

# Reconciliation on Psychosocial Well – Being of Mushaka People after Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda

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## ABSTRACT

Reconciliation has become a high-level concern for countries emerging from intrastate armed conflict as well as for international development assistance in post-conflict societies. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of reconciliation on psychosocial well-being of the Mushaka people after genocide against Tutsi. The study was guided by the truth theory. The study used qualitative approach and a Phenomenology design to show how reconciliation was used to deal with psychosocial problems after genocide in Mushaka parish. The objectives of this study were: to examine the experiences that Mushaka people had gone through before the project of reconciliation; to determine the challenges encountered during reconciliation among the Christians in Mushaka Parish; to explore strategies that they used to promote reconciliation and the state of psychosocial well-being; and to expand the role of counseling for effective reconciliation and to promote healing through reconciliation. Qualitative tools have been used to gather information from both genocide perpetrators and survivors. A Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 5 survivors: 5 perpetrators and 4 priests from the target population of 480 participants from Mushaka parish. Data were collected using focus group discussion, interviews with both groups of survivors and perpetrators, and an interview guide for Priests. Using thematic analysis, the researcher analyzed the findings. The findings showed that there was poor reconciliation among survivors and perpetrators in Mushaka parish before Mushaka Reconciliation project. The reconciliation process was challenged by a lack of telling truth to both sides, a lack of the trained mediators or counselors, fear, and mistrust. The suspension over the sacraments in order to promote Gacaga Nkirisitu was one of strategies used to reconcile the Mushaka people. The other strategy was to gather both survivors and perpetrators to discuss their differences, charity works, and solidarity funds. The true reconciliation needed the counseling sessions in order to help people open up and be effective. This study recommends the collaboration of all institutions and the recognition of the role of psycho-spiritual counseling in promoting reconciliation.

## BACKGROUND

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been characterized by the largest number of mass killings in human history, in which 10.8 million people died. Armenia (1915-1918), the Holocaust in Germany, the Nazis and their collaborators' attempt to completely destroy European Jewry (1933-1944), Cambodia (1975-1979), Bosnia (1992-1995), Rwanda (1994), and Darfur (2003) are among the world's most notorious genocides, according to Roser and Nagdy(2018).

Following each bloody conflict in a country, an attempt is made to reconcile the people and rebuild the social fabric. In 2001, in former Yugoslavia, through the office of President Vojislav Kostunica, there was the creation of the commission for truth and reconciliation in Yugoslavia (Hayner, 2011). Kiernan (2008)states that Cambodia has had a series of genocides in which around 1.5 million to 2 million

people were killed under the Khmer Rouge regime. For about 20 years, Cambodian people could not talk about the horrible and traumatic experiences they encountered. The Cambodian National Assembly passed a law to create a court that would try the offenders of the most serious crimes in 1999. Its mandate was to include justice, truth, and national reconciliation. The report from this court was to bring fair trials in order to ease the suffering of the survivors. However, this court was not able to fulfill its mandate due to obstructions and corruption from the government. Therefore, reconciliation for the Cambodians was very difficult to achieve because many survivors did not get justice.

In 2003, there was a mass killing in Western Sudan carried out by the group of government armed forces known as Janjaweed (El-Tom, 2011). After 10 years, Darfurians have not gained the opportunity to heal the trauma of the violence. As a young nation, it takes time to heal because government has to unite the citizens around two major tribes: the Nuer of Riek Machar and the Dinka of the president Salva Kiir (Roach, 2016).

After post-election violence, Kenyans needed a national dialogue where every person has an equal say in the well-being of the country. The people have to genuinely discuss their differences in order to find a durable solution for a peaceful and united country. In 2008, the parliament of Kenya established the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya (TJRC). The mandate of the TJRC was to address the cause and effects of historical injustices and gross violations of human rights; this made the commission a contributor to national unity, reconciliation, and healing (Adeagbo & Iyi, 2011).

In his article Manda (2017) on healing and reconciliation as a pastoral ministry in post conflict South Africa, Christian communities explored several rituals and approaches to healing and reconciliation to see how they could be applied to post-conflict African communities. The findings show that in the African cosmology, healing comes as a result of the restoration or reconciliation of broken relationships between the individual and community.

Genocide in Rwanda has destroyed the country in all entities. It broke the unity of the Rwandan people and caused many social, economic, and political problems. According to Schliesser (2018), the genocide against Tutsi was one of the most destructive genocides in history. It has cost around one million lives in one hundred days. The victims were mostly members of the Tutsi minority, while most perpetrators belonged to the Hutu majority. Reconciliation is of urgency to prevent violence in situations, such as in Rwanda, where groups remain mixed.

Hatzfeld, (2006) observes that during the genocide, millions of Rwandans were subjected to physical and emotional acts of cruelty, such as rape, body mutilation, coerced participation in the murder of loved ones, and forced mass displacement from their communities. In addition to that, genocide has destroyed the Rwandese community on a social level, where people have lost confidence in one another. Today Rwanda continues to face multiple serious social issues, including poverty, HIV/AIDS, collective trauma, injustices, and interethnic tensions (King, 2011).

In Rwanda, it was very difficult after the genocide to bring the Rwandese community together. This was because of the traumatic events Rwandans passed through during the genocide. They have experienced life-threatening events such as war and violence, terrorist incidents, natural disasters, physical or sexual assaults, serious terminal illnesses, physical pain or injury, the death of a loved one, and imprisonment (Cafasso, 2016).

The government of Rwanda has initiated various programs to unite Rwandans after the genocide, among them the Gacaca Court. It was introduced to combine legal and psychosocial objectives through truth-telling, peace, justice, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation and was found to be very appealing (Clark, 2010). Reconciliation was defined as a technique that goes beyond settling a conflict's material stakes to restoring social relations and healing hearts and minds (Lerche, 2000). The reconciliation process in Rwanda

focuses on reconstructing the Rwandan identity as well as balancing justice, truth, peace, and security; primary responsibility for reconciliation efforts in Rwanda rests with the NURC (Thomson, 2013). Gacaca Court is a local tribunal set in the traditional Rwandan way of prosecuting the crime, whereby the crime is prosecuted where it has taken place. The prosecutors were the people of that local place.

Gacaca was viewed as a crucial first step in Rwanda's long journey of social reconciliation after the 1994 genocide. The judges focused more on the individual and ignored the collective nature of psychosocial trauma. The protection of the mental well-being of Rwandans was paramount because it involved remembering, recounting, and hearing traumatizing information during the hearings. Gacaca is an imperfect but necessary means of ending impunity and facilitating the face-to-face encounters necessary to reestablish social trust in Rwanda. The government of Rwanda has made a great effort to unite and reconstruct relationships between Rwandese citizens through different programs such as Ndi-Umunyarwanda (I am Rwandan). There are still some traces of conflict among the survivors and perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda.

Despite the efforts made to unite the society after mass violence, there has been a scarcity of mental health interventions for Rwandese people who were affected by the Genocide. Survivors need true justice to know where their people are buried in order to bury them in a respectful manner. This can be achieved through the processes of reconciliation, truth-telling, forgiveness, and establishing working institutions like those for counseling and emotional healing. Thus, this study looked at those other ways people in Rwanda should be helped to handle their psychological, emotional, and mental issues for their well-being.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

The research design that is used in this study is a qualitative approach; a phenomenology design is employed. Phenomenology is a philosophical term that refers to the consideration of all perceived phenomena, both objective and subjective. Literally, it is the study of "phenomena": the appearance of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, and thus the meanings things have in our experience (Husserl, 1970). The phenomenological approach aims to illuminate the specific and identify phenomena through their perception by the actors in a situation. In the human sphere, this normally results in collecting 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions, and observation of participants and representing them from the perspective of the research participant(s). Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, 'bracketing' taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving (Creswel, 2014).

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such, they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom (Lester, 1999). The aim, for instance, is to discover the subject's experiences and how they make sense of those experiences. All these are with the aim of investigating the effect of reconciliation on the psychosocial well-being of the people of Mushaka Parish.

### Target Population

A population is a human group concerned with the objectives of the investigation (Selvam, 2017; Bhattacharjee, 2012). The target population of this study was 480 participants (Mushaka Parish Report, 2019). This is 276 survivors and 200 perpetrators who have gone through the reconciliation process in

Mushaka Parish, along with 4 priests from Mushaka Parish.

A sample size of 14 was selected from the target population of 480 people. Five survivors, five perpetrators and four priests, according to what Creswell suggests: “The exploration of the phenomenon require a *group of individuals* who have all experienced the phenomenon. Thus, a heterogeneous group is identified that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78).

In this study the researcher used stratified random sampling to put entire population into three strata. These are the perpetrators group, survivors’ group and priests’ group. According to Deming (2010) stratified random sampling technique produces estimates of overall population parameters with greater precision and ensures a more representative sample is taken from a relatively homogeneous population.

The researcher classified the group into two strata: that of perpetrators and survivors. From each stratum simple random selection was used to pick one individual for focus group discussion and interview.

The researcher administered an interview guide and facilitated a focus group discussion with both perpetrators and survivors from five villages in Mushaka Parish. The researcher used simple random sampling to select one perpetrator and one survivor in each and every district of Mushaka Parish. The four priests who are working at Mushaka Parish were purposefully sampled for the interview guide since they have more information on this process of reconciliation. The sample size distribution is shown in the table below.

**Table 2.1: Sample size**

Respondents	Total population	Sample size	Sampling procedure	Research instrument
<b>Priests</b>	4	4	Purposive sampling	Interview guide
<b>Perpetrators</b>	200	5	Simple random	Interview guide & focus group discussion
<b>Survivors</b>	276	5	Simple random	Interview guide & focus group discussion
<b>Total</b>	480	14		

### Description of Data Collection Instruments

This study used focus group discussion and an interview guide as research instruments. Focus group discussion involves gathering people from similar backgrounds or experiences together to discuss a specific topic of interest. It is a form of qualitative research where questions are asked about their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or ideas (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2018). Interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Connaway & Powell, 2010). The researcher met with the group of survivors and the group of perpetrators for focus group discussion, and the priests served as the interview guide.

### Trustworthiness and credibility of Instruments

For the qualitative design, the credibility and dependability of the study were determined through member-checking criteria. During the data collection process, the researcher summarized what had been said at the end of each interview and asked the interviewees if the summary accurately reflected their positions. To achieve credibility, the researcher created a good rapport with the parish priests and used the same questions, recording procedures, and transcription procedures across the interviews. She then analyzed the data. Unnecessary questions were removed, and missing information was added to the instruments. According to Creswell and Clark (2007), qualitative researchers agree that qualitative trustworthiness, whether collected from an interview or focus group discussion, is evidenced by credibility, conformability,

dependability, and transferability. The researcher did her best to avoid bias and was as objective as possible. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews in detail to capture information. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews in detail to capture information.

### **Description of data Collection Procedures**

Primary sources of data are important to this research because they provide firsthand observation and investigation. This was used in the research, where respondents were asked for their views on the study of the contribution of reconciliation to psychosocial well-being. The main techniques of primary data collection were focus group discussion and interview guides. The instruments to be used for data collection are structured, meaning that the interview guide was structured. It was arranged according to the objectives of the study. The researcher guided the participants during the focus group discussion and interview guide by recording some responses.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Kumar (2006), the analysis of data includes comparison of the outcomes of the various treatments on several groups and the making of a decision as the achievement of the goals of research.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis approaches. This helped to analyze the results that were attained from the responses in the focus group discussions and interview guides that were given to the respondents, and this helped in answering the research questions that were stated in Chapter 1.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It goes beyond identification and analysis to interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Selvam, 2017).

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Cozby (2009), ethical concerns are paramount when planning, conducting and evaluating study. Ethical and moral considerations were observed in this study. Respect for intellectual property of others was observed. All sources borrowed were duly acknowledged. According to Wambiri and Muthee (2010), the use of other people's work is allowed only if the ideas that are borrowed are properly acknowledged, and permission is sought for such use.

Regarding consent, for authenticity, the researcher obtained written letter of introduction from the institution of learning, in this case, the Psycho Spiritual Institute (PSI). The letter was presented, respectively to the bishop and the appropriate government agency so that research permit could be obtained. Bias in the selection of sites of the study was avoided. According to Creswell (2014), a researcher should select a site without a vested interest in outcome of the study.

The researcher wanted the consent of all participants in this research. Consent was obtained from the school's administrators before engaging in the collection of responses from the different targeted groups. According to Kombo and Tromp (2009), the researcher must obtain informed consent from any subjects used in the study. The purpose of the study was explained in writing to the school administrators and all the targeted groups of respondents. The participants were assured of the freedom to choose whether to participate or not in the study.

The confidentiality of all respondents was protected. For respect for the respondents' privacy and confidentiality, names are not used in this study, and sensitive information was not disclosed. According to Gatara (2010), there would be a written understanding between the researcher and the participants in the research that their privacy is guaranteed. The participants should not be exposed to any harm by

participating in this study( (Resnik, 2015). During the collection of data care was taken to respect the site and disrupt as little as possible the daily activities of the research sites.

To avoid and help those who may have emotional problems, the researcher gave a counseling session before the focus group discussion and was assisted by two nurses (male and female) in charge of counseling in a nearby health facility so that in case the emotions come too high, he or she should be able to handle the case professionally.

### **Limitations of the study**

Findings of this study should be considered in light of its limitations:

1. Language barrier: the study was prepared in English, the participants being unable to express themselves in English, the researcher had to use a translator.
2. Political orientation: Considering political orientation in the country, it was not easy to get information. This is because of fear of saying what is not in the line of the government and because of the stigma associated with being involved in or a victim of genocide. There was a kind of readiness to share.
3. Culture: Rwandan culture does not allow for an easy opening, especially when it is a delicate subject like genocide. Some participants were reserved.
4. Transportation: Finding the participants at their homes seemed difficult, especially since it was rainy season and moving around the region was not easy; the researcher had to travel on foot all the time.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **Demographic Information of the Respondents**

The total number of participants in this study was 14. These are 5 survivors, 5 perpetrators, and 4 priests who are working in Mushaka parish. All 14 participants (Priests, survivors, and perpetrators) have participated in the interview guide of this research and 10 participants (survivors and perpetrators) have participated in focus group discussion. All the respondents gave their contributions, which gives a response rate of 100%. This response rate was considered extremely high to adequately represent the population targeted by the researcher.

### **Presentation of the findings**

Before the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Mushaka parishioners were living in good harmony. People used to work together, consulting each other on some issues that arose in society, and to a greater extent, they were intermarrying. There was a strong tie between the people of Mushaka parish. However, genocide brought many issues of hatred, killing each other, and suspicion, among others. Some community values were destroyed, creating emotional instability among the people. The following were some elements that characterized the people of Mushaka Parish before the project of unity and reconciliation.

### **Guilt and Shame for what happened**

Guilt and shame are the emotional states that carry a heavy burden. They are negative emotions that make people feel bad about themselves and can have negative consequences. For example, FGD Participant 1 shared his experience as follows:

*I was disturbed whenever I remember what I did: I killed children, adults, pregnant women, stole their properties, burned their houses, and so on. I was always avoiding meeting those I offended. But after starting the instructions about asking and giving pardon I felt relieved (February 23, 2020).*

FGD Participant 5 reported that he felt unforgivable consider to what he has done. He expressed himself in these words: *“What I did to my neighbors was too bad. I killed the husband of this one, I stole her livestock. I feel that I cannot be forgiven my sins”* (February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

This concurred with Schliesser (2018), who argued that Rwanda genocide was one of the most destructive genocides in history. It has cost around one million lives in one hundred days. Therefore, Reconciliation was very necessary to prevent violence and to restore Rwandan community, where groups remain mixed.

Healing these two states not only liberate from carrying the burden of the past into the present moment, but the accompanying emotions of fear and anxiety are subsequently healed. The two previous respondents, had in common that, after accepting their role in genocide(killing, stealing, raping among others), they felt different. Participant 5 in said:

*The one I killed her husband was working in Gacaca court. She encouraged me to accept my offenses, and then I asked for pardon. I did it, and I was sentenced to eighty years in prison. From that time, I felt different: no more shame to see the offended, we could meet and talk, ... I was renewed (Feb. 24, 2020)*

According to Schliesser (2018), there are four dimensions of reconciliation that are essential for conflict transformation: shared truth, justice, regard, and security. Truth is important as societies divided after mass crime tend to deny what members of the other side have experienced and thus need to openly recognize that they have different views of reality. Justice is needed as those who have suffered oppression or atrocities seek redress, which may take the form of restitution or compensation, but also punishment of those who committed injustices; justice may furthermore be exhibited in politics that offer protection against future harm and discrimination. Expression of regard by members of each community towards the other entails recognizing the humanity of the others and their human rights. Security, in the sense of personal or collective safety and well-being, is a constitutive part of reconciliation. Security exists as long as the adversaries feel a minimum of trust and have reason to believe they can look forward to living together without one side threatening the other.

In interview guide participant 6 asserted that

*People could not face each other; even meeting on the way was annoyance. I have never wanted to see a Hutu! To me, all Hutu were beasts. However, conferences and talks about peace and reconciliation have brought us together. I received the killer of my family as a brother or a sister, even as a parent. The killer has informed me how they killed my people and where their bodies are. I paid them a due respect to them. They are well buried. Today, I live very well with those who killed my family. They can be the Godfather of my children because now they are back to the church (Feb. 24, 2020).*

Guilt and shame were not only for the offenders; even the offended had those emotional behaviors. Genocide had left many psychosocial problems where Rwandese people lost confidence in each other after genocide. This concurred with Participant 11, who expressed his voice by saying:

*Before this program of unity and reconciliation, everything was a mess. Loss of human properties and relationships was almost destroyed. The sicknesses like cholera, HIV/AIDS, and others were too much during that time. On the health side, things were very poor; posttraumatic stress was too prevalent among survivors and prisoners; people were not willing to face each other; there was no trust. People fled in a terrible fear (Feb. 23, 2020).*

This report concurred with Schaal et al. (2012) that after genocide survivors had many illnesses, among them PTSD and depression (46% each), and 59% suffered from anxiety. Measures to promote reconciliation included retributive and restorative justice, reparations, sites and practices of remembrance, as well as educational and therapeutic measures. Justice, reparations, and memorials are measures that primarily refer to the institutional (macro) level of reconciliation and might thus contribute to a societal climate that supports a general reduction of mental stress in Rwanda. Educational and therapeutic measures refer to the group (meso) level of reconciliation and the individual (micro) level of reconciliation, respectively, and might thereby contribute to a reduction of mental stress in smaller groups of persons and in individuals.

### Post-traumatic stress

To exchange, to understand, to tell and discover the truth, to excuse, and to reconcile after intractable conflict, it demands willingness, mental strength, and discipline on an individual level. Mental stress can prevent those concerned from engaging in this process and thereby undermine peace efforts. Post-traumatic stress is a source of mental and psychological issues caused by experiencing or witnessing life-threatening events. It is a reality of human history. It is a result of war, natural disasters, or man-made afflictions since time immemorial; trauma has played a constant, distressing role in the human experience (Siedlecki, 2013). Both survivors and perpetrators had post-traumatic stress disorder due to what happened to them after genocide.

In the interview guide, Participant 8 reported that

*Whenever I hear the whistle, I find somewhere to hide. I remember those days when they were chasing us using whistles. I experience a strong fear, and I start screaming (Feb.25, 2020).*

It was like in group discussion, whereby FGD Participant 9 reported:

*I feel strong fear whenever I meet the killer of my husband. Sometimes I forget that I have forgiven him, and I start crying. In the night, I dream about the killers invading my house. I work up quickly; I start running outside like a madwoman. I am extremely aggressive to anyone who comes into contact with me (Feb. 23, 2020).*

In the study Schaal et al. (2012)) carried out on Appetitive Aggression as a Resilience Factor against Trauma Disorders: Appetitive Aggression and PTSD in German World War II, Veterans found that repeated exposure to traumatic stressors such as combat results in chronic symptoms of PTSD. However, previous findings suggest that former soldiers who report combat-related aggression to be attractive are more resilient to developing PTSD.

To avoid repeated exposure to traumatic stressors, there was a need to stop genocide and other sorts of violence that had followed it. Excessive fear and crying, acting aggressively, and talking to yourself were the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Reconciliation was there to restore the well-being among the survivors and perpetrators to avoid or minimize the traumatic stressors.

In the group discussion, FGD Participant 4 reported that:

*Whenever I am in the cell, I talk to myself. I used to view myself as useless. When I remember the people I killed, I used to see their faces looking at me. I shout too much in a way that disturbs other prisoners (February 23, 2020).*



The same was articulated by participant 1 in interview guide:

*I killed many people and shed a lot of blood. I think my sickness comes from there (exaggerated fatness). I hear many voices of the children I killed crying! Oh my God! I am dying too! I feel uncomfortable! "Forgive me! Please don't kill me!" he yelled (Feb. 24, 2020).*

Siedlecki (Siedlecki, 2013) comments that, PTSD severely and completely compromises the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual integrity of those at risk. People with PTSD seem to be at greater risk of physical health problems, including pain, diabetes, obesity, heart problems, respiratory problems, and sexual dysfunction, and may engage in riskier and health-compromising behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse.

In interview guide, with participant 12 reported that

*In relation to sicknesses, some survivors were engaging themselves in heavy drinking; others complained of strong headaches, fear, and physical wounds, and others were HIV/AIDS positive because of the sexual violence they underwent during the genocide. Some perpetrators could tell you that their life in prison was the toughest life they had ever lived. Some missed sleep, others had pains everywhere. All those were the symptoms of PTSD (February 23, 2020).*

### **Difficult to Forgive, Revenge and Imprisonment**

Before the unity and reconciliation project, there was a program to encourage perpetrators to ask for forgiveness and the survivors to give forgiveness as a way to unite the Rwandese community, which was destroyed by genocide. However, it was very difficult to forgive. The wounds were very fresh. It was easier to take revenge than to forgive. There was a massive prison for the perpetrators of genocide.

In group discussion, FGD Participant 10 reported that:

*This Nelson (nickname) was among the killers of my father. When I saw them, I alerted my father, who came out fearfully and killed him in front of me. It was very difficult to forgive Nelson. He has made us orphans because of his hatred. One day, I was coming from school. He bought me a cup of tea after he came home to ask for forgiveness. It was difficult to forgive him, though finally he was forgiven (February 23, 2020).*

The same idea was voiced out of interview guide by Participant 6, who said:

*Unity and reconciliation were impossible. The Hutu killed in the daylight, and the Tutsi killed in a hidden way (psychologically). They took revenge and put many Hutus in prison. I instructed my relatives not to greet any Hutus. Today, there are some perpetrators who have never sought forgiveness because of their guilt and shame for what they did to me (February 24, 2020).*

Forgiving is a very difficult process, the same as asking pardon. Some perpetrators chose to remain in prison instead of asking pardon from the survivors. This was seen as the trap the government is using in order to exact revenge and kill them because they have accepted their responsibilities in genocide.

FGD Participant 2 revealed to us in the group discussion that:

*Accusing myself was like opening my belly. I thought that what I had left was death. However, after that, I felt soothed and relieved. To accuse yourself, accept your offenses, and then ask for forgiveness was a very tough task. I felt that I would be killed by those who sought revenge for the people I killed (they cried). It was easier for me to keep quiet and remain in prison (February 23, 2020).*

This concurred with Staub's (2000) assertion that forgiveness is not an easy act. This is because people were affected psychologically in the sense that it takes time to enter into one's inner self to face the reality of the world. Nonetheless, forgiveness is very important because it allows reconciliation to take place.

The Challenges encountered during Reconciliation among the Christians in Mushaka Parish

The reconciliation process in Mushaka parish after the genocide encountered different challenges. Some challenges were linked to the culture, personal interests, and the nature of the task to be performed. In this work, the research developed the challenges like fear to tell the truth, Rwandan culture, marginalization, and betrayal of your people, and finally, failure to ask for and give pardon.

### **Fear to tell the Truth**

Following the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, survivors, perpetrators, and even the international community were terrified. This was because what happened in the last few days was horrible.

In the group discussion, FGD Participant 1 reported that:

*The challenge I had was the fear of telling the truth and asking forgiveness for what I did. I have been helped by the professional counselor in order to be able to say it the way it was. I was hated by those with whom we were together during killings for saying that I had betrayed them (Feb. 23, 2020).*

The perpetrators were afraid to tell the truth because the Gacaca court proceedings were taking place outside in public. Even forgiveness was granted or denied publicly. The fear was that if I said that I did this and that, my children, my relatives, and my friends would feel scandalized. The other cause of not telling the truth was that in the Gacaca proceedings, forgiveness was often performed through public confessions that involved the accused and the public prosecutor representing the state rather than the opposing parties in the conflict (Clark, 2010).

The presence of the public prosecutor had caused trait to the accused; therefore, these types of apologies were viewed as symbolic, and their genuineness was questionable because there was no dialogue between all parties involved in the process.

In the interview guide, participant 13 reported that:

*The serious challenge for perpetrators was the fear of being put in prison and the guilt and shame to meet with the offended. Another challenge was that perpetrators doubted the state's forgiveness and its justice. On the side of the survivors, the challenge was that if I said the truth, I may be marginalized by other survivors; I even may be removed from the beneficiaries of survivor's aids (Feb. 23, 2020).*

### **The Rwandan Culture**

Rwandan culture, to some extent, has become a challenge for reconciliation after the genocide. It is not easy to know if a Rwandan is happy or not. The names like "Hishamunda" (hide in your stomach: literally translated). It is difficult to know or see what is inside. Another saying like "Vuga Uziga" literally translates as reserve yourself while speaking.

The culture has become an obstacle to knowing the truth about what triggered the genocide in Rwanda. Reconciliation is always possible when the parties concerned speak the truth. Through this culture, one may doubt the nature of forgiveness among the Rwandan people. Reconciliation involves the members of the two groups coming to see the humanity in one another. This means accepting each other and developing mutual trust (Staub, 2000). The mutual trust cannot take place if the concerned groups are not able to tell the truth.

On the other hand, the Rwandan culture had also facilitated the promotion of reconciliation in Mushaka Parish through intermarriage and other cultural values.

FGD Participant 5 reported that their reconciliation was supported by the marriage of his daughter with the son of a survivor who was a soldier.

*My daughter was married by a farmer RPF soldier. This was an impossible event for me because I could not imagine how the son of those who accused me and put me in jail could decide to be my son-in-law, yet I killed his family (Feb.23,2020).*

In the same way, Participant 7 reported that

*The challenge I had is a misunderstanding on how to ask for and give forgiveness. There was a need to have a mediator because not just bringing people together forces them to ask for forgiveness, and you are also forced to forgive (Feb. 24, 2020).*

This report demonstrated that the act of forgiving or asking for forgiveness did not involve all parties involved. They were under the pressure of asking for and giving pardon to fulfill cultural obligations and Christian virtues of forgiveness.

A change of collective mind, especially when the socio-economic conditions are not dissident but considered from the point of view of non-persecuted people, can rather support it. However, as experiences of injustice and relative deprivation are important triggers of violence against other groups, changing a partisan collective mindset is an essential premise for lasting peace in post-conflict settings. For that purpose, it seems recommendable to open up mixed marriages (intermarriage) between ethnic groups in Rwanda. In this way, persistent ethnic stereotypes and ethnic injustice could be addressed openly and directly through community-based interventions. Before the genocide, Rwandans were taught that the Hutus had been oppressed and exploited by the Tutsis. After the genocide, the game changed, and the Hutus killed Tutsis. Intermarriages between ethnic groups should be accompanied by positive education in Rwandan history lessons.

### **Marginalization and Betrayal of your people**

Marginalization is about isolation. People who were ready to say the truth about what they did during genocide were risking being isolated by their ethnic mates.

In interview guide, participant 5 reported that:

*When I decided to tell the truth about my participation in genocide, my ethnic members decided not to associate with me. My family back in my village was scared and persecuted. Neighbors were no longer associating with my family members. They were living alone. This was because I decided to say how many people I killed, and those who were with me were accused of betraying members of my ethnic group. It hurts me (25th Feb.2020).*

The same was echoed by participant 7:

*I was hated by my colleagues' survivors. I betrayed my ethnicity when I decided to forgive those who killed my children and my husband. I was threatened with being removed from the list of the beneficiaries of FARG. They told me that I have received corruption from the Hutus who killed my family; therefore, I should live through it (February 24, 2020).*

In focus group discussion, FGD Participant 6 reported that

*I was put in jail because I decided to live together with the family of those who killed my husband and sons. I was called to Gacaca court to accuse (gushinja) a neighbor who is a Hutu, but I decided not to go there because I did not know his active participation in genocide. I was marginalized by my fellow Tutsi; in a way, I was told that I have to create or invent the accusations so that they jail him. It was not easy for me to say no, but I did, with all the consequences I suffered (February 23, 2020).*

Her testimony concurred with Heim's(2018) and Carney's(2015) that Gacaca was an imperfect but necessary means of ending impunity and facilitating the face-to face encounters necessary to reestablish social trust in Rwanda. During Gacaca, some people were jailed unjustly because of false accusations and others were also released, yet they were not innocent. During the gacaca proceedings witnesses could vote to clear or to crucify the accused.

This confirmed with Clark's (2010) finding that Gacaca courts did not bear the expected fruits because of the approach used during the hearings. The government has adopted the top-down approach. This means that the government was directly involved in interpreting the testimonies during the Gacaca proceedings. Through the collection of facts about past wrongs, this has contradicted the information that had been used to motivate people to participate in Gacaca.

### **Failure to ask and to give forgiveness**

The reconciliation in Rwanda after the genocide had a challenge of failure to ask for and give forgiveness. On the side of the perpetrators, there was no confidence in confessing what they did because they were not sure they would be forgiven.

During group discussion, FGD Participant 4 reported that

*I was approached many times to accept my offenses and ask for pardon when I was in jail. I did not believe in it because I said this was the trick of Inkontanyi (the RPF movement) to kill me. I denied it because what I did was too much. I killed many people. I deserved death; my place was not with people. Prison was my favorite place. The government and other peacebuilding agencies continued to sensitize people about asking for pardon. Finally, I accepted to open my mouth because we only die once, and I knew I deserved death. I was surprised to be tried in gacaca court; after serving 8 years in jail and doing my last 2 years in TIG, I was released (Feb. 23, 2020).*

The same was reported by participant 14 during interview guide:

*The challenge we had in this process of reconciliation here in Mushaka was to convince both parties to ask and give pardon. The perpetrators were not ready to ask forgiveness because it was a very difficult process for them. On the side of the survivors, it was not easy to forgive and forget. The wounds were very fresh. However, with the time and some prepared instruction on forgiveness, some concerned people were ready to embrace pardon and forgiveness (Feb. 23, 2020).*

### **The Strategies that Mushaka parish used to promote reconciliation and the state of psychosocial well-being**

To promote reconciliation, Mushaka parish took strategic measures that did not please the people but pushed them to enter the reconciliation process. It is about excommunication from the sacraments during a period of catechesis, a condition of having acts testifying change and closeness, and a public admission of the faults committed, especially by telling the truth concerning those who participated in the massacres and the place where the victims were buried.

## Suspension over the Sacraments

The sacraments are the visible signs that represent the invisible graces. The teachings of the Catholic Church view the sacraments as the heart of Christian life. A Christian who does not receive sacraments is not worthy of being called a Christian. Therefore, sacraments in the Catholic Church are very important. One of the techniques Mushaka Parish used to initiate reconciliation was suspension to receive the sacraments of those who were not able to ask for and give forgiveness.

In the interview guide participant 14 reported that

*We suspended from the sacraments all the people who were not ready or able to ask forgiveness, especially those the Gacaca court had condemned. We organized a special teaching for those people up until they were ready to face each other. I met them and taught them until they realized the importance of reconciliation (February 23rd, 2020).*

The same was reported by participant 13 in this way:

*The first phase was very difficult because, at that time, people could kill each other. The wounds were very fresh. As the church leaders, we took the decision to suspend sacraments for all those who were not yet ready to ask for pardon. It was a very difficult decision, though it was necessary to help them reflect on their lives. This decision bore fruit in that the concerned person saw objectively that what he or she did could not separate him or her from the merciful love of God. Then he/she accepted to pass through the way of reconciliation (Feb. 23, 2020).*

FGD Participant 1 in group discussion reported that:

*When I heard the church say that I could not receive any more of the holy Eucharist, I felt very bad. I was morally and spiritually locked out. I was comparing asking forgiveness of those who killed their family to being a Christian without sacraments. This was very strong for me because I grew up in the Catholic Church. However, my decision was very clear. I could not miss my faith! I mustered the courage to seek forgiveness (February 23, 2020).*

Participant 11 explained how their strategies worked:

*How did the pastoral process of Gacaca Nkirisitu actually work? First of all, genocide perpetrators were asked to abstain from the sacraments for six months. During this time, they participated in a weekly catechetical program on Saturday mornings. These sessions examined the connections between human rights, sacramental practice, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Over the course of the six-month program perpetrators were encouraged to share the full truth concerning their actions during the genocide (e.g., by informing survivors where their deceased family members were buried). Perpetrators were also encouraged to overcome their shame and seek forgiveness from victims (February 23, 2020).*

However, the suspension of the sacraments was a heavy blow and a shock for the Christians, especially since all those who were condemned by the gacaca are not guilty. Reasons why there have been reluctances, and even today, those who plead their innocence say that it is still an injustice that they are about to undergo; the decision was taken in general.

## Solidarity funds

The reconciliation between survivors and perpetrators was supported by the solidarity fund. The survivors and perpetrators' family worked together in their development.

In the discussion group, FGD Participant 3 reported that

*We opened a savings account where the members were survivors and perpetrators, or their families. I saved some money, and when my turn came, I could manage to buy a goat or a cow. All of us are faithful in saving. I saw this saving as a living sign that I am forgiven. I can share ideas with those I made orphans. It seems impossible, but it is now possible in Mushaka parish (March 23, 2020).*

On the other hand, the survivors saw this solidarity fund as the way of living the mystery of reconciliation after the genocide in Rwanda. Participant 9 reported:

*I have gone beyond my personal efforts. I accepted to be member of solidarity fund that was created in my parish. I was reluctant to join, but now I am a member. This fund has helped me to understand that I am not alone. I can forgive and forget. I can live with anybody, as Christ did. I can achieve development if I work with whatsoever in my village (25<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2020).*

The reconciliation in Mushaka parish had reached the other level. Both survivors and perpetrators work together for their development. In the interview guide, Participant 14 remarked:

*Today, both perpetrators and survivors are gathered in groups for those who were suspended to the sacraments. They met once a term to pray and talk about their lives. They had monthly contributions to support each other. They bought cows that they kept sharing the newborn among them (Feb. 23, 2020).*

Participants' social cohesion was enhanced, with positive influence on affect and self-confidence. This prediction is consistent with empirical evidence that the mere presence of others decreases reactions to them, that social support has positive effects on health and well-being, and that this affect is more positive when interacting with others than when being alone.

- **The charity work**

The charity work done by the perpetrators who were released were the sign of true repentance. It is possible that the criminal can change into a better person.

The perpetrators were ready to do TIG. In the interview guide, participant 12 reported

*The charity work done by the perpetrators together with the survivors are the signs that a person has changed. The evildoers can do good deeds. The killer can one day protect lives of others. Once people can do something good together, it reduces guilt and low self-esteem towards the others (Feb. 23, 2020)*

The reconciliation between the survivors and perpetrators in Mushaka parish was followed by charitable activities done by perpetrators for the survivors. These were like tiring soil in survivors' fields, some house chores like renovating houses, planting and harvesting activities, among others. These were in line to show commitment to the reconciliation that was going on.

Participant 5 reported that:

*I was not sure that I would be forgiven. After telling the widow of genocide that I killed her family, I was very guilty; I could not face her. When I managed to say forgive me, I was relieved. From that time, I started to be closer to her by helping her with some family chores. The charitable activities confirmed my forgiveness because after or during such activities, we could talk freely. In fact, we were so much close in the way I felt like a child in that family (Feb. 23, 2020).*

In addition, participation in mourning was found positively related to positive affect and indicators of positive social functioning. Reconciliation passed through the painful steps by which people move toward forgiveness and admission of wrongdoing, suggesting reasonable success.

### **Psychological Counselors**

After the genocide, in Mushaka parish, people were seriously wounded. There were physical wounds that medical doctors were attending to. However, psychological wounds were stronger than physical ones because they are hidden from our sight. There was much trauma in Mushaka parish.

To facilitate reconciliation, in Mushaka parish, the psychological counselors played a crucial role in supporting the emotional needs of the victims of genocide in Rwanda.

FGD Participant 8 reported that:

*I was not ready to face the killers of my husband and children. Whenever I saw him, I could faint. I was helped by the counselor who was brought by our parish. After I shared with him my experience of life, he showed me how I could overcome some traumatic experiences I had during the genocide. From that time, I was changed and felt new (Feb. 23, 2020).*

This was echoed by FGD Participant 4, who said that:

*While in prison, I was not so sure that I would one day reunite with my family. I could see all the people I killed in front of me; for some, I could even hear their cries in my ears. I was so disturbed that I became like a mad person. During this program of gacaca nkirisitu, I was brought to the parish to shed light on my role in genocide. I was not able to speak, and then I was given somebody to help me (a psychological counselor). I told him all I did after his advice: I confessed publicly my wrongdoing during the Genocide. From that time on, I felt transformed. I felt new creature (Feb. 23, 2020).*

Psychological counselors have helped in reconciliation process in Mushaka parish. It has helped the survivors to voice out the bitter experience encountered during genocide, and to the perpetrators, it has helped them to understand the badness of evil and to be able to say the truth to embrace the history of their country.

### **The Role of Counseling for Effective Reconciliation and to Promote Healing through Reconciliation**

The process of reconciliation is considered to be a journey towards the total healing of the human person from the events that affected him. It took psychologists to help people deal with reality and their own stories.

#### **Peace of mind**

The counseling session has a major role in bringing peace to the mind. In the interview guide, participant 5 reported that

*After meeting the counselor guide, I shared with him my experience during the genocide. I felt new. I was dead, but now I am alive. I felt as if I had a heavy stone on my shoulders and in my heart, but when I decided to meet my offended (survivor) that I killed her husband and children, I was energized and peaceful enough to ask for pardon. She didn't complicate the situation; she said, "Come home, we'll talk about it. This was the beginning of my reconciliation journey. I was very happy to hear such a consoling invitation. At her home, I came with a friend of mine and a local beer (Urwagwa), then we talked about forgiveness. I was forgiven (happily), then I started some charity activities in her home (Feb. 24, 2020)*

This was echoed by FGD Participant 8, who said:

*I used to fall whenever I thought about how I was remaining alone, yet I had a stable family. I always talk about how no child, no husband's (crying) life, is unfair. Today, I feel fine since I accepted to face the killers of my family. I am strong enough. I feel peace of mind. I feel renewed. The reconciliation has transformed me. I can eat with the killers of my family (February 23, 2020).*

This concurred with Rieder and Elbert (2013) that Genocide widows lost people, properties and their animals, which were killed and eaten by the killers. They lost homes, and all they had left was loot. They were stripped of all they had as a result of major traumatic events that would have enormously contributed to PTSD among the genocide widows.

The traumatic experiences affected a whole body; even the spiritual part of a person was affected. The traumatic experiences that survivors had undergone may have caused them to lose faith in God and lack a sense of awe and wonder about creation. They may disavow the goodness of humanity and the integrity of the agencies or people connected to the traumatic event. "Spiritual losses also may be reflected in a lack of hope in the future, the loss of trust, a sense of no longer being a whole person, the inability to respond spontaneously and optimistically, and the loss of childlike innocence" (Rogers & Koenig, 2002, p. 19).

Reconciliation had made the concerned—both survivors and perpetrators—implore the merciful love of God and brought peace of mind and peace of heart. Each and every one was free to work and journey with another after the genocide in Rwanda, because reconciliation was genuine.

Reconciliation was conceptualized in various ways. Crucial factors of reconciliation include on the individual level, healing from trauma; on the interpersonal level, changes in inter-group beliefs and behaviors; acknowledgement of guilt; repentance; excuse; a deconstruction of stereotypes; and a formation of peaceful relations; and on the institutional level, democracy, dialogue among opponents, tolerance, and justice, both restorative and retributive. For the most part, reconciliation brings peace to oneself and society.

### **Ask and give forgiveness**

The role of reconciliation in Mushaka parish was to help both perpetrators and survivors ask for and receive pardon. Participant 14 during the interview guide noted that:

*It was not easy at the beginning of the process to administer and introduce the issue of reconciliation among the survivors and perpetrators. Perpetrators were not ready to confess what they did during genocide because they were afraid that they would be killed too or that they would not be forgiven. The survivors, on the other hand, were also not ready to forgive the perpetrators because the wounds and memories were very fresh. Step by step, the church leaders in Mushaka parish managed to introduce the issue of reconciliation and forgiveness (Feb. 23, 2020).*

Reconciliation had made the concerned ask for and grant pardon. Without the essence of reconciliation, the survivor was not ready to face the perpetrator, and vice versa. Reconciliation from a church perspective was like the motivation for both sides to feel the essence of giving and asking for pardon.

During Focus group discussion, FGD Participant 5 reported that:

*I doubted the pardon from the government. The government takes revenge, the government jails. When my church called for me to accept my role in genocide and ask pardon of all those I offended, I felt relieved because I had been waiting for that opportunity. I trusted the forgiveness of the church more than the forgiveness of the government. This had motivated me to come out and look for all those I offended to implore true forgiveness (Feb. 23, 2020).*



The paradox in this process of asking and giving pardon was: who was supposed to start? Was it the offender or the offended? In this case, any could. The reconciliation aspect of life made each and every person concerned take responsibility for what could happen. A survivor could start the same way the perpetrator could. The prescriptions to forgive have created much guilt and consternation in victims who are not able to do so. The ambivalence about forgiveness is heightened by the lack of agreement about just what it is (Karkošková, 2013).

Participant 7 reported that:

*Reconciliation made me who I am today. It has been my painkiller every day. Before accepting to give pardon to the killers of my people, I was mad. I started misbehaving in one way or another. This was the time I tasted almost all the sorts of beer. I wanted to forget my situation. I was very bitter. Reconciliation was like the second genocide to me! The killers deserved death. One day I remembered one word in the gospel: "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is." I started seeing that the fact that I remained meant there was a message to give to the world. I have to forgive my enemies. From that time on, I decided to forgive all the killers of my people (February 24, 2020).*

Reconciliation has become the source of asking for and giving pardons. It had motivated every side to wake up and see that the only way to live as Rwandese people is to forgive one another and work together to build the country. Reconciliation played a major role in reconstructing the Rwandan community.

### **Stopping the cycles of violence**

Effective reconciliation was the tool for stopping the cycle of violence. Violence as a result of someone feeling marginalized or not involved in decision-making could recur once people were not able to forgive one another. Reconciliation required both parties to sit down and discuss their differences in order to find a durable solution.

Participant 6 reported that:

*Before reconciliation, I used to feel very bitter. If I had a gun, I could shoot all Hutus because they killed my husband and relatives. To see them in society was hard for me. I considered all Hutus to be animals. My wish was to see them suffer as we suffered. I could revenge (Feb. 24, 2020).*

This was after such violence that the survivor was contemplating shooting all Hutus. However, reconciliation had made her feel that there was no need to cause other violence. People needed to work together in order to build their unity and reconstruct the country.

On the other hand, the perpetrators in prison could think about revenge. Some killed others not because they were enemies but because of bad power (leadership). Therefore, for them, they felt innocents; this was why they might think about revenge once they were given opportunity. However, reconciliation had stopped all those ill thoughts on both sides. You cannot solve violence with violence.

This concurs with Rime et al. (2011): people who have been helpless targets of violence suffer a threat to their identity as powerful actors in the community: they need to recover some level of control and power. Perpetrators, who used to be powerful actors, suffer a threat to their moral identity. They need to regain a positive image. Reconciliation attitudes will be reinforced if victims receive a message of empowerment and if perpetrators receive a message of social acceptance.

In Rwanda, there are no more structures or psychologists who provide specialized mental health care. Two main structures are based in the capital, and there were only six psychiatrists working in the country in 2014 (Heim, 2018). Psychiatric nurses are employed in district hospitals, providing mental health services

across the country. Despite the effort to improve access to psychiatric and psychological care, the supply is insufficient to cover the high demand. Priests or pastors, traditional healers, and wizards are usually aligned with doctors. They offer answers to vital questions, including how to deal with the blows of fate, loss, and illness. By providing explanations and advice, religious and spiritual figures fill the void left by poor mental health infrastructure and thus play an important, albeit largely unofficial, role in Rwanda's mental health system.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study was relevant to society. Through it, the researcher managed to get the view of the whole society before the project of reconciliation in Mushaka Parish. People were living in a terrible fear, and others had serious physical and moral wounds. The project had many challenges because, at the time it was introduced, the experience and the wounds of genocide were very fresh. It was not easy to tell the truth or trust your neighbors.

Some people were rejected by their ethnic group's members; others were insulted, marginalized, and oppressed because they wanted to shed light on what happened. They were called the traitors of their ethnic members. However, with prayer, suspension of the sacraments, and other strategies, the concerned parties found it necessary to sit down and talk about their experiences during genocide.

Reconciliation in Rwanda required the active promotion of truth, justice in relation to past violence, just societal arrangements, acknowledgment by each group of its past harmful actions, humanizing each group in the eyes of the other and increased trust, a constructive vision or ideology that can bring people together, and at least moving toward a shared or inclusive history of past events in place of conflicting histories. Reconciliation has become an effective tool to reconstruct Rwandan families. It had promoted effective healing and stopped the cycle of violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study the researcher has the following recommendations to make:

1. The Rwandan government needs to review the process by which Gacaca court proceedings were conducted and find a way to encourage those who did not have the opportunity to talk about their cases during Gacaca proceedings to do so. The government has to reinforce the solidarity funds of both survivors and perpetrators rather than supporting only survivors' funds. This will be the way to strengthen reconciliation among survivors and perpetrators and avoid division among them. The government should also facilitate the work of professional counselors in the community and encourage people to use their services.
2. Religious leaders need to work together in order to help the members of their churches understand the essence of reconciliation in order to reconstruct the spiritual parts of their members and the country in general. Their teachings must be based on unity and reconciliation. Every church needs to support the reconciliation initiative by employing psychological counselors for their members. The religious bodies in the Catholic Church, like Caritas, the Justice and Peace Commission, and the Unity and Reconciliation Commission, might continue to foster the need for unity and reconciliation among the Rwandan communities. The suspension of the sacraments might be decided in the small community within the church and not be based only on the result of Gacaca.
3. The non-governmental agencies, both local and international, need to support the reconciliation initiative in the country in order to work on the well-being of the Rwandese community.

4. The findings of this study showed that there are not enough psychologists and counselors in the country to attend to the people in prison and even to those in survivors' associations. It is an appeal to all those existing psychological counselors in the country to help those up now who are not yet able to ask for and give forgiveness to do so because it is a therapy. The genocide having touched the whole human person—body, soul, and spirit—clinical psychology is not enough to cure all the men; psycho-spiritually trained counselors are needed for a holistic healing.
5. This study has shown that there is not enough material on psycho-spiritual topics. This study encourages Rwandese scholars to provide their knowledge on reconciliation through writing. This will create awareness among our young generation on how they can promote the well-being of their people.

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