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Forgiving a genocide: Reconciliation processes between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the interviewees' experience of their reconciliation process and the influence of the Amataba Workshops on their healing process. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with five pairs (N=10) of Tutsi survivors of the Rwandan genocide and their perpetrators, members of the Hutu majority; they had all participated in an intervention to promote reconciliation. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was chosen to study the transcripts. Analysis resulted in 9 main relevant categories that should be taken into account while designing a reconciliation-oriented intervention, including truth, listening to each other, justice, repairing the damage and collaboration on joint projects. The results of this research show how these processes can occur when reconciliation-oriented interventions are facilitated. For some interviewees, these workshops have become a crucial turning point and helped them set aside the hatred and pain.

Keywords: reconciliation; forgiveness; intergroup conflict; Rwanda; genocide

Introduction

In the Rwandan genocide (1994) one million people (the population was less than 8 million at that time) were killed by their neighbors (Des Forges, 1999). Even today we continue to wonder how a group of people can reach such extremes of violence (Moghaddam, 2018). In order to understand both conflict and overcoming, we need to know the context where the conflict took place. Our description will probably be incomplete and not comprehensive; in this review we will only focus on those aspects of the conflict that will help us understand the main elements of the reconciliation-oriented intervention analyzed hereinafter.

Three castes coexisted in Rwanda: the Hutu (85%), the Tutsi (14%) and the Twa (1%) (Rodríguez Vázquez, 2017). The main differences were in their names and surnames (associated with the place of origin), in the distribution of rights and duties, and in the positions of power they assumed. Historically, the Tutsi had more rights than the Hutu, in addition to a certain preeminence at the political level. Opposing historical narratives are still trying to explain the origin of the rivalry between these two groups. One narrative claims the enmity goes back to the sixteenth century, during certain military expeditions carried out by the Tutsi with which they asserted their power to subdue their Hutu subjects. Another positioning assures the conflict dates back to the First World War, when the Rwandan administration came under the umbrella of Belgium, which enhanced the power of the Tutsi in the country and fed the hypothesis of the genetic superiority of the Tutsis (Magnarella, 2005). This supremacist ideological discourse culminated in the creation of an identification document at a national level that stated the specific 'ethnic group' to which the person belonged. The mere possession of this identity card guaranteed a system in which the Tutsi benefited from privileges, increasing the Hutu's perception of injustice. By including the 'ethnic group' to the identity card, each person was defined, as one or other of the three recognized social categories: Tutsi, Hutu and twa (Hintjens, 1999).

After Rwanda became independent from Belgium, the Hutu came to power for the first time in 1961. At that time, both groups could already identify elements of reality that they incorporated

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3 into their narrative of a chosen people, morally superior, as opposed to the other, the enemy and
4 a threat (Cantrell, 2014). During those 30 years of government prior to the genocide, the
5 historical fear of their previous oppressor became clear. In the years that preceded the genocide,
6 the Akazu clan, the most radical wing of the Hutu, occupied a large part of the positions of
7 power and had among its ranks the scientists and intellectuals who enunciated the ideology that
8 was later used to justify the genocide (Hintjens, 1999). Their privileged position in Rwandan
9 society allowed them to disseminate hatred and feed the idea that the Tutsi should be eradicated.
10 According to their ideology, the Tutsi belonged to a different and strange race, and their arrival
11 in Rwanda had meant the beginning of the slavery and exploitation to which the Hutu had been
12 subjected for centuries; not only had it conditioned the loss of their wealth and power, but it had
13 forced them to live in constant humiliation and poverty, even corrupting them inside (Des
14 Forges, 1999).

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29 After decades of historical conflict between Hutu and Tutsi, a civil war formally began in 1990
30 which would be the prelude to the genocide of 1994 (Kuperman, 2000). Anti-Tutsi measures
31 intensified during this time and reached extreme levels of hatred and intolerance. The death of
32 the Hutu President, Habyarimana, on April 6th, 1994 was the trigger for the genocide; the attack
33 that brought down the plane in which he was traveling was immediately blamed on the Tutsi.
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39 The genocide began the next day and lasted for three months (Des Forges, 1999). During the
40 hundred days the genocide lasted, cold-blooded massacres were committed in unimaginable
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Between July and August 1994, the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front troops entered Kigali and
soon took control of the rest of the country, defeating the Hutu regime and thus ending the
genocide (Hintjens, 1999). After the victory of the RPF, violence continued in both directions,
many Hutu were imprisoned and about 2 million took refuge in border countries; some of them
had participated in the genocide, others simply feared Tutsi reprisals (Smeulers & Hoex, 2010).

Reconciliation processes in identity conflicts

The conflict between Hutu and Tutsi has been considered an identity-based conflict according to its characteristics. Identity-based conflicts are usually based in people's culture, background, basic characteristics, values or beliefs and shared history. This kind of conflict tends to be more abstract and ambiguous than interest-based conflicts, which tend to be more specific (Freedman et al., 2008; Rothman, 2012). As Auerbach (2005) points out, what triggers an identity-based conflict is often that one group feels that the other is denying or underestimating their own identity and, consequently, they perceive their rights and freedoms are being damaged.

Considering this, Auerbach's (2009) reconciliation pyramid is presented hereafter as a comprehensive proposal to help us understand the key elements that are necessary to guarantee a successful reconciliation process, and as the theoretical framework chosen to organize this research findings. According to this model, promoting reconciliation in identity-based conflicts requires an extensive and profound change of attitude, to be able to confront the conflicting narratives that are in the basis of the conflict, and that have grown for decades (or even centuries) feeding each other's victimhood narratives. These narratives often claim inherited rights over a territory dating back centuries (Auerbach, 2010). They are strongly defended, and members of each group see them as unquestionable truths.

Collective identity is often linked with national narratives. There are differences between types of narratives that is important to distinguish (Andrews, 2003). Especially, metanarratives are basic narratives that each side holds about themselves (who they are, what differentiates them from the other), and those are different from national narratives that are often based in historical facts and, therefore, are more easily modifiable than the metanarratives, which are deeply rooted in the collective identity.

Metanarratives are the framework through which members of each group interpret the world and every event that takes place. They include all values, beliefs, norms, and symbols of a group and, therefore, metanarratives can be considered the synthesis of the national spirit (Auerbach &

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3 Lowenstein, 2011). These metanarratives are so deeply rooted in each group member's identity
4 that trying to modify them is futile because it would be seen as an attack to their most precious
5 values. The self-awareness of victimhood is probably the element of the metanarrative that is
6 most resistant to change. Groups that have felt threatened and that are still overwhelmed by past
7 sufferings (their own or their ancestors') find it hard to overcome that narrative of themselves as
8 the only legitimate victims and, therefore, the others as undeniable aggressors (Bartov, 2003).
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16 On the contrary, national narratives are specific stories about a country or territory, including
17 national heroes' feats told over generations (Noronha, 2004). Their meaning is linked to the
18 metanarratives (often national narratives exemplify the values contained in the metanarratives
19 through their heroes) but, on the contrary, national narratives, as it happens with history, can be
20 more flexible and is susceptible to change by incorporating more specific stories that might
21 illustrate a different side of national history (Ross, 2007). These national narratives play a key
22 role in identity-based conflicts and they can be the key to initiate a reconciliation process, but
23 they can also fuel the conflict when used in the other direction.
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34 In the Rwandan conflict, we can identify some emotional and cognitive processes that might
35 fuel the conflict (Villa Gómez, 2016). Initially, the Hutu narratives indicated that there was an
36 'other'/enemy that destroyed their own identity, lifestyle, values, traditions, and that therefore
37 should be eliminated (Villa Gómez et al., 2017). Each party considered themselves the *good*
38 group and had the feeling of being chosen as a morally superior group, victims of the *other*,
39 which was experienced as a collective, without distinguishing individualities, and embodied all
40 the defects. Secondly, *narratives* of victimhood began, which oversimplified the facts and
41 created founding myths (Young & Sullivan, 2016). Beliefs such as *competitive victimhood*
42 (Auerbach, 2009) appeared, in which an asymmetric evaluation of suffering is observed: the
43 conviction that one's own group has suffered more than the other, and that one's suffering is
44 more unjust.
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57 The 'Reconciliation Pyramid' (Auerbach, 2009) presented below points out that groups in
58 identity conflicts may not reach reconciliation until they know and acknowledge each other's
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3 narrative about the origin, causes and development of the conflict, and, furthermore, until they
4 are able to include the other's narrative into their own one (Barkan, 2006). An important part of
5 the reconciliation process involves the deconstruction of national narratives, identifying those
6 facts that are irrefutable and will remain in the narrative and, deconstructing the rest of the
7 narrative, allowing adjustments in the rest of the story. The seven phases of the *Pyramid* are as
8 follows:
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16 *Phase 1: Knowledge of conflicting narratives*

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18 When conflicts are prolonged, the hurt and fear are so strong that they lead each party to focus
19 on their own situation, and, in the end, they are not only unfamiliar with each other's narrative,
20 but they are unable to critically review their own narrative and to admit the possibility that their
21 version of the facts might not be the absolute truth. Research in reconciliation has emphasized
22 the relevance of the recognition of the other's narrative (Ben David et al., 2017; Rafferty, 2020).
23 Though, little efforts have been made to distinguish between *knowledge* and *acknowledge*. The
24 first one, might be the start of a reconciliation process, but the second one means lending
25 credibility to the other's version, and it is also a requirement for a successful process.
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35 *Phase 2: Recognition of the other's narratives*

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37 Admitting that the other's version has some validity, understanding it and recognizing it as
38 legitimized, without necessarily accepting them as true. The movement from Phase 1 to Phase 2
39 is difficult. Acknowledging the other's version of the truth does not threaten one's identity but
40 some people might feel so and, therefore, they might be very reluctant to step into this Phase
41 (Vollhardt et al., 2014).
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48 *Phase 3: Expressing empathy for the other's suffering*

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50 Empathy is an extremely difficult in identity conflicts. The attempt to comprehend the other's
51 situation and feelings is a challenge and hardly conceivable in this type of conflict (Halpern &
52 Weinstein, 2004; Klimecki, 2019). Any degree of empathy is more likely to appear in the
53 personal level, between peers, close opponents or enemies with some characteristic in common
54 that might connect them. The emotional identification that is required to experience empathy
55 could be labelled as betrayal by one's own group. For this reason, knowledge and recognition of
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3 the other's narrative should come first, to make empathy more achievable (Nadler & Liviatan,
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5 2006).

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7 *Phase 4: Acknowledge at least some part of the responsibility of the other's suffering*

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9 Taking responsibility (even a small part), may be understood as taking the blame and this is
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11 another obstacle in identity conflicts due to the legal consequences (Kanyangara et al., 2014).
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13 However, it is important that at least once in the process some responsibility for the suffering of
14
15 the other is recognized.
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18 *Phase 5: Communicate willingness to repair or compensate*

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20 This fifth step, communicating willingness to compensate and repair, could be key to promote
21
22 reconciliation between former opponents. In fact, they are critical to reestablish the moral
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24 principles that are lost during times of conflict (Kirchhoff & Čehajić-Clancy, 2014).
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27 Nevertheless, if there is compensation but no acknowledgement of at least some part of the
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29 responsibility of the other's suffering (*Phase 4*), the prospects for success are limited.

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31 *Phase 6: Public apologies and seeking forgiveness*

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33 Forgiveness is fundamental to guarantee successful reconciliation processes in identity conflicts
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35 (Worthington, 2006). This phase incorporates what Auerbach (2009) calls 'warm' and 'cold'
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37 elements, making it even more complex than the previous ones. First, public apologies might be
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39 merely considered a political issue and, therefore, a cold component. This does not mean public
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41 apologies are not powerful, it only indicates they do not necessarily affect the personal level. On
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43 the other hand, forgiveness requests must be sincere to contribute to reconciliation. The victim
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45 must perceive the perpetrator's regret and that is what it is understood as a 'warm' process
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47 (Auerbach, 2004, 2005). Some of the main issues discussed in the scientific literature on the
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49 role forgiveness plays in reconciliation are if granting forgiveness is necessary in identity
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51 conflicts (or if it is sufficient with the perpetrator seeking forgiveness) and when and how
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53 should forgiveness appear in the reconciliation process (Gopin, 2001; Levy & Sznaider, 2006).
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55 This model, the 'Reconciliation Pyramid', suggests forgiveness should be promoted nearly at
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57 the end (*Phase 6*). Expecting that, by that moment, other cognitive and emotional barriers might
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59 have been overcome, paving the way to let forgiveness occur.
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3 *Phase 7: Effort to integrate the opposing narratives into a mutually accepted one*

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5 From this theoretical framework, the reconciliation process would only be concluded after an
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7 identity conflict if the opposing groups build a common narrative about their history. This
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9 narrative has to be public and must incorporate both positive and negative actions of each group
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11 (Worthington, 2006). In fact, if both groups have been able to go through the steps mentioned in
12
13 the previous phases, this common narrative might be already developed and ready to become
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15 public, which would be the conclusion of a successful reconciliation process (Yarn & Jones,
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17 2009). Though, the challenges in each of the previous steps are complicated and, therefore,
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19 reaching this point might be very unlikely. However, goals can be less ambitious, it is not
20
21 necessary that both groups reach a single common narrative, it could be enough if both groups
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23 tolerate a minimum set of explanations about what triggered the conflict (Rafferty, 2020). The
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25 other's metanarrative will not seem as threatening as it was at the beginning of the process.
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29 The seven phases are organized in increasing complexity, and it is presumed that the groups will
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31 not reach a complex phase before accomplishing the previous one. But this model only reflects
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33 what it is expected, the order of the phases is not mandatory. Overall, reconciliation processes
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35 are more complex and long-lasting than mere problem solving (Leiner, 2018). Repairing a
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37 relationship requires a deep change of attitude, particularly in identity conflicts which are often
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39 extremely traumatic.
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41 ***The AMI Process (Amataba Approach)***

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44 This research focuses on the AMI Reconciliation Process. Rwandans have made a huge effort to
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46 achieve reconciliation in a context that appeared to be impossible. Rwandan culture is mostly
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48 family supported and collectivistic, focused on restoring relationships and not behaving in ways
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50 that threaten group solidarity. Rwandans often emphasize collective norms, social harmony and
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52 relationships with others (Arnold, 2011; Mukashema & Mullet, 2013).
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55 Different reconciliation initiatives have been promoted over the past years. Some of them come
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57 from the Rwandan government (e.g. 'I am Rwandan'/ Ndi Umunyarwanda and 'Reeducation
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59 Ingando Camps'), some other initiatives are promoted by religious organizations (e.g. The
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3 Secret of Peace, first known as Mushaka Program). The initiative on which this work is focused
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5 is promoted by non-religious/secular organization, the *Association Modeste et Innocent*. This
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7 initiative especially interesting, compared to others because it comes from a private and
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9 independent organization and it is also well structured and systematized, oriented to promote
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11 autonomy among their participants (i.e. helping them to take the lead once the intervention is
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13 over to keep alive the reconciliation process with a proposal of ongoing contact through a
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15 shared economic activity) (Association Modeste et Innocent, 2018).
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18 The *Association Modeste et Innocent (AMI)* was born in 2000 to promote sustainable peace and
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20 development by empowering actors raised in *ubuntu* and by creating concerted and non-violent
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22 solutions to Rwanda's psycho-socio-economic challenges (e.g. ethnic/caste-based conflicts,
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24 trauma, domestic violence, extreme poverty, citizen disempowerment). AMI works in
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26 partnership with local governments to identify and address situations of unsolved conflict
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28 among Hutu and Tutsi. 'Ubuntu' has different nuances depending on the context. In this case,
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30 the AMI self-defines *Ubuntu* as goodness and *gift-ness* (AMI, 2018). Goodness means being
31
32 physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually good and *gift-ness* means being a gift for
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34 others and becoming useful to society. AMI has established its own approach called 'The Right
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36 Inner Power', a theory and a practice that allows a person to grow up in *Ubuntu*.
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40 The process suggested by the association (*Amataba* Approach) can be summarized in 9
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42 steps to promote reconciliation (AMI, 2018). All steps are framed in the promotion of
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44 reconciliation and harmony and among survivors and ex-prisoners who have to live together in
45
46 the same town: 1. gathering and evaluating information on the situation of conflict; 2.
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48 contacting participants; 3. sensitization to the Right Inner Power; 4. creating separate groups of
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50 Hutu and Tutsi to participate; 5. expressing one's negative perceptions about the other in
51
52 writing; 6. exchanging lists of perceptions and writing down reactions against them; 7. face-to-
53
54 face dialogue; 8. creation and operationalization of the reconciliation groups with Hutu and
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56 Tutsi in order to continue exchanges and initiate reconciliation activities, and 9. action and
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58 outreach of the *Amataba* Group.
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3 AMI undertakes the task of creating a safe setting where groups of victims and ex-prisoners
4
5 can meet with each other and start a true and honest dialogue that could lead to reconciliation. In
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7 the AMI they tend to use a metaphor that helps them illustrate the imbalances among the
8
9 starting positions of victims and perpetrators once they are about to initiate contact with the
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11 other: the perpetrator is on top of a hill, 'the hill of violence', (meaningful image in Rwanda,
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13 known as 'the country of a thousand hills'), whereas victims would be in the valley, called 'the
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15 valley of misery', as a result of the violence they have suffered. Perpetrators have to come down
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17 (giving up the power that is usually linked to those who perpetrate violence) and victims have to
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19 come up (be lifted and rise to restore their dignity), to be able to meet with the other in a safe
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21 place where dialogue can happen in equal conditions. That middle ground is called *amataba* in
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23 Kinyarwanda (local language), a word which is also used to designate these workshops (AMI,
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25 2018).
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29 These meetings take place weekly and might last for months. First of all, they work in
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31 separate groups of victims and ex-prisoners, to sensitize and train them on the Right Inner
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33 Power and Ubuntu (goodness and *gift-ness*), and finally on '*upright human being praxis*', a tool
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35 to change the level of consciousness and stop the recurrence of violence. These workshops
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37 attempt to restore the victim's dignity and give the ex-prisoners a chance to feel part of the
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39 moral community again. This practice intends to lower the hills of violence, fill the valleys of
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41 misery, invite 'everyone' to 'the plain' of the *upright human being* (AMI, 2018). After these
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43 first sessions focused on the reflection on the identity and philosophy of the association, each
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45 group writes accusations to the other group; these complaints are exchanged between groups
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47 and they are discussed by each group in an attempt to understand the other's perspective.
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50 After a month of these ongoing separate sessions, both finally meet and properly hear
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52 accusations they still have pending with any member of the other group. Consequently, both
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54 sides are expected to gradually lose their fear of the other and learn to understand the experience
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56 of one who was previously seen as a cruel murderer. Survivors might then see humankind in
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58 their perpetrators after sincere expressions of forgiveness, and ex-prisoners could see in the
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3 victims much more than rejection, criticism, rage and hatred (AMI, 2018). Thus, the encounter
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5 between groups would take place and, through it, the dialogue, listening, the re-humanization of
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7 the other, the apologies and forgiveness.
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10 After this encounter between the two groups, a new and unique group is created including
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12 victims and ex-prisoners, which is expected to be a safe place where dialogue and encounter can
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14 go on. Finally, all of them commit with the group to a long process that leads to reconciliation,
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16 often initiating joint economic activities that keep them in touch in an atmosphere of
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18 cooperation and trust (for example, they might buy land and cultivate it together, or they might
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20 help each other with their businesses, etc.). From then on, the groups continue meeting
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22 regularly, once a week, to strengthen the process, exploring the problems they face and, even
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24 later, often continue meeting as a group without the follow-up of the Association (AMI, 2018).
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26 The AMI usually attends and helps them in this process.
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29 Even though this intervention has been running for more than a decade with successful
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31 results in terms of participation and engagement (AMI, 2018), there is no research so far that
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33 evaluates the effectiveness of these workshops. Our study aims to bridge that gap, addressing
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35 the meaning-making experiences and personally lived experiences of the participants in a
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37 reconciliation-oriented intervention and, therefore, investigate the effectiveness of this program
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39 and how it impacts the participants' reconciliation process. To achieve this objective, we
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41 assessed the interviewees' experiences to delve deeper into the elements of the intervention that
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43 might have an impact in their forgiveness and reconciliation process. [Anonymized] (2020)
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45 examined the relevance of forgiveness within the reconciliation in a brief report. The current
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47 paper draws on the same data as [Anonymized] (2020) but examines the broader results of this
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49 research on reconciliation presenting bellow all the results from the analysis considered to be
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51 relevant elements of the reconciliation process. Not only the role of forgiveness, but the role of
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53 the truth and listening to each other, justice and repairing the damage, the role of the Ubuntu
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55 philosophy, self-forgiveness, taking the initiative to approach to the other, faith, the role
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3 community and family plays and collaboration on joint projects as a way to build trust and help
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5 others.

6 7 8 **Method**

9 10 *Participants*

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13 In February 2018, ten people who had gone through the AMI (Smith & Osborn, 2003)
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15 reconciliation workshops were interviewed by the authors; five pairs of victims of the genocide
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17 and their own perpetrators (all victims were Tutsi and all ex-prisoners were Hutu). Three out of
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19 the five victims were women, all perpetrators were men, and all of them were neighbors at the
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21 time of the genocide. Two out of the five pairs had even closer relationships, with one victim
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23 and his perpetrator being part-time teachers at the same school, and another pair being friends
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25 before the genocide, when they were children. Concerning the specific violations each of them
26
27 had suffered, one ex-prisoner had destroyed his victim's house and lands, and the rest were
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29 involved in the murder of relatives of the victim who had recently forgiven them. One was in
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31 the group that killed four children and his victim's husband, another one had killed the youngest
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33 brother of his victim and threw him into a hole in the ground (latrine), one more was the leader
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35 of a group that murdered several siblings of the victim and the last one had participated in the
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37 massacres of the victim's family and destroyed his properties.

38 39 40 41 *Interviews*

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43 Authorization to conduct research was granted by the Rwandese Ministry of Education
44
45 (Directorate of Science, Technology and Research). Contact with victims and ex-prisoners was
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47 facilitated through the *Association Modeste et Innocent* in Butare, where they had participated in
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49 workshops to promote reconciliation within the last ten years. Social workers from AMI
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51 recruited the participants and invited them to collaborate in this research. They were all selected
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53 by the association for being success stories of their reconciliation workshops (reported by both
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55 the participants and the association workers). All the interviews took place in the Association's
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57 office. AMI workers reported that participating in the reconciliation process was volunteer
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3 although they also pointed out that, in the Rwandan culture, when someone considered an
4 authority (as a community leader might be) gives an indication or suggestion it is often
5 understood as 'mandatory' (Jung et al., 1995; Rugerinyange, 2016). Yet, in any case, there were
6 people who decided not to participate (for instance, one of the interviewees, at first, refused to
7 participate in the reconciliation groups and, afterwards, changed his mind when the perpetrator
8 went to apologize). The same reasoning it is applied when trying to guarantee all participants
9 decided to participate voluntarily in the interview. Researchers went through the consent
10 process carefully to guarantee that every participant came voluntarily yet there is still concern
11 that the role that the authority plays in Rwanda might be a barrier and some participants did not
12 even consider rejecting the invitation (even though the researchers emphasized that was their
13 choice and there would be no consequences). However, the only way to access to these
14 participants was through the AMI workers, as they know the participants personally and they
15 respect and trust them. The AMI workers that invited them to participate are often considered as
16 leaders within the community and therefore, their suggestions might be understood as a
17 requirement. However, although data obtained from these interviews could be considered biased
18 for representing only the voices of those who finally reconciliated and excluding the voices of
19 those who did not, it is still considered extremely valuable information. Access to this type of
20 information in Rwanda is still very complicated as it is not easy to receive approval to conduct
21 research about reconciliation processes within the country and any information, however small
22 it seems, is priceless. This research does not pretend to be exhaustive or representative from the
23 broader reality. The aim of this study is only to present the experiences of these five pairs of
24 victim and aggressor who went through a reconciliation-oriented intervention and finally
25 reconciliated and see if we can extract some lessons about those elements that might be helpful
26 to promote reconciliation.

27
28
29 Yet, the researchers went through all the consent process carefully with each interviewee
30 without the presence of AMI workers and all agreed to participate as well. Each victim-ex-
31 prisoner pair was interviewed together, at the same time (as suggested by the AMI workers and
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3 as a way to identify elements of reconciliation as a two-way process). The main challenge of
4 this interview format was that it would be harder to reduce social desirability bias in the
5 participants' responses as it is a very sensitive topic (this type of bias that is the tendency to
6 answer questions in a way that respondent's expect will be viewed more positively by
7 interviewers. In this case it would imply over-reporting reconciliation) (Grimm, 2010). In order
8 to mitigate this, the researchers emphasized several times during informed consent and at the
9 beginning of the interview that there were no right or wrong responses and confidentiality
10 would be assured. We also included an indirect question about their current relationship in order
11 to divert the attention from the main issue of reconciliation (Fisher, 1993; Nederhof, 1985).
12 Nevertheless, the researchers considered that having the pair of victim and ex-prisoner together
13 would bring more benefits than drawbacks as the participants had self-reported they had
14 reconciled prior to the interview and non-verbal communication between the pair of victim-
15 perpetrator could give us valuable information on how they interacted (i.e. they looked at each
16 other when speaking or not, they laughed during the interview or not, their facial expression was
17 tense, rigid, shameful, joyful or relaxed, etc.). This information was then written as part of the
18 field notes (Hall et al., 1995).

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37 Informed consent was verbally obtained before starting the interviews. Both researchers spoke
38 with each participant to present the main information concerning the research study (objectives,
39 relevant scientific aspects, safety procedures during the interviews and during the results
40 analysis to guarantee confidentiality and anonymization, including who would have access to
41 those data) and also main information about their right to withdraw from the research study at
42 any point, without giving explanations to the researchers and without any penalty or
43 discrimination derived. Each interview took from 20 to 30 minutes. All of them were carried out
44 with the assistance of a Kinyarwanda - English interpreter (local interpreter contacted by an
45 independent Rwandan university that had experience in similar research projects). He was
46 included in all interviews and consent processes. The researchers asked a question in English,
47 the interpreter translated into Kinyarwanda, the participants answered, the interpreter translated
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3 back into English and researchers took literal notes of the interpreter's translation in English.
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5 Interviews did not last longer because the association workers had summoned the participants
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7 for a day (they all came from different locations around the area) and all interviews and consent
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9 process had to be conducted within the frame of that day. In addition, the research aim was to
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11 focus on their reconciliation process and their present relationship, actively avoiding the
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13 traumatic history or to going back to the violence of the past.
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16 The interviews were not audiotaped to avoid inconvenience to the interviewees and to
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18 encourage them to speak freely and without any kind of pressure (acknowledging there is still
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20 fear and censorship around the official version of the history of the genocide within the
21
22 country). Instead, the three researchers took literal notes of the English translation of the
23
24 interviews. All field notes and interviews were independently transcribed by the researchers and
25
26 then double-checked to confirm consistency. Two of the interviewers were Western women
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28 with a long research background on reconciliation issues but always within the European
29
30 context, and their research had never been oriented towards such massive conflicts as genocide.
31
32 With the purpose of avoiding possible personal biases (bracketing), an independent Rwandan
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34 male researcher was included as a third interviewer, also with an extensive knowledge in
35
36 reconciliation processes in Rwanda from his research background. Further analysis was agreed
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38 only between the two authors, including the review, as well as discussion and reflection on the
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40 field notes (containing their feelings and thoughts when conducting the interviews).
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44 Furthermore, two open-ended questions guided the semi-structured interview: 'Could you tell us
45
46 how your experience of reconciliation was?' and 'How is your relationship nowadays, after
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48 participating in the *Amataba* process?'. In addition, to discover more about the participants'
49
50 experience, four more detailed questions were drafted: 'Is justice a requirement for
51
52 forgiveness?', 'Would it be possible for you to continue working together, but without
53
54 forgiveness?', 'What was helpful during the process?' and 'What were the challenges?'.
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Analytic Approach: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

We drew on IPA (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012) to explore the interviewees' reconciliation experience and how the *Amataba* Workshops might have influenced their healing process. The aim of this qualitative approach is to analyze personal lived experiences. Therefore, it captures lived experiences rather than those often set by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. IPA is concerned with seeking understanding people's worldview and, from this epistemological perspective, it is assumed that people's explanations tell something relevant about their personal thoughts and feelings. IPA proposes that it is participants themselves those who try to interpret their own experiences and explain them in a manner that is reasonable for them (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This methodology is especially valuable when investigating complex topics and processes which differ broadly, depending on the personal experience and background, as is the case with forgiveness and reconciliation processes (Smith, 2017). Thus, it involves both phenomenological and interpretative analysis (Kappmeier, 2016). The phenomenological element describes the density of a phenomenon through deep study of a person's explanation and the meaning they might have given to their account. On the other hand, the interpretative component aims to comprehend the person's account through understanding the context in which the interviewee lives.

Coding Scheme

Qualitative research distinguishes two types of coding process: inductive and deductive. For inductive coding there are no predefined codes or categories for analysis. The investigator approaches the interviews with the research interest and creates coding categories right from the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Based our phenomenological approach, the IPA, which is inductive in nature, we assumed no pre-existing hypothesis, as the intention with this frame is to understand and capture the meanings that interviewees give to their reconciliation experiences. Consequently, no pre-defined categories for labelling were drafted to guide the analysis of the interviews. Based on the IPA, the categories are drawn from the interviews and not previously defined (Smith &

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2
3 Osborn, 2003). In the coding system, categories emerged from the content of the interviews and
4
5 were subsequently grouped to facilitate analysis by categories.
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7
8 The analytic steps proceeded as follows:
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- 10 1. Interviews were read several times by both authors independently to guarantee a general
11 sense of the whole nature of the participant's experience. During this phase potential
12 categories were noted and the procedure was informed by the authors' experience of the
13 interview itself (supported by their field notes). Potential categories identified were
14 shared between the two authors.
15
- 16 2. All interviews were then read again by both authors and any emergent themes were
17 further identified and systematized provisionally. Each quote was labelled with a
18 category that covered the main topic addressed in each statement using N-Vivo 11
19 (Qualitative Data Analysis Software).
20
- 21 3. The next phase was gathering both researcher's analyses. The resulting outcome was 21
22 categories (adding those identified by researchers 1 and 2). Afterwards both researchers
23 screened jointly the 21 categories and grouped them according to similar content. The
24 final categories after this joint analysis were nine.
25
- 26 4. Then the categories were defined in a more detailed manner and establishes the
27 potential relationships between them.
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- 29 5. The categories were organized to make meaningful statements of the essence of the
30 participant's experience grounded in their own words.
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46 Therefore, the analysis presented in the results section is organized around nine categories that
47 emerged from the interviews, instead of categories previously defined. Consistent with the
48 interpretative phenomenological approach these categories will be further analyzed in relation to
49 the scientific literature in the Discussion section.
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Results

The results section presents the nine superordinate categories that emerged from the analysis. Each of them is described and exemplified with *verbatim* extracts from interviews. Each pair of participants is numerically identified from 1-5 and V (victim) or E (ex-prisoner).

The role of the truth and listening to each other

The respondents' descriptions of the truth-telling dialogue seem to be found at the beginning of the reconciliation process. Every forgiveness process begins with the request for the truth. Survivors need to know what happened, and ex-prisoners need to confess the truth, although the amount of information each of them needs is not always equal. This does not always happen immediately after the attack. Sometimes it comes after serving the sentence when that perpetrators confess, as was the case with some of the interviewees:

- 'I didn't know that it was him who destroyed my house, I found out it when he came to apologize to me.' (1V)
- 'Then he told me how everything had happened.' (2V)
- 'My initial desire after the genocide was to eliminate all Hutu but, little by little, step by step, listening to others, I started to listen and speak, and this was how I was able to talk to him (her perpetrator).' (2V)
- 'Once I got out of prison, I tried to approach her, but she was very reluctant. I insisted a great deal, and she finally agreed; I begged her forgiveness and she refused. For me, it was very difficult to start and to recognize what had happened.' (2E)
- 'Listening to the survivors' testimonies gave me courage to approach him (victim).' (3E)

Justice and repairing the damage

Although justice and restoration were key to lead the way in promoting reconciliation, each respondent felt about it in a different and particular way. One victim said justice did not necessarily have to take place before forgiveness. Others did not claim financial compensation (even after court decisions):

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- 2
- 3 • ‘If you're willing to forgive you must not wait for justice... If you are about to forgive,
- 4 you must not wait for justice.’ (5V)
- 5
- 6
- 7 • ‘He had to pay me for what he had destroyed (court decision), but he couldn't, so he
- 8 asked me if he could do some kind of work instead. I told him I had some land and that
- 9 he could help me to work the land. Then, he came...’ (5V)
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13 • ‘She did not ask me to repair anything I had damaged, nor to compensate her
- 14 economically...’ (1E)
- 15
- 16
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18 *The role of the Ubuntu philosophy (goodness and gift-ness)*

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21 For some interviewees, the final meetings held in the Association enabled mutual listening;
22 knowing the testimonies of the victims also helped the ex-prisoners to take the lead to approach
23 them, the philosophy of life underlying the *Amataba* approach reinforced the importance of
24 forgiveness in order to move forward and reach a better quality of life:
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- 29
- 30 • ‘The meetings between victims and perpetrators that we had at the end of the whole
- 31 process in the Association (AMI) helped me greatly.’ (3E)
- 32
- 33 • ‘The philosophy of the Association (AMI) helped both of us.’ (4V)
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37 *Self-forgiveness*

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39 When asked about the role of self-forgiveness, two ex-prisoners described how they forgave
40 themselves before asking their victims for forgiveness. There is also a common feeling of
41 hopelessness among perpetrators when they realize the severity of their actions and they blame
42 themselves for that; this absence of hope is often the catalyst to seek out the victim and ask for
43 forgiveness, and it is also what lets them forgive themselves once they feel the need to find hope
44 in their lives:
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- 52 • ‘I forgave myself in prison, before going to ask him (a victim) for forgiveness.’ (3E)
- 53
- 54 • ‘I asked for her forgiveness after forgiving myself, it was the first thing I did.’ (2E)
- 55
- 56 • ‘My personality pushed me to ask for forgiveness because there was no hope in my life
- 57 after understanding the crime I had committed.’ (4E)
- 58
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Taking the initiative to approach to the other

All our interviewees described how the ex-prisoner was the one who took the lead in asking for forgiveness. Taking the initiative to ask for forgiveness is seen as the hardest thing in the whole process; some had lived for years avoiding each other and negating the crimes and took a long time to have the courage to bridge that gap. Transparency and integrity were two of the attitudes that perpetrators assumed to help them reach their victims. One respondent did not know the truth of what had happened until the perpetrator came to her. For some victims, the fact that their perpetrator took the lead was very valuable. One interviewee sent a friend to talk to the victim instead of going himself, knowing the victim would listen to his friend but not to him, and making sure he understood that his only intention was to ask for forgiveness and that he wanted nothing else but that:

- ‘He came to apologize to me, I was surprised that he asked me to forgive him, now we both know what happened.’ (1V)
- ‘The hardest thing for me was the decision to begin the process and take the initiative to go to her and ask for forgiveness, it was really hard to take that initiative... I was like a dog that reverses direction when he sees something that terrifies him; when I saw her, I avoided her, now we're going in the same direction.’ (1E)
- ‘I valued very much that he had the initiative to start.’ (2V)
- ‘I tried to be open and honest when I approached to ask for forgiveness.’ (3E)
- ‘It was hard to accept my crime, I reflected a great deal while I was in prison until I understood that what I had done was a crime and that it was not good; then I decided to ask for forgiveness, but I was not expecting to be forgiven.’ (3E)
- ‘At the beginning, it was very difficult to forgive, we were both afraid of each other, we didn't want to meet the other.’ (4V)
- ‘I didn't want to take the first step because I thought that it was very hard (...) The third day of the intervention (the third session of the initiative of the Association) I dared to approach to her.’ (4E)

- ‘I joined the Association once I got out of prison and he (victim) found out about the existence of this Association when I went to ask him for forgiveness.’ (5E)

The role faith plays in forgiveness

One victim asked us at the end of the interview about the reason for the lack of forgiveness in our home country, suggesting it could be explained by a widely extended lack of faith. For many respondents it was their faith that pushed them to forgive and prayer together as a way to clear the path to reach trust:

- ‘Why is it so hard for you in (the researcher’s country of origin) to forgive? Is it because you don’t believe in any god? Or why...?’ (Victim asks the interviewers) (2V)
- ‘What helped me to forgive (...) was the philosophy of this Association and the firm belief that I should forgive.’ (3V)
- ‘My Christian faith helped me to forgive (...). He (the perpetrator) was also a Christian.’ (3V)
- ‘The second step was being able to pray together.’ (4V)

Consequences of forgiveness and reconciliation

Some interviewees portrayed the experience of forgiveness as a modification in their feelings, changing from sadness to new feelings of happiness, freedom, peacefulness, stability, calmness, normality, rejuvenation, relaxation, openness and readiness to forgive others, trust and collaboration:

- ‘Now I (ex-prisoner) feel free, joyful and happy. I am 61, but when I see her, I feel like 18.’ (1E)
- ‘I have forgiven him from the bottom of my heart. Before I was sad, now we are well, forgiving has cleaned my heart, I feel after forgiving my heart is free, I feel relaxed, now life is like normal.’ (2V)

- 1
- 2
- 3 • ‘I have forgiven him and now I am open to forgiving others who might come to ask me
- 4 for forgiveness. Now we are calm, have stable hearts, peace, collaboration, we have
- 5 built trust and we are ready to forgive others.’ (4V)
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9 • ‘To show him that I had forgiven him, I gave him the documents where the judge wrote
- 10 he should pay me for what he had destroyed, as a sign of true forgiveness, to show him
- 11 that I had really forgiven him.’ (5V)
- 12
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- 14
- 15 • ‘We understood that the reason to forgive was the only thing that could help us to live a
- 16 better life.’ (4V)
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20 • ‘Living and working together without forgiving is like wearing new, clean, and
- 21 beautiful clothes, but with dirty underwear.’ (3V)
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- 23
- 24

The role community and family plays in forgiveness

25 For some respondents, what they have learnt from genocide is that the best thing we have

26 received as a society is our ability to live with others, and they want to help other countries to

27 discover this and let them know the only way to achieve peace is through sustaining love and

28 patience. One of the victims describes how, for Rwandans, life is living-with-others, and living

29 in isolation is not living. Another described how the guilt and individual responsibility of the

30 ex-prisoners also extended to their family and, consequently, the family of the perpetrators is

31 seen as recipient of forgiveness too. Likewise, a victim expressed how when he forgave, all his

32 family forgave as well, as if that bond was indivisible:

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- 45 • ‘No genocide again, keep love. We have to keep the love, it is the only thing that can
- 46 create a better world, the best thing we have received is to be able to live together. We
- 47 have learnt this, and we want to help others to know this too.’ (1V)
- 48
- 49
- 50
- 51 • ‘Here, to live is to live-with. If you live alone, you don't live.’ (3V)
- 52
- 53 • ‘I forgave him and I invited his family to receive forgiveness too, he was then godfather
- 54 of my daughter's wedding.’ (1V)
- 55
- 56
- 57 • ‘I can't forgive him alone. Because I forgave him, all my family has forgiven.’ (3V)
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- ‘(I told him he could help me to work the land) Then, he came with a group of 20 people from the Association (AMI), ex-prisoners and survivors. After that, I decided that I also wanted to join the Association.’ (5V)

Collaboration on joint projects as a way to build trust and help others

At the end of their reconciliation process, some respondents described how sharing projects and activities is seen as a way to achieve confidence and ensure that reconciliation is sustainable over time. One victim narrates how he created an organization with his perpetrator in order to offer the testimony of their experience of reconciliation to others in need, drawing on their own experience to help others in conflict:

- ‘At the beginning, every time I said ‘good morning’ she did not answer. It has been a long process, initially there was no trust, now we work together, and we share projects and economic activities.’ (2E)
- ‘After forgiving him, we started to collaborate (joint projects), we have rebuilt trust with each other.’ (3V)
- ‘We have created a partnership to help survivors and ex-prisoners. I am the President and he (perpetrator) is the Vice President. He offers his testimony in many places and I always go to accompany him. Sometimes he goes to give his testimony to a place that fears him, somewhere he thinks survivors might do something to him... In those cases, I am always with him.’ (3V)
- ‘Now we trust each other, we are united, we work and collaborate together.’ (5V)
- ‘We have reached this point where we can now help others that are still fighting to overcome the conflict. Love and patience are the only way to reach peace.’ (1V)

Discussion

Through this inductive approach, some meaning-making and personally lived experiences that help us understand their reconciliation process emerged from the interviews. We can identify

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2
3 four key elements for successful reconciliation processes mentioned in the first section: truth,
4 justice, forgiveness, and contact.
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7 ***Truth and listening***

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10 The first category presented in the results section is '*The role of the truth and listening to each*
11 *other*' which can be related with several stages mentioned in Auerbach's (2009) Reconciliation
12 Pyramid. Specifically, *knowledge of conflicting narratives* (Phase 1) and *recognition of the*
13 *other's narratives* (Phase 2) but we can also see some elements of the *effort to integrate the*
14 *opposing narratives into a mutually accepted one* (Phase 7). The first two phases are presented
15 in Auerbach's theoretical model as the early stages that are necessary to move forward in the
16 reconciliation process were highlighted as relevant for the participants' experiences. The last
17 one (Phase 7) is presented as the ideal conclusion of a reconciliation process.
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28 First of all, for the victims, listening to the ex-prisoner when they approached to ask for
29 forgiveness was especially relevant; being able to talk to the other and learn the truth of what
30 happened helped the victims move from hatred and pain to emotional relief. Listening to the
31 other is the first way to decrease polarization, and this is key for any reconciliation process to
32 succeed (Staub et al., 2005). Through the search for truth society recognizes those who
33 committed the crimes and, therefore, responsible for them, and can also understand the severity
34 of the facts. Consequently, it is essential for justice to identify the truth of what happened (who
35 did what, how and why) and this is also needed to help groups move towards a shared narrative
36 of their common history (Spandler & McKeown, 2017). The ex-prisoners pointed out that
37 something very relevant for them was listening to other survivors' testimonies (not necessarily
38 their victim's). Listening to others that had gone through this reconciliation initiative gave them
39 the courage to approach their own victims as they could see there was some hope if they did.
40
41 Therefore, the elements of the intervention that clearly have an impact in their forgiveness and
42 reconciliation process are those that facilitate listening to the other in a safe context. We can
43 extract from interviews that being able to hear each other's narrative in a safe place allows both
44 parties to recognize the other's narrative and ultimately legitimize it. Accordingly, confronting
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3 facts and history and coming to terms with the truth is an essential piece of any reconciliation
4 effort (Nadler et al., 2008).

8 ***Justice and repairing the damage***

10 The second category presented in the results section is '*Justice and repairing the damage*'
11 which can also be related with some stages mentioned in Auerbach's (2009) Reconciliation
12 Pyramid. Specifically, *acknowledge at least some part of the responsibility of the other's*
13 *suffering* (Phase 4) and *communicate willingness to repair or compensate* (Phase 5).

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19 Particularly, all perpetrators had served their sentences, and this basis of effective justice also
20 helped to recreate a balance of power between the two groups which is also necessary to
21 guarantee the success of any reconciliation process (Gollwitzer & Van Prooijen, 2016). Justice
22 recognizes the responsibility of those who used the violence and the compensation that all
23 victims deserve. The victims must be in a preferential position throughout the reconciliation
24 process. Effective justice processes recognize people's suffering, increase feelings of safety, and
25 recreate a balance between the two groups (Hegtvedt et al., 2016). Every unpunished crime is a
26 source of new crimes. There are always some inevitable tensions between justice and
27 reconciliation, being both concepts that could be understood as opposite, but most research
28 emphasizes the need to establish as a basic condition to promote reconciliation the guarantee that
29 no damages will be repeated again (Aguirre, 1998; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Acknowledging
30 the past leads necessarily to the recognition of the truth of what happened and this one is
31 inevitably linked to the perpetrators' assumption of responsibility. Although these are
32 independent steps, in the case of the interviewees, one went hand in hand with the other. Thus,
33 often, the confession of the truth implied assuming responsibility for the victims' suffering.
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51 Likewise, taking responsibility came with the desire to repair the damage. Reparation implies
52 that the aggressor accepts responsibility, expresses a desire to improve the relationship with the
53 other and indicates that the damage will not be repeated in the future. Acts of reparation
54 facilitate positive communication between victims and aggressors by overcoming the anger in
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3 the victims and their sense of helplessness, and rehumanizing the aggressors (Nadler et al.,
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5 2008; Wohl & Branscombe, 2009).
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8 *Apologizing and granting forgiveness*

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10 Additionally, five of the nine categories are directly related to forgiveness (i.e. self-forgiveness,
11 taking the initiative to approach to the other, the role faith and the community plays in
12 forgiveness and its consequences). Consequently, giving 'forgiveness' a central place in the
13 interviews and, therefore, in the participant's perception of their reconciliation process. These
14 forgiveness-related categories can similarly be related with several stages mentioned in
15 Auerbach's (2009) Reconciliation Pyramid. Specifically, *public apologies and seeking*
16 *forgiveness* (Phase 6) but we can also see implicitly some elements of Phase 3, *expressing*
17 *empathy for the other's suffering*.
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28 Initially, self-forgiveness is key for perpetrators to be able to move on with their lives and they
29 narrate it occurs while they were serving the sentence, prior to meeting their victims. During
30 that time, the awareness of the seriousness of their crimes leads perpetrators to repentance and,
31 in some cases, self-forgiveness comes with the desire to approach their victims to apologize.
32 From the ex-prisoner's point of view, the personal experience of hopelessness when they realize
33 the depth of their crime is the driving force that makes them approach their victim and ask for
34 forgiveness. The only way to deal with the offense in a genuine way is to accept having caused
35 the damage and to try to make compensatory restoration. In cases of genocide in particular,
36 acknowledgment is crucial to counteract the denial that often follows (King, 2010). In the self-
37 forgiveness process, the person understands that he/she has harmed, contacts the victim or the
38 community, and offers to repair the damage personally, and, furthermore, reconstructs his/her
39 own image, looking for elements that allow him/her to maintain self-esteem and self-concept
40 (Hall & Fincham, 2005). In this process of genuine self-forgiveness, guilt is recognized, as well
41 as the value of the victim, negative emotions are experienced, and attitudes and behaviors to
42 face the crime develop as the aggressors seek to amend the damage and, during this process,
43 recover their self-image as a good person, forgiving themselves. Forgiveness, therefore, enables
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3 emotional release, growing self-esteem, hope, peace and increasing well-being (Reed & Enright,
4 2006). For both, that moment when the ex-prisoner takes the initiative to approach their victim
5 is one of the most meaningful moments and the one the victims value the most.
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10 From the victim's perspective, perceiving these apologies as sincere helped them forgive but
11 also certain supports (i.e., their faith, family, and community). The parties involved in the
12 conflict are expected to engage in a process of emotional change, by the expression of empathy
13 towards the situation of the other. Empathy is the ability to consider the other's perspective and
14 can refer to feeling what the other feels (emotional empathy) or understanding the other's
15 feelings (cognitive empathy). This is a difficult step, according to Auerbach (2009). Empathy
16 enhances forgiveness processes: apologizing and asking forgiveness for past mistakes. It is only
17 after speaking about truth and justice that it is appropriate to speak about forgiveness.
18

19 Forgiveness must be based on respect for the victims. When apology and repentance are
20 perceived as authentic, the victim's perception of the offender's negative characteristics
21 decreases (Aguirre, 1998). The willingness to forgive rebuilds the person, by releasing them
22 from the hatred and the desire for revenge and enables society to get out of the spiral of revenge
23 (Robb, 2007). Receiving the apologies enables the victim to regain the identity as a person
24 worthy of respect, and increase the sense of control; both basic emotional needs that must be
25 addressed in any reconciliation process (Porter, 2003). In this regard, the interviewees describe
26 the consequences of forgiveness as some feelings they experienced after going through the
27 reconciliation process (and forgiving the other): freedom, joy, happiness, a clean heart,
28 relaxation, a normal life again, a shared life again, openness to forgive others.
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48 ***Contact with each other***

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51 Finally, there was one unexpected result in the interviews that was not included in the
52 seven phases of Auerbach's Reconciliation Pyramid (2009). Contact with each other emerged as
53 a relevant category as the collaboration on joint economic or social projects was mentioned as
54 another element of the reconciliation-oriented intervention that helped them rebuild trust in each
55 other and also let the ex-prisoners repair the damage they caused. This contact between groups
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3 is the one that guarantees that the forgiveness and reconciliation achieved will be long-lasting
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5 (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The promotion of joint activities might lead to long-lasting
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7 reconciliation only because it is the end of a process in which work has been done to achieve
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9 mutual approach of both groups; therefore, minimizing prejudice and polarization (De Tezanos-
10
11 Pinto et al., 2017). For these joint projects to actually build trust and really contribute to the
12
13 reconciliation process, they must be perceived as useful on both sides. In this regard, they must
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15 be focused on the social needs identified by both parties and must be based on the principles of
16
17 reciprocity and equality. Only this way it is possible to break the circles of dependence to one
18
19 another (Worchel & Coutant, 2008). Positive contact between the two groups is essential in
20
21 order to restore confidence and to consider reconciliation as complete and sustainable. Positive
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23 contact, focused on collaboration and cooperation, would allow one to see the humanity of the
24
25 other, to rethink one's own identity and build a shared-common identity (Halpern & Weinstein,
26
27 2004).
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31 In sum, all four elements of reconciliation identified in the interviews are designed to
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33 facilitate changes both victims and perpetrators. Emphasizing particularly the role *forgiveness*
34
35 has to catalyze the reconciliation process.
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38 **Limitations and Further Research**

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41 There are a few limitations in this study that should be stated. Talking about the genocide is still
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43 an issue in Rwanda. Although they have already come a long way, there is yet much to do
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45 (Buckley-Zistel, 2006). Genocide and reconciliation are very sensitive topics and speaking
46
47 freely about them is not always easy. People continue to speak with caution because mentioning
48
49 some circumstances that surrounded the genocide and the post-genocide are not yet socially
50
51 acceptable. This situation makes it difficult to delve deeper into these issues when interviewing
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53 ex-prisoners and survivors. In this regard, we were not able to access survivors or perpetrators
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55 who participated in this initiative but who finally did not end up reconciling. Subsequently, we
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57 cannot incorporate into our analysis those situations where the intervention was not helpful or
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59 did not end up the way the facilitators expected. This led us to decide we would focus our
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3 questions on their reconciliation experience as this study was qualitative and the valuable
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5 outcomes we could provide would only be related to success stories of reconciliation. Therefore,
6
7 leaving for future lines of investigation the deepening in those cases where there was no
8
9 successful reconciliation.
10

11
12 Furthermore, only ten participants were interviewed. Even though each experience was deep
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14 enough to enrich our analysis of reconciliation processes, we understand that this research
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16 cannot be read as representative of all Rwandese (Grafström & Schelin, 2014). Nevertheless,
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18 these few interviews offer significant knowledge of key issues, opportunities and challenges
19
20 when delivering reconciliation-oriented interventions. However, we suggest further research
21
22 should investigate more deeply the features of these kinds of initiatives and how clinical and
23
24 psycho-educational interventions might impact processes of forgiveness and reconciliation.
25
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28 As stated before, each victim-ex-prisoner pair was interviewed together at the same time, (as
29
30 suggested by the association). This situation had potentially some benefits for our research as a
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32 way to investigate reconciliation as a two-way process in which both participants involved
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34 might contribute with an enriching dialogue (more than a one-to one conversation). However,
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36 the language limitations forced us to include a Kinyarwanda-English interpreter and, every time
37
38 one of the participants spoke for one or two minutes, the interpreter translated it to us. This way,
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40 the expected dialogue between victim and ex-prisoner was very challenging (Huer & Saenz,
41
42 2003). Although, on the other hand, the joint interviews were still valuable due to the
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44 researchers could observe other levels of the relationship between the interviewees expressed
45
46 through the nonverbal language (i.e., they looked at each other while speaking or not, they sat
47
48 together very close or not, etc.).
49

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51 One last challenge to conduct this research was trying to minimize the social desirable
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53 responding among interviewees (Grimm, 2010). During the consent process both researchers
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55 emphasized the anonymization of the results and that there were no 'good or bad responses', we
56
57 also organized the setting without the presence of any association member to avoid any kind of
58
59 social pressure. Nevertheless, the extremely sensitive topic and the country context, where many
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Rwandans still do not feel free to share their opinions or memories in public (King, 2010), do not let us assure that none of our participants' responses were influenced by some kind of social pressure (Tracey, 2016).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Drawing from our study, some suggestions for future interventions can be made. When designing a reconciliation-oriented initiative the seven steps of Auerbach's (2009) Reconciliation Pyramid must be considered and, contact and collaboration on joint projects should be added too. the search for the truth must be at the heart of the project (Spandler & McKeown, 2017). The victims need to know what happened and the ex-prisoners to some extent also need to be able to express what they did in a context of mutual listening. In addition, justice and redressing damage should be prioritized (Stover & Weinstein, 2004). Regarding the development of the intervention, it is important to take into account the role that faith can play in inspiring forgiveness and also in seeking to repair what was damaged (Staub, 2005). Furthermore, it is important to know that for some interviewees, the fact that the ex-prisoner was the one who took the initiative to approach them was very encouraging. It is also important to recognize the role that the families and communities might play. It can be powerful enough to trigger a genocide, but also a supporting resource for victims and ex-prisoners in their reconciliation process. Finally, to ensure that the changes achieved are sustainable in the long term, the impact that collaborating on joint projects has in building trust and helping others should be noted (De Tezanos-Pinto et al., 2017).

The results of this research show that attending a reconciliation-oriented intervention can facilitate a process that might not happen spontaneously without these kinds of initiatives. For some respondents, attending these workshops became a turning point and allowed them to leave behind the hatred and pain and led forgiveness to open a new future of hope.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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3 **Ethical approval:** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in
4 accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and
5 with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.
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9 **Informed Consent:** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in
10 the study.
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14 **Data availability:** The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable
15 request from the corresponding author, AOC. The data are not publicly available due to their
16 containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.
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