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'Confession' and 'Forgiveness' as a strategy for development in post-genocide Rwanda

Author:
Anne Kubai[1,2]

Affiliations:
[1]Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University, Sweden

[2]Research Associate, Institute for Religion and Theology, University of South Africa, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Anne Kubai,
anne.kubai@teol.uu.se

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The government of Rwanda has pursued reconciliation with great determination in the belief that it is the only moral alternative to post-genocide social challenges. In Rwanda, communities must be mobilised and reshaped for social, political and economic reconstruction. This creates a rather delicate situation. Among other strategies, the state has turned to the concepts of confession and forgiveness which have deep religious roots, and systematised them both at the individual and community or state level in order to bring about reconciliation, justice, social cohesion and ultimately economic development. In view of these strategies and challenges, some of the important questions are: Does forgiveness restore victims and empower them to heal their communities? What empirical evidence exists that religiously inspired justice and reconciliation processes after mass political violence make a difference? In what areas might the understanding of religious thought and activity towards transitional justice be deepened? These questions provide the backdrop against which I examine the case of post-genocide Rwanda in this article. A hermeneutic interpretative analysis is used to situate the phenomena of forgiveness, confession and social transformation within the specific context of post-conflict societies.

Introduction

In post-genocide Rwanda, peace without social-economic development is not durable; hence development initiatives have to be sensitive to the current situation in which justice, trauma healing and reconciliation are crucial for the reconstruction of the country and its society. The government has prioritised the need to build trust among communities, bring about social cohesion, and build peace and harmony, all of which are considered necessary for the society to move forward socially and economically. This creates a rather delicate situation. According to the current Rwandan government, 'the integration process entails the implementation of programs to bring about a change of mindset' and create a 'new national narrative', 'a new moral order in which there is no fear and mistrust' Kubai (2014:93), the two elements which are said to have contributed to the genocide

To bring about social changes, the Rwandan government has introduced a number of public and social policies aimed at addressing gender inequality by encouraging change in traditional cultural attitudes towards women and also encouraging women's participation in decision-making at all levels of society. Access to education and healthcare has been improved and programs have been put in place to facilitate access to housing and other social amenities for the vulnerable members of the society. A number of laws have been promulgated to strengthen various social institutions. In search of viable solutions to challenging enormous social and economic problems, Rwanda has also turned to its indigenous cultural heritage for inspiration (Kubai 2010:272–276). With a wide range of examples, I will expound on the use of the concepts of confession and forgiveness as a basis for a national strategy of reconciliation and reconstruction in the country's effort to transform society and bring about social and economic development.

I will rely on a hermeneutic interpretative analysis, taking into account the historical and cultural complexity of Rwanda. A hermeneutical approach is suitable because it enables me in the process of interpretation, to situate the appropriation of the concepts of confession and forgiveness within the specific context of post-genocide Rwanda. I am persuaded by Deneulin and Rakodi that:

> Hermeneutics emphasizes that interpretation is key to understanding social reality. Social reality is constituted by social practices and institutions that have meanings for those who participate in them. Knowledge is therefore socially constructed rather than being about discovering an objective reality or universal laws of cause and effect governing social phenomena. (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:51)

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In light of this definition, this article seeks to interpret the appropriation of confession and forgiveness as strategies for social mobilisation for reconciliation, justice and development in post-genocide Rwanda.

Some of the data used for this article was generated through fieldwork in three large studies in Rwanda between 2004 and 2010 and through an on-going study on the emerging post-gacaca developments.

Framing the debate

Theology of reconciliation has many perspectives, but the overall idea that informs this discussion is the vertical and horizontal dimensions; which has also been debated by such scholars as Volf (1996:86–129, 140–165, 2000:96, 2006:22–33), Clegg (2006:123–137), De Gruchy (2002:31–38, 148–152), Tombs (2006:85–102). Among these scholars Volf is the foremost proponent of an increased focus on the social (horizontal) dimension, while Clegg differs and calls upon the churches to rely more on the social aspects of the theology of reconciliation in their own work with communities. De Gruchy defines reconciliation with an emphasis on truth and justice, while Volf, Tombs and Leichty concentrate on forgiveness and repentance.

A theology of reconciliation is chosen for this study mainly because it provides tools that can capture and describe the new ways in which the concepts of 'truth-telling' or 'confession' and 'forgiveness' are variously defined, re-defined and infused with new meanings with the ultimate aim of rebuilding the Rwandan society. Thus the ideas which informs the work of organisations such as the Rwandan chapter of the Prison Fellowship,[1] which runs a reconciliation project known as '*Umuvumu*'[2] and 'reconciliation villages', can be analysed. I further consider the theology of reconciliation suitable because I am persuaded that it 'recognizes post-modern difference and moves beyond the paralysis of post-modern parochialism to a critical synthesis of Christian revelation, African traditions and Western modernity' (Carney 2010:553).

According to Philpott (2007:32), a 'systematic analysis of religious practice of transitional justice has only begun' and important questions remain unanswered; for instance: Does forgiveness disempower and disrespect victims, or does it empower them to heal their communities? What empirical evidence exists that religiously inspired justice and reconciliation processes after mass political violence make a difference? Philpott (2007:4) further raises the question: '[I]n what areas might our understanding of religious thought and activity towards transitional justice be deepened?' To frame the discussion, I shall take as my starting point Deneulin and Rakodi's article, 'Revisiting religion and development studies 30 years later' (2011). As the title indicates, the authors revisit the debate and make some important observations. They suggest that

> ... because religion deeply influences people's construction of meanings about the world, development studies need to engage with believers' interpretation of social, economic and political reality in the light of their faith. This not only poses epistemological and methodological challenges to those constituent disciplines that are dominated by positivist approaches, but also has significant implications for the way development is conceived and enacted by development organizations. (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:46)

Deneulin and Rakodi remind us that during the 1980s re-establishing economic stability, reforming economic policy and rolling back the state were given primacy of place, and consequently religious values were side-lined. However, 30 years later the subject matter of religion has managed to shift to the centre of development studies. Indeed, it cannot be overemphasised that religion 'is an important force that shapes peoples' values, what they consider worthwhile and valuable' (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:48). The normative role of religion in societies has been highlighted in the fields of sociology and phenomenology of religion; and research has shown that 'religion has a considerable authority of legitimising (or delegitimising) the ruling authority of the state' (McGuire 2002:206). In recent years, material research on religion and development has also increased considerably: for instance, in the year 2000 the World Bank established a unit for development dialogue on values and ethics to improve understanding of and advice on the links between faith, ethics and service delivery. It was believed that this unit would benefit from the work of an earlier program on faith and development. For the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs), partnership between international NGOs and faith organisations was deemed necessary (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011).

The concepts of confession and forgiveness, which have deep roots in religion, were introduced to Rwandan prisons by Prison Fellowship International, and gradually they became crucial to the government's justice and reconciliation programs implemented through the all-important National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). In the peculiar circumstances of Rwanda, it is in the best interest of Rwanda's leadership that social harmony and cohesion are restored and perpetrators reintegrated because their exclusion threatens not only the achievement of peace, justice and reconciliation, but also the social and economic development of the society as a whole. Finding a balance between justice and reconciliation or between retribution

1. Pastor Deo Gashagaza is the founder of Prison Fellowship Rwanda. In 2005, he narrated to this author in a moving personal testimony how 45 members of his family had been killed in Rwanda and his yearning for answers which motivated him to return to Rwanda after 32 years of life as a refugee in Congo. He wanted to go to Bugesera prison and speak to those who had killed his sister. In the belief that the inmates who had committed most heinous crimes were still human and needed to hear the word of God, he asked to be allowed into the prison to speak to the inmates. This brave venture into the prison led to the establishment of Prison Fellowship Rwanda chapter (PFR). The PFR conducted regular visits to prisons where more than 200 000 genocide prisoners were being held, to preach and teach prisoners about the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Gradually through different programs, PFR was able to convince many prisoners to confess their crimes and ask for forgiveness. With the support of NGOs such as the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) PFR focused its assistance on both those still in prisons and the local communities among prisoners and genocide victims. For further details, see Samset and Kubai (2005:16).

2. See Luke 19:1–9. This project is based on the Biblical story of Zacchaeus who was a sinner but climbed in the sycamore tree (fig-mulberry) in order to see Jesus and went on to confess to Jesus what he had done. He was forgiven and the story is used to encourage perpetrators to take the initiative to seek forgiveness.

and forgiveness, which is crucial for bridging the gap between perpetrators and survivors, is a delicate process. Also, a sense of injustice and humiliation experienced by perpetrators is reminiscent of Rwanda's historical social inequalities and can evoke mistrust which, in some way, can determine the success of the various programs in bringing about the much needed social integration and development.

My earlier research on the role of the churches in reconciliation (Kubai 2005:7–31, 2007a), the survivors who are caught between reconciliation and justice (Kubai 2007b:55–62) and *Gacaca*[3] and reconstruction (2010:272–277) has highlighted the dilemmas arising from encouraging people to confess, plead guilty, and in return be forgiven. Initially the question was: Does a confession obtained in this way allow genocide perpetrators to really acknowledge their guilt and thus appeal for forgiveness? However, in recent years, I have realised the need to look at emerging evidence from a different perspective, with a view to understanding the impact of the appropriation and nationalisation of confession and forgiveness as strategies by the government and NGOs. Therefore, here I shall pick up the strands of this discussion and explore further how the concepts of confession and forgiveness, the so-called reconciliation villages and communities; and projects such as 'practical confession', are used to bring about the integration of perpetrators into the society. Bridging the gap between genocide perpetrators and survivors is considered to be crucial to the national process of reconciliation and socio-economic reconstruction of Rwanda.

Confession and forgiveness of genocide crimes

In the history of Rwanda, religion has played an important role, depending on the prevailing socio-political circumstances at any given point in history. The point being made here is that religion has been and continues to be part of Rwanda's system of meaning-making and meaning-interpretation, and hence has contributed to shaping new values, demands of propriety and interpretations of old norms that have emerged after the genocide. This reflects Berger's suggestion (1967:20–29) that the system of meaning-making and meaning-interpretation in society is both explanatory and normative, as well as McGuire's observation (2002:22–36, 73–81) that, since systems of meaning-making and meaning interpretation are created and held by people, meaning is not inherent in a situation but is bestowed. Important concepts such as confession are variously defined in the specific situation of the relationship between perpetrators and survivors of genocide at the individual level; as well as in their relationship with the state at the national level.

McCullough and Worthington inform us that the concept of forgiveness has a dual nature – the common material and the transcendental. In the common material world, forgiveness is a social-psychological phenomenon. Forgiveness is, however, also:

> … spiritual, transcendent, timeless … it causes people to revisit religious or spiritual memories that have been long forgotten … when people forgive (or feel forgiven) the experience evokes religious and spiritual thoughts, images and affects. To raise the issue of forgiveness is to beg questions about human fallibility and human vulnerability. The transcendent nature of forgiveness is profoundly difficult to pin down. (McCullough & Worthington 1999:1142)

Philpott (2007) reminds us that:

> The language of faith comes through in performance of apologies and forgiveness. It is often the religious who conduct civil society efforts to deal with the past and repair the body politic. (p.2)

Rwandans are largely Christian, with nearly half of the population being Catholic.[4] This could, perhaps, partly explain why the message of confession and forgiveness resonated with them (Muir 2010); and why the NGOs found themselves in such a unique position to propagate confession and forgiveness.

Prison Fellowship Rwanda developed different projects, including the *Umuvumu* (Sycamore tree), and 'practical confession' where prisoners built houses for destitute survivors (Samset & Kubai 2005:66–68). These programs aimed to bring perpetrators, survivors, their families and communities together in order to bring about reconciliation 'at deep heart and practical level'. The expected outcome was to:

> Free the perpetrators and the victims, as well as their families from bondage of shame, unforgiveness, hatred so that they can contribute to the new Rwanda where all people see themselves as Rwandans; and encourage all the groups to work together for the development and economic upliftment (sic) of their communities, which also leads to building trust and social cohesion. (Prison Fellowship Rwanda 2012:2)

The *Umuvumu* project has been hailed as hugely successful, as it led thousands of perpetrators to confess and seek personal reconciliation while still in the prisons, and in their communities upon release. The project contributed to decongesting the prisons, as many prisoners who confessed had their sentences commuted. The other project is the establishment of six 'reconciliation villages' (with support of other organisations) where communities of perpetrators and survivors strive to live together in harmony. It must be remembered that many of the survivors and released prisoners discovered that not only had their property and homes been destroyed; but also their communities. They therefore had no place to return to. In these circumstances reconciliation villages provided new homes and a semblance of community where they could establish new relationships.

3. In a bold move, the government enacted the Genocide Statue in 1996 to put in place the *Gacaca* (*mu-gacaca*/on the grass) traditional justice system in order to expedite the process of carrying out trials of perpetrators of genocide. The re-organized and formalized *Gacaca* aimed to serve similar functions as it did in the traditional society, but in a totally different situation after the horrific genocide. Though it is possible to find traditional courts in countries like Ghana and Botswana, Rwanda's *Gacaca*, by combining the restorative and retributive types of justice, is different in important respects and its novelty and ingenuity are so far unparalleled on the continent.

4. Prior to the genocide, Rwanda was known as the most Catholic country in Africa, but by 2005 membership to the Catholic Church had dropped to slightly more than 50% of the total population (Samset & Kubai 2005:30).

It is no surprise therefore that members of these communities support each other in their daily activities. They carry out income-generating activities to secure their livelihoods and ensure that the village communities embody social transformation and economic development. Prison Fellowship Rwanda was therefore committed to ensuring that reconciliation happens in tandem with economic development. Here, we can say that the outcome of the work of Prison Fellowship Rwanda as well as other religious groups and organisations resonates with Philpott's observation that religious leaders and communities

> … are effective in shaping transitional justice, in whatever form this justice takes, whether on the state or civil society level … First they derive authority from the status that the community enjoys in their society … as well as its record of involvement in political matters … Religious actors deploy this authority apart from whether they advocate their cause in religious language. (Philpott 2007:27)

Perpetrators and survivors rediscover the reciprocal exchange of humanity

Learning to forgive

Prison Fellowship Rwanda started its prison ministry by preaching to the genocide prisoners and encouraging them to seek forgiveness for the atrocities which they had committed against their fellow Rwandans. At the beginning it was difficult to get the prisoners to talk about what they had done, but eventually many of them were willing to learn about forgiveness and therefore were taught how to ask for pardon and how to 'accept' their crimes as is revealed in the excerpts below. The excerpts presented below form parts of the testimonies that I recorded with 100 prisoners selected from all 12 of the major prisons in Rwanda where hundreds of thousands of genocide prisoners were incarcerated. In addition to these, 18 testimonies were recorded during the *Gacaca* trails. Other testimonies were recorded with ex-prisoners in 2005. In 2010 further interviews were conducted with those perpetrators who had been tried and sentenced during *Gacaca* trials to serve their time by doing community service popularly known by its French name: *Travaux d'Interêt Général* (TIG).

Testimony by a female genocide perpetrator (Josephine)[5]

> I went into exile in 1994. When I returned home, I was arrested and jailed. A woman was accusing me of having killed her daughter. When the prosecutor asked whether I accept the charge, I refused. I was too afraid to tell the truth. Instead, I said that the woman was accusing me because we had a conflict over land since she was my neighbour. We were later transferred to Byumba, where they continued to teach us how to confess and tell the truth. I was jailed in 1996, but I revealed the truth in 1998. But some people with whom I was jailed still refuse to tell the truth, up to now. At first, I would tell half the truth and dodge other facts, until I became confident. They would tell us that this is the government of national unity, telling us what is good; and that, if that bad government advised people to kill, why don't we take good advice now. Confessing and asking for forgiveness demands a lot of courage and prayers.[6]

In this excerpt, the informant says that at the beginning she was afraid to tell the truth and therefore she told half the truth and dodged the facts about the killing of her neigbour's daughter. But after she and others were taught how to confess and how to tell the truth, she gained the courage to reveal the truth and confess to killing her neighbour's daughter. It also emerges from her explanation that the decision to confess was an individual internal struggle with both her conscience and the pressure from the society to take responsibility for participating in the genocide.

In 2007, the local priest at Mushaka Catholic Church in the Rusizi District introduced a new approach to reconciling members of its congregation who were perpetrators and survivors of the 1994 genocide. The local priest understood that it was not right for former inmates released under the presidential clemency[7] to return to the church and continue receiving Holy Communion without first apologising for what they had done, and seeking genuine reconciliation (reconciling with the offended families). The priest began to preach to inmates in Kamembe prison about the need for offering apology (confessing to the genocide crimes which they had committed) and receiving pardon (forgiveness from those whom they had offended). The priest outlined a lengthy process of how perpetrators were trained to use actions to make a 'practical confession' instead of the verbal apologies that had characterised the confession and forgiveness activities in different parts of the country. He introduced the idea of a course for inmates where topics such as life as God's gift, the commandments and the wounds of genocide were included in order to facilitate reintegration of former inmates into the church and local communities.

The process started with members of the congregation's acceptance of the terms and conditions such as losing their rights to the Holy Communion for 6 months. They would also be required to accept to report to church for lessons every Saturday morning for the entire period. At the same time, former inmates would be asked to meet and to interact with genocide survivors in their daily life. A perpetrator would, for instance, start by going to work on a genocide survivor's farm so as to initiate some dialogue. In the beginning this elicited different reactions – sometimes a survivor would confront a perpetuator and even claim that this was an act of mockery; but in such cases, the priest advised the perpetrators to persist and keep trying until survivors accepted the gesture. In spite of the initial skepticism that this method evoked, some perpetrators gained the courage to keep trying

5.The name of the female genocide perpetrator and ex-prisoner has been changed to protect her identity.

6.Interview with Josephine, Nsinda Prison, 2004.

7.By November 2001, the government claimed to have released 1,500 detainees accused of committing genocide while they were minors. In early 2003, the president granted conditional release to some 24 000 persons who had confessed to their genocide crimes. In January 2007, the cabinet took a decision to release an estimated 8 000 suspects of the 1994 Rwanda in an attempt to foster reconciliation and at the same time decongest the prisons which were overcrowded with perpetrators.

to get an opportunity to apologise to survivors and gradually people began to see results.

It seems that the church, which played a mediation role, has therefore provided both the material and spiritual tools with which to thaw the 'frozen' relationship between perpetrators and survivors, in the process laying the foundation for reconciliation. At the individual and local congregation level, many perpetrators begged for forgiveness (i.e. they told the truth about what they had done and offered apologies); while survivors accepted the apologies and offered forgiveness in return. When asked to describe this process, Mukandori, a survivor whose husband had been killed commented as follows:

> When many of those who were pardoned by the president were released they came back to their villages and once again they found themselves in the same communities as the survivors. This was hard for both survivors and perpetrators. How were we going to live together as if nothing had happened? But when the churches encouraged people to learn about reconciliation, we started to wonder whether it was really possible. I did not do anything at this stage I just waited to see what would happen, but when I went to my small farm, I found that an unknown person had cleared the land. It happened several times, but one day when I found Karekezi working there, I was upset and asked him why he was tilling my land. His response was that he was doing this because he did not know how else he could apologize for killing my husband.[8]

Mukandori pardoned (accepted the apology) and offered forgiveness to the killer of her husband in 2005, and the two families re-established their relations as neighbours and members of the same church. Later on Karekezi's son asked for the hand of this survivor's daughter in marriage, which was conducted at the church witnessed by the whole community.

At the end of the course, the survivors and 'repented' former inmates were brought together, and given lessons on apology and pardon. Thereafter a 'graduation ceremony' would be organised to mark the end of 'separation' and the beginning of a relationship of reconciliation among neighbours torn apart by the genocide. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) realised that different parishes were involved in different activities aimed at providing opportunities for survivors and perpetrators to come together and to seek reconciliation through apology and pardon. The executive secretary of the NURC at the time is reported to have said that the reconciliation processes initiated by church leaders would be more easily understood by the people, most of whom were religious. As such, their initiatives would supplement *Gacaca* courts because they would urge the perpetrators to reach out to those families whom they had offended and to apologise, not only in words, but also in deed. Here I can refer to Kelsall's general but useful suggestion (2008) that:

> A core set of values and beliefs – concerning power, accountability and social morality – that are widely observed across sub-Saharan Africa, have proven extremely durable and remain powerful drivers of behaviour. (p. 1)

8.Interview with Mukandori, Remera, 20th October 2010

This could not be truer for Rwanda, where fossilised ideas which inspired popular participation of ordinary people in mass killing, have now been re-invented and appropriated to inspire people to confess and seek forgiveness with the hope of living together in peace and harmony.

Acknowledging responsibility – 'practical confession'

It is difficult to judge the private and public perception of confession and forgiveness. Presumably, Rwanda's tens of thousands of prisoners would favour a system that would help speed up the hearings at the trials. Also presumably, survivors would want to see perpetrators punished, and in the spirit of 'restorative' justice, might welcome replacing long prison sentences with a more useful approach through which they would accept their crimes publicly, acknowledge responsibility and later on take part in community work schemes such as housing for survivors and *Travaux d'Interêt Général* (TIG).

The following testimonies of perpetrators provide insights into the phenomenon of confession and forgiveness of genocide crimes at the individual and public level.

Testimony by Uwihoreye:

> In fact, my role is that I personally killed two Tutsis … I even went to my home area and asked the women whose husbands I killed to forgive me and some were positive. Now I feel relieved ... and that is why I confessed and I am able to testify even today. Before they would give me the sacrament, I had to clean my soul. And now I feel that the country will be united ... I don't think what happened will happen again because even if you gave me a machete to kill, I won't. What I did taught me a lesson. I only served in one republic, but see what I did. We however need very much to change the hate ideology as the president normally says.[9]

Testimony by Karoli:

> When I came back I found that many people had either died or fled. I was also on the list of those to be killed. When I was brought here, to prison, I was relieved. So people advised me to get saved so as to do away with the fear. So God helped me. This was coupled with Gacaca's demand for people to confess and receive a kind of favour. So I feel that if I managed to ask God for forgiveness, I will not fail to do so to a person I wronged. What happened was done by the government and what continues to be done is done by the government. Otherwise I did what I did with a lot of enthusiasm and I felt that all was alright[10]

Testimony by Kayira:

> I am one of those who were touched by what happened in 1994. And that is why I decided to confess, I decided to confess and acknowledge the crimes I committed … I asked the government and people of Rwanda to forgive me. And in particular I asked those that I wronged to forgive me, especially one woman called Muwamariya ... She agreed to forgive me.[11]

9.Interview with Uwihoreye, Remera Central Prison, 2004.

10.Interview with Karoli, Remera Central Prison, 2004.

11.Interview with Kayira, Remera Central Prison, 2004.

Testimony by Jean Pierre:

> I confessed and accepted all that I did from the beginning. I even went to testify in my home village ... I have now confessed and pleaded guilty, something that has relieved me a lot. Before, I was hard and full of hatred and anger. I now feel that I can live with survivors as we continue to ask and show each other compassion. I do not feel that I have any deep hatred.[12]

These extracts of interviews with perpetrators tell us one side of the story of confession and forgiveness and therefore, it is relevant to hear the other side – the survivors' experiences. During a visit to a church in Kigali rural, I listened to released prisoners telling how they had been released after confessing to what they had done during the genocide, and how they participated in various projects as a way of being reconciled with their neighbours. Most of those who spoke were men, although the church was three-quarter full. Men and women were sitting on benches in rows that were separated by an aisle down the middle of the earth floor of the church. I turned to the women and implored them to speak. One timid-looking and soft-spoken woman then slowly rose to provide us with her personal experience of forgiveness. She said that when the genocide took place she was 21 years old and had been married for only 2 months. Her neighbours then killed her husband by cutting him with machetes. Afterwards they gang-raped her. She survived, but when she heard that those men were going to be released from prison, she tried to kill herself and when she failed, she ran away and hid in the forest for 3 months. By the time she was found, she could not speak. Finally she was invited to the reconciliation activities and she reconciled with the killers of her husband who also gang-raped her. She concluded by pointing out that these were the men sitting before us in the front row in the church. There is no doubt her testimony was moving. She forgave them.

Can forgiveness be incomplete or partial?

Another example of forgiveness is that of Odette. We sat in a small roadside 'milk bar' in Remera, Kigali and we were deeply engrossed in a conversation as we enjoyed a glass of sour milk. A man then came and greeted her (with an embrace the Rwandan style) and they exchanged pleasantries as usual. After he had left she said that whenever she saw him, she felt something, even though she had forgiven him for what he had done. When I probed further she said:

> Did you not see that our eyes did not meet when we greeted each other? He confessed to killing four members of my family, and I forgave him because the church and the government tell us to forgive. But I forgave him for what he confessed and he knows that I know that he did not tell the whole truth. He also killed two of my nieces and he did not ask for forgiveness for that. How can I forgive him completely if he does not tell the whole truth?[13]

In this case we see what can be considered as contradictions of truth-telling, of confession and forgiveness in cases of mass violations of human rights. This reminds us of the oath that a witness takes before a court, swearing by the Bible or other means to 'tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth', which implies that truth can be partially told. It seems that forgiveness can be partial, as Odette seems to imply. I reflected on this experience, trying to understand what Odette meant by pointing out that their eyes did not meet. I was wondering whether it might have been an indication or a reminder that the forgiveness was incomplete for both of them. Gopin too, observes that forgiveness is characterised by such contradictions as:

> … apology, repentance and acknowledgment of the past; a willingness to suffer punishment as part of forgiveness; ritualized bilateral exchanges that give efficacy to forgiveness only in a prescribed set of interactions; unilateral expressions of the gesture; forgiveness that is offered and received that cancels all other obligations; forgiveness only in the context of legal compensation, justice, restoration, or the righting of wrongs; and finally, interpersonal versus collective executions of remorse, apology, and forgiveness. (2001:4)

What emerges from the testimonies of both survivors and perpetrators, however, is that forgiveness depends not only on the pain and suffering of the perpetrator who is moved to beg for pardon, or to 'make a plea for mercy, but also on the willingness of their victims to show mercy' (Volf 2000:96). The case of Odette suggests that a survivor can choose how and when to accept a perpetrator's request for forgiveness. She can forgive even though *not completely*, and she has decided on what she could forgive and what should remain unforgiven – she will greet and hug the man who killed members of her family as is the practice in Rwanda, but their eyes do not meet. It seems therefore that there is a common understanding between them and they can live with the knowledge (i.e. the unspoken truth) of what happened during the genocide.

On further reflection, as well as in many similar cases, I call to mind Volf's thoughts on embracing a perpetrator (2000:102). As such I cannot but draw a comparison with the embrace that Odette should offer to and receive from the killer of her family members. I struggle to understand what it means for both of them to embrace each other in these circumstances. I realise, however, that perhaps forgiveness can be partial, even incomplete, and at the same time allow perpetrators and survivors to move on with their lives, after acknowledging the humanity of each other. This also reminds us of what Desmond Tutu, arguably the most famous proponent of reconciliation theology in the world today (Carney 2010:253), refers to as the common humanity of both the victim and the perpetrator, on which reconciliation hinges. Both the victims and the perpetrators are people, they are both human.

The old adage 'it takes two to Tango' fits rather well with regard to forgiveness. On apology and acceptance, the following case sheds light on the inherent contradiction that I am highlighting here. A woman who had been sexually assaulted during the genocide by a person from her village whom she knew well was so seriously injured during the attack that she was left for dead. She nevertheless survived and felt the need to forgive the man and has hopefully

12.Interview with Jean Pierre, Nsinda Central Prison, 2004.

13.Interview with Odette, Remera, 2004.

moved on with her life. She believed that through forgiveness she would find peace, but she knew that to forgive the atrocities to which she had been subjected would require courage. She felt that she needed courage to make a new beginning and therefore she offered forgiveness to her attacker. The problem was, however, that the man would not accept her forgiveness. He could not believe that someone can truly forgive such atrocities. This woman was literally trapped between her desire to forgive and to move on, and the man's refusal to accept her forgiveness.

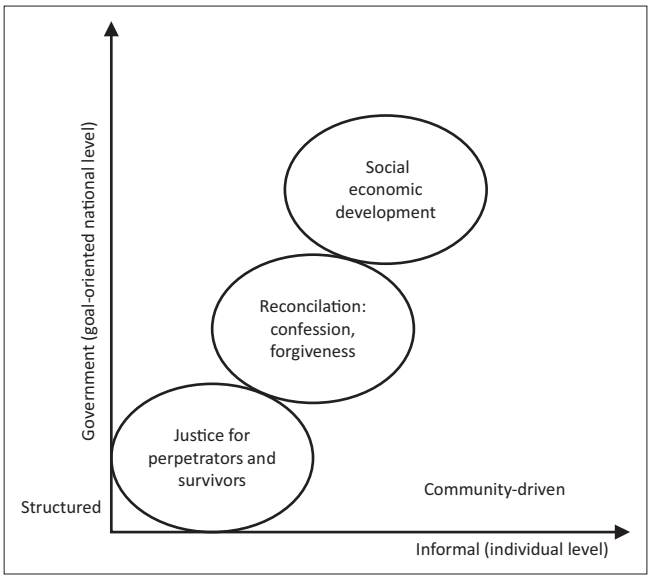
This case also reminds me of the reaction of a thousand prisoners who were released following a presidential decree in 2007.They felt that they could not face their victims in the communities upon release. As a result, they begged to be allowed back to the prison. This raises the question: what happens to both the victim and perpetrator when the healing and reconciliation process is arrested by the perpetrator's rejection of forgiveness?

There are also those who think that being asked to forgive their tormentors and killers of their families is not only a psychological burden, but something akin to cheap justice. At the beginning of the process in 2005 some even expressed the sentiments that the implementation of forgiveness was a mockery of their misery. Ten years later many of them might have gained new experiences and understandings of forgiveness and the individual and political purpose of reconciliation. Such an understanding does not, however, shift the moral onus to forgive from the victim.

Reconciliation in tandem with development and social cohesion

At the beginning of the *Gacaca* process, crimes of genocide were classified into four categories and perpetrators were identified as those who had confessed and those who had not. Those who confessed had their sentences commuted and after the *Gacaca* trials, others were sentenced to community service (*Travaux d'Interêt Général* – TIG), depending on the seriousness of their crimes. The fundamental point here is that perpetrators were required to tell the truth publically in a local setting, and those present in a *Gacaca* hearing would verify or corroborate the information provided by those on trial as well as the witnesses. This, in my view, is the foundation for the process of rebuilding towards nationhood in Rwanda, because development entails 'the progress towards a society of trust and openness that respects differences and desires to care for the needs of others' (Hong 2014:7).

Hong also reiterates that development in the post-genocide context entails more than mere civil co-existence. It requires peace that is accomplished through respectful dialogue and a willingness both to acknowledge the past and to look towards the future. This is what the government of Rwanda is aiming to achieve by nationalising and formalising truth telling and forgiveness. I will use the figure below to illustrate the interconnectedness of reconciliation justice and development in Rwanda.



Source: Author's illustration

FIGURE 1: Public and individual confession and forgiveness, justice and reconciliation.

As stated above, the confession and forgiveness process is both public and private. Considering the large numbers of perpetrators and survivors involved, there is no doubt that it was necessary for the state to validate and systematise confession and forgiveness as a strategy for restorative justice, which in the peculiar circumstances of post-genocide Rwanda, is necessary for the country to move forward. For the transformation that is crucial for socio-economic development to be realised, it was necessary for the state to create the structures for transitional justice, for individual acts of personal forgiveness to become more than isolated occurrences. The 'power and meaning of these acts (for the wrong-doer, the victim and the community) must be captured by a common narrative'. The state therefore 'has an extremely practical role to play in facilitating and broadcasting acts of personal forgiveness' (Inazu 2009:20–22). An 'unorganized' restorative justice process could hardly find the space and dynamism that the state exhibited through the *Gacaca* and NURC, just to mention two of the most prominent instruments of restorative justice in Rwanda. The *Gacaca* process has illustrated that multiple instances of forgiveness can shape transitional justice if personal forgiveness is organised and systematised as is the case in Rwanda. Restoration in Rwanda implies providing for material and spiritual needs, in other words, engaging in social-economic development for all. This is particularly important for both perpetrators and victims or survivors – not only because both groups are now considered to be vulnerable, but also because broken relationships cannot be successfully rebuilt in the midst of communities that continue to be ravaged by poverty or characterised by destitution. Reflecting on this aspect of its work, Prison Fellowship Rwanda concludes:

> There is nothing that speaks to the power of forgiveness like the Reconciliation Village: Perpetrators and victims who came face-to-face during the brutal events of the genocide have chosen to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and commit to living out the future together in peace. They have, in fact, gone beyond

> forgiveness. They have made a choice not only to move forward, but also to move forward *together* as neighbours and friends. It seems impossible. It is, without God's presence in the hearts and minds of Rwandans. It is God's grace, provision, and amazing love now reflected in the lives of the villagers that make these communities of reconciliation grow and thrive. Reconciliation is the key to restoring Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide. (Prison Fellowship Rwanda 2012:6)

Conclusion

Let me first conclude by briefly alluding to the import of my endeavor here. I have highlighted two important and interrelated aspects of reconciliation and development in Rwanda: confession and forgiveness at the individual or interpersonal and public or community or state levels; and acknowledgement of responsibility for both the perpetrators or offenders and the victims or survivors, based on the recognition of a common humanity. In the wake of violence on the societal scale of the infamous Rwanda genocide, finding the right balance between justice and reconciliation, or between retribution and forgiveness, is a challenging process. There is no doubt that the unspoken aspect of collectivity remains problematic – leaders and politicians have frequently advised Hutus to apologise for 'the genocide of the Tutsi', as Rwanda genocide is now referred to in government circles. There is a tendency to hold whole groups responsible for the actions of individuals, or individuals responsible for the actions of large groups. This is particularly relevant for countries, where one group might be held responsible for the conflict, without acknowledgment that there were individual members of that group who tried to save the lives of victims, or who offered protection in the hour of need. In view of these contradictions, forgiveness has proved valuable in helping victims and perpetrators establish dialogue that is crucial for laying the foundation for social cohesion, justice and reconciliation in this post-conflict society.

Reconciliation, building social cohesion and bringing about development are processes that depend on time, besides a whole host of infrastructure and resources, both material and non-material. Confession and forgiveness have been harnessed by both the state and the religious organisations as a strategy to contribute to the realisation of these processes. But the point that I would like to reiterate here is that one important and innovative aspect of confession and forgiveness of genocide crimes is the 'practical'. The notion of practical confession (and practical forgiveness) is Rwanda's addition to the now familiar processes of truth and reconciliation commissions. Through projects such as the *Umuvumu*, the practices of reconciliation are presented as holistic, relational and ultimately transformative. Through such projects perpetrators and survivors formed groups to discuss repentance and how they could move together towards forgiveness and reconciliation. In this process of dialogue, perpetrators who repented were asked to demonstrate their sense of remorse and willingness to be forgiven practically by building houses for survivors whose homes had been destroyed during the genocide and now had nowhere to live. By accepting the houses built for them (the gift from perpetrators), victims in turn rehabilitated the perpetrator and at the same time relieved themselves of the burden of 'unforgiveness'. The message for the public is that the communities of perpetrators and survivors who live in the reconciliation villages have not only practically demonstrated the purpose of practical confession, but through working together in practical reconciliation efforts such as agricultural projects, community housing and supporting the vulnerable members of their communities, have moved beyond mere words. Through purposeful action, not by just talking, but by doing, they have translated forgiveness into opportunities that can boost their welfare and social transformation.

From the excerpts of the interviews that I have presented above, it is clear that, though forgiveness is sought by an individual and granted by an individual – because a group cannot forgive collectively – in the context of transitional justice, forgiveness is neither private nor individual. In these testimonies of confession and forgiveness, individual perpetrators make public confessions and request for forgiveness from individual survivors and their families. Some extend their apologies to 'the people of Rwanda'. Through the *Gacaca* process, apology and pardon were expressed in public official settings such as those organised by the churches and the state through the NURC. In this sense, forgiveness becomes shared as a public good; an aspect of good governance that is deemed crucial for economic development. Reconciliation in Rwanda is not only for the purpose of building peace between Hutu and Tutsi, though this is crucial, but even more important is the need to maintain peaceful communities in order to work for the development of the country so as to achieve Vision 2020[14] that is expected to push the country out of the group of least developed countries (LDCs) to middle income level.

To return to the theology of reconciliation in conclusion, I concur with Hatch's observation that recent models of reconciliation, including that of Rwanda, 'have shifted away from the legalistic, hierarchical redemption model that dominated Western theology for centuries toward a discovery of the relational emphasis in the gospel teachings' (Hatch n.d.:5). The relational aspect links directly to the wellbeing not only of the individuals (both perpetrator and victim or survivor) but of emerging reconciliation communities in a nation that is struggling to heal and rise like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes of genocide.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

14.The government of Rwanda's national development strategy is articulated in its Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS). In February 2007, the Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Sport and Culture and the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission were mandated to establish strategies to make Vision 2020, the Development Millennium Goals and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy understandable to Rwandans.

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