation must be to "create an atmosphere in which a settlement can be reached and be stable when implemented," which is all that a nation can do to promote peace (Kaufman 2006:215). Supporting diverse programs of mutually reinforcing reconciliation initiatives, such as problem-solving workshops, theatre programs, or discrimination training for journalists, is just one way Kaufman suggests a nation like Rwanda can seek peace.

Emotion Work and Reconciliation

Although each of these sociological theories work well in the abstract, it does not play out as cleanly in reality, especially when emotions are involved in behavior. Not only do simple, everyday Rwandans have to set aside their own personal emotions everyday in order to survive, but they also had to find ways to deal with their emotions within their own communities. According to research conducted by the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, forging unity was at the core of the Rwandan government's mission of reconstruction rather than a simple, western

approach to justice. This was realized through the *gacaca* courts, which was explained previously. The article states, “The idea that a perpetrator’s confession could lead to forgiveness and reconciliation was incorporated as a key element into the Gacaca process” (Schall et al, 2012:450). The implementation of reconciliation is easier said than done.

The obstacles to reconciliation cannot be managed without a little emotion work.

According to the same article, Schall asserts that:

Reconciliation means that survivors and perpetrators accept each other and see the possibility of a constructive relationship . . . research suggests that a number of factors have a significant impact on the readiness to reconcile, including the perception of justice and truth, forgiveness and trust, empathy, and a lack of mental health problems (Schall, et al 2012:450).

In order to see the possibility of a constructive relationship, emotion work must be put into action. Identifying and seeking meaning in people, institutions and actions can be molded toward reconciliation rather than continued hate. This is the difficulty and the curse of emotion work, as it seems unnatural to choose the actions that affirm humanity, such as Sebarenzi’s encounter with the genocide perpetrator. What may be beneficial to an individual personally may not benefit the community, and vice versa.

The Relationship between Victim and Offender in Reconciliation

At best, the current emotional state of estrangement within Rwanda prevents authentic reconciliation from occurring. There is no doubt a presence of fear and bitterness within many communities that prevents any kind of relationship forming between survivors and the killers. Again, one of the difficulties of reconciliation and source of alienation between populations lies in the rift between emotional experiences of the victim and the perpetrator. Jean Hatzfeld, an expert on the Rwandan genocide, comments on how trauma affects survivors and killers differently through his work *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*. His interviews with *génocidaires* reveals that the emotion work they engage in differs from a survivor's coping methods. Hatzfeld does this by reflecting on the way in which victims and *génocidaires* approach forgiveness:

The killer has no idea of the ordeal that begins for the victims once they have agreed to forgive, for in so doing they not only reopen old wounds but also lose the possibility of gaining relief through revenge. The killer does not understand that in seeking forgiveness he is demanding that the victim make an extraordinary effort, and he remains oblivious to the survivor's dilemma, anguish and courageous altruism. The killer does not realize that when he asks for forgiveness as though it were a simple formality, his attitude increases the victim's pain by ignoring it (Hatzfeld 2005:199).

One can see how difficult reconciliation can be from an emotional perspective. There is much cost in choosing to forgive another, which is evident through Hatzfeld's reflection.

The situation becomes even more difficult when the appeal for forgiveness is not genuine. Hatzfeld again comments on the obstacle this presents for reconciliation, saying:

“*génocidaires* do not ask for forgiveness. They offer their apologies in more or less loud voices to survivors who are free to hear, accept, or refuse them—rather like the way one says ‘sorry’ to somebody one has just jostled on a sidewalk” (Hatzfeld 2005:199-200). This kind of language and approach to forgiveness cannot be healing for those wounded by the genocide. Without self-examination, reconciliation cannot be made possible.

One of the first steps toward unity and self-examination is an understanding of self in contrast and relation to others. Human beings tend to function in an “us” versus “them” society; even the small things that set people apart, such as music taste or clothing, can serve as a means of segregation. One of the ways to overcome these differences is by crosscutting relations. Crosscutting relations, a term coined by psychologist Morton Deutsch, means that populations of these differing behaviors or cultural traditions can overcome this human tendency of differentiation by living, working, and playing together; it is not enough to simply live in proximity to one another. In order to reduce negative stereotypes, positive contact must be cultivated (Staub 2008:274). According to Ervin Staub, “Real interaction in a framework of equality is essential for people to come to know and accept each other” (Staub 2008:274). This is what Rwandans lack as they participate in collective and personal emotion work. Some perpetrators cannot imagine the kind of emotional turmoil a victim may go through when they choose to forgive, or even in living next door to someone involved in the unimaginable acts of

genocide. But, by living authentically in community, Rwandans can sidestep the alienation that occurs when participating in emotion work that does not align with their inner feelings.

Ideally, Rwandans may engage in positive emotion work and find common ground in the pursuit of shared goals. These shared goals, otherwise known as superordinate goals, are defined “goals that are shared by individuals or groups and that are higher in the hierarchy than other potentially conflicting goals” (Staub 2008:274). But, in order to adopt these goals, groups must have a foundation of trust and empathy for one another. This seems unimaginable, as Rwandans have such a bloody history. However, many people in small communities are beginning to make such changes.

Mental Health and Reconciliation

Another factor that comes up in emotion work and definitely poses a problem for survivors of the genocide is mental health. There have not been many studies done on mental illness in Rwanda, as the priority and the focus has been primarily on seeking justice. In fact, perpetrators less frequently met diagnostic criteria for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) compared to survivors, 14% to 46% (Schall et al 2012:450). These statistics point out the differing emotional states the people of Rwanda live in following the genocide, even though many have experienced much violence. Although all Rwandans lost loved ones or witnessed or

took part in the slaughter, each had their own, individual experience and processed and perceived it differently. This finding implies that victims and perpetrators must employ a different kind of emotion work.

According to the same article, mental health is also connected to attitudes toward reconciliation. Although a highly positive attitude toward reconciliation was a protective factor for mental health in the survivor group, it was a risk factor in the group of perpetrators (Schall et al 2012:450). In other words, there is much to gain in reconciliation if one lives as a victim, but not if one is the perpetrator. Perpetrators that have more severe symptoms of PTSD also seem to be more aware of their actions, hinting that conscientiousness of their actions may be the factor leading them to repentance. This proves to be a challenge for talk of peace and unity, as the kind of emotion task set before the victim and the perpetrator is different.

Equality, Fairness and Transparency in Transitional Justice

True reconciliation in Rwanda is also impossible if the government refuses to recognize the wrongs on the winning side, in other words, the crimes of the RPF. So far, this kind of equality has not been seen, as only one RPF senior officer has been prosecuted in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and has refused to allow accountability for RPF crimes in the *gacaca* courts. (Mgbako 2005:223). This refusal to recognize wrongs despite what

ethnicity or organization the individual affiliates him or herself with undermines an authentic reconciliation process. In the words of Rwandan scholar Chi Mgbako,

“the assignment of collective guilt for the genocide to all Hutu, as opposed to the assignment of individual responsibility, undermines the recognition and prosecution of genocide. In contrast, assigning individual guilt and acknowledging that victimization took place on many levels during and following the genocide would affirm the humanity of all Rwandans” (Mgbako 2005:223).

Collective healing can be found through individual reconciliation, not ascribing guilt without due cause.

Education's role in reconciliation

Reconciliation is a process that involves the rebuilding of relations, both individually and collectively. It is obvious that long-lasting, deep and meaningful reconciliation will not occur in Rwanda without an honest understanding and teaching of history. History curriculum has the full potential to further social reconstruction; it is a precondition for the building of a lasting peace in Rwanda. If nothing else, Rwandans, especially the youth, deserve to own, know, and decide the path of their history. It is the only way to move toward peace.

Instead of highlighting the importance of history in the classrooms, Rwandan leaders focus on unity and reconciliation through a national identity. Marian Hodgkin reflects on the

difficulty of Rwanda's current state education in terms of addressing history in her article

Reconciliation in Rwanda: Education, History and the State.

The current government in Rwanda is faced with a difficult and daunting question: How does one teach a nation's history when not only the scale and longevity of violence in the past is overwhelming, but the history itself is contested? The Government's response has been to remove formal history from all school curricula, arguing that modern national history is potentially too divisive to be taught in a society emerging from decades of ethnic hatred, distrust and prejudice. Instead, the government is focusing much of its time and resources on promoting unity and reconciliation, stressing that Rwandan identity should now be based on national bonds rather than ethnic differences. (Hodgkin 2006:199)

Hodgkin's insights are precisely why Rwanda must step up and address its history, especially in terms of ethnicity. In fact, if the Rwandan government wishes to promote unity and reconciliation, then why not address the very issue where the rift occurred?

Immediately after gaining power in 1994, the current Tutsi-dominated government banned the teaching of history because of its use in perpetrating the genocide. Much of the genocidal ideology summoned memories of past wrongs, conflict and skewed historical events in order to establish authority and stimulate support (Hodgkin 2006). The Rwandan government cannot be blamed for this action completely, as unimaginable pain has resulted from this misuse of remembering history. In recent history there has been a push within education to create a single narrative of history. This approach will, according to Hodgkin, "deny or repress the memories of each subgroup within Rwandan society," leading to serious obstacles in personal

and political reconciliation (Hodgkin 2006:199). A single narrative does not welcome freedom of expression and the right to diverse opinion. Historical debate should be inclusive, as there are a plethora of experiences and perspectives. One aspect Rwandan education lacks and what reconciliation approaches lack proves to be an open narrative. Hodgkin reflects again on the danger of sticking to one history without flexibility:

The construction of one unchallenged history, which the population has received from above rather than participated in creating, allows no capacity for critical thinking . . . Rwandans often argue that it was the lack of these very same skills that allowed the genocidal ideology to take such strong hold in so many parts of the country. Many people did not analyze orders to exterminate all Tutsi ‘cockroaches.’ (Hodgkin 2006:205)

Obviously there is danger in this kind of top-down education instead of collective, grassroots-oriented history. Critical thinking and an environment open to the diversity of narratives of the genocide will benefit Rwanda greatly, and would indicate a future bright with possibilities of peace, hope, and a better life. Through critical thinking, Rwandans will better be able to choose the path they wish to take their country on rather than following one as if it were destiny.

Just as education can be used as a tool of hate, it can also play an important role in the establishment of unity and peace within a nation, something Rwanda should not readily forget. Education paired with history can be used for means of good rather than evil, something that is practiced already. Currently, no student is turned away based on ethnicity, but rather a students’

performance is judged on his or her merit and closely monitored examinations. Even language policies have also been changed to meet refugees who may have learned a dialect other than Kinyarwanda, such as English (Hodgkin 2006). These policies of fair and equal treatment are positive, but there is more that the education system can be doing. There is much to unite the Rwandan people: language, culture, religion and ancestral belief—but this alone is not enough, especially when so many injustices have not been addressed.

Education in Rwanda has been intimately involved with ethnic identity, as teachers have potential to teach discrimination or appreciation of diversity. Before the genocide some teachers would point out physical differences between students, molding their minds to focus on the miniscule differences in appearance as compared to the similarities in life, family, clothing, schooling, etc. Teachers were even targeted in the Rwandan genocide, as 75 percent of teachers in 1994 were either killed or are identified as perpetrators (Hodgkin 2006). Today, teachers can be used to facilitate discussion of ethnicity in positive ways, allowing an authentic Rwandan identity to be formed—not a mythical one.

Channels for Reconciliation

One way in which Rwandans safely explore and express their emotions is through theater. Theater, acting and role-playing has become absolutely essential to promote

reconciliation and critical reflection during a time of transition. Theater is not new to Rwanda; in pre-colonial days, it was used as a tool in Rwanda's political systems. *Ikinimicu*, or theater, in the courts of the King served as a way to depict heroic tales of war and reinforce caste or hierarchy systems. The *biru*, or the court historians and "tellers," were important in decoding the rules of the monarchy, ultimately upholding the judicial system and social structure. It appears that one cannot enact justice in Rwanda without considering performance (Breed 2006:508). Josephine, a victim of the genocide and part of the theater community, comments on the outlet and the stage theater gives to reconciliation: "When they confess, it gives morality.... When we sing and dance, we feel happy and excited. I no longer see them as enemies, but those that share problems of the survivor." (Breed 2006:208). Josephine's experience reveals how positive emotion work and truth telling can begin on the stage.

Another woman survivor of the genocide comments on how theater has changed her life. Through role-playing, interaction with perpetrators becomes safe for her. She comments on the transformation of her perspective by stating:

When you are with others singing, acting, performing... the kind of ideas and fears that you have been harbored in your heart will subside . . . Another thing is when you are in this mission, . . . [i]t makes you interact with a person you used to fear. . . when we are invited to say something or perform somewhere you find yourself participating in nation building. (Breed 2006:510)

This dialogue slips from the personal to the collective reconciliation through the arts, depicting how emotion work on the micro level can be brought to the macro level and feed into the strengthening of a nation as a whole. Theater has historically been used to manipulate people politically, but the people of Rwanda can use this tool to their benefit—to heal their wounds and to build a nation with unity and forgiveness. It is up to Rwandans whether or not this kind of reconciliation and healing can begin.

Conclusion

How can a victim overcome feelings of hatred and disgust for someone who mercilessly took the lives of those he or she loved most? On the other hand, how can the perpetrator cognitively and emotionally acknowledge the horrific, personal ways in which he or she took the lives of neighbors? Answering this question will not come easily; yet, hope remains. Ultimately, the path of reconciliation lies in the hands of Rwandan citizens and their leaders. With the union of Rwandan citizens, a continual renewal of the emotional climate, and proactive efforts to continue truth-telling dialogue concerning the genocide of 1994, the stage will be set for future community building and trust building. Although forgiveness and reconciliation requires both time and support from many, it can be possible.

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