

## **THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF TESTIMONY FOR LOCAL RECONCILIATION IN RWANDA**

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### **Abstract**

The genocide against the Tutsi raises huge challenges about post-genocide reconciliation. One of the principal practices used in Rwanda to promote reconciliation was testimony about past violence. When the justice process known as Gacaca opened in Rwanda, one of its chief activities was a nationwide collection of testimonies from witnesses of genocide. This article results from a micro-level analysis of reconciliation practices in Rwanda. It addresses the following question: How have testimonies of perpetrators and survivors promoted reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda? It argues that perpetrators and survivors' testimonies led to their reconciliation in three ways: through the acquisition of information about what happened during the genocide, through healing and through social interaction. Perpetrators' testimonies provided information about the unfolding of the genocide, the perpetrators' responsibility and about the fate of survivors 'lost parents and friends. They appeared as both testimony and apology. On the other hand, survivors' testimonies constituted a response to perpetrators' testimonies. Both paved a way for a dialogue in which apology and forgiveness led to what I call here proclamation of reconciliation. From the multiple uses of these testimonies in Rwanda, I conclude that they contain not just cognitive aspects about the past, but also the potential to manage emotions, both at individual level through healing processes, as well as at social level through interaction. This study is empirical. It uses a semi-structured interview method, analysing 80 testimonies from survivors and perpetrators from five districts of Rwanda. It also relies on the existing literature on testimony, on emotions and on reconciliation in other post-conflict situations. Its major contribution is the way it highlights how international and national policies of reconciliation work at local levels, between two persons, one survivor and one perpetrator through their encounter or distance, dialogue or avoidance, then proclamation of reconciliation and its outcomes.

### **Key Words**

Rwanda; Testimony; Healing; Perpetrator; Survivor; Local Reconciliation.

### **Introduction**

The grassroots justice process in Rwanda known as Gacaca started with a nationwide collection of testimonies from witnesses of the genocide against the Tutsi. This occurred mainly in 2005 and 2006, although a pilot programme had collected a few testimonies before those dates. Perpetrators, victims, and bystanders narrated what they witnessed between 1990 and 1994. Perpetrators' testimonies enabled the victims to know what had happened to their family members who were killed. Perpetrators informed victims on who was responsible, on the circumstances under which they were killed, and most importantly, where their bodies were located. These testimonies contained also their confession and apology.<sup>1</sup> It was expected that the victims' testimonies would be about forgiving their perpetrators. This was the beginning of a reconciliation process that would take place between the two groups.

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This article analyses carefully these perpetrators' testimonies at a micro level with the intention to understand the testifying of the perpetrator and the response of the survivor to it. It addresses the following question: How have testimonies of perpetrators and survivors promoted reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda?

This study is empirical. It is based on the evidence gathered from 80 genocide perpetrators and survivors in five districts of Rwanda (Nyarugenge, Bugesera, Muhanga, Karongi and Nyamasheke). These informants narrate how the genocide took place in their vicinity and how they witnessed it. They also narrate how they reconciled after the genocide. 40 survivors (8 from each District) were selected in the sample. Then each of them selected one perpetrator who has wronged him/her or his/her family and with whom they proclaim to have reconciled. This amounted to 40 perpetrators (also 8 from each District). Therefore, this research used a semi-structured interview method. The purpose was to understand the process that led to their reconciliation. Specifically, I wanted to understand to what extent the narration of the perpetrator about his/her role in the genocide helped the survivor he/she had wronged to forgive him/her, and whether the forgiveness led to reconciliation. In practice, I collected two parts of narratives from each respondent: a genocide memory narrative, i.e., what happened during the genocide; and a reconciliation narrative, i.e., how the perpetrator reconciled with the victim. This study also relies on the existing literature on testimony, on emotions and on reconciliation in other post-conflict situations.

It is worth noting that these testimonies were produced in order to reconcile the perpetrators and the victims. I argue that it is only when the testimony of the perpetrators provided precious information or additional information to victims that they accepted to forgive them, and ultimately, they reconciled. Secondly, the attitude of perpetrators while testifying also mattered. For example, their capacity to have - or at least to display - humility, empathy and a timorous heart while testifying enabled the victims to start a process of forgiving their perpetrators. However, in a few cases, victims forgave the perpetrators even before they testified about their wrongs. I also argue that testifying opened new avenues for healing and social interaction for both the perpetrators and the victims.

The first section sets a historical background about genocide and the reconciliation process in Rwanda. The second section shows how perpetrators' testimony provided valuable information to victims and how this process led to their proclamation of reconciliation. The third section is about healing benefits of testimony and proclamation of reconciliation between the perpetrators and the victims. The last section highlights the possibilities of interaction and the uses of testimony for reconciliation.

### **Background to Reconciliation in Rwanda**

The agency, the geography and victimhood of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda has made reconciliation an obligation in post-genocide Rwanda. This genocide claimed the lives of more than one million Tutsi in the whole territory of Rwanda. Victims failed to find hiding places because of very few forests. Victims lived side by side with those who became their perpetrators. This made it easy to identify them. Furthermore, national and local leaders devised sophisticated strategies of misleading the victims. They promised them some security if they gathered at public spaces such as administrative buildings, schools and commercial centres. Once Tutsi groups gathered there, killing machines appeared and massacred them. The state mobilized a huge number of ordinary citizens to take part in the genocide. As a

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result, more than one million Hutu became perpetrators. Most often neighbours killed neighbours.<sup>2</sup>

After the genocide, perpetrators and victims found themselves living again side by side. Peaceful coexistence required heroic sacrifices on both sides. The government of Rwanda initiated and supported unity and reconciliation policies since its inception in July 1994. The churches and many other civil society organizations joined the reconciliation activities. This became a background to reconciliation efforts that ensued between Rwandan citizens.

Everyday life conditions also obliged the Hutu and the Tutsi to interact. They realized that the welfare of both depended on their mutual interaction, just as it had been the case before the genocide. The Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) conducted a research in 2015 called Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer. According to this study, social cohesion in Rwanda has much improved since 1994. Respondents assert to have engaged in interaction, convivial relations, trust, solidarity and friendship with other Rwandans of different ethnic, religious and regional origins at more than 90 percent.<sup>3</sup>

### **Testimony for Information**

Testimony has been one of key tools for information gathering about past violence. Peter J. Graham argues that the basic expectation from a testimony is information: “Testimony is intuitively an information transmitter; testimony disseminates information.”<sup>4</sup> This information has to be useful for both the perpetrator and the victims of mass atrocities. This leads us to the parallel concept of economy of testimony<sup>5</sup> to mean that which the witnesses intend to reach following their testifying. Ari Kohen calls this a useful information or a real information:

Victims and their loved ones [...] ‘need real information, not speculation or the legally constrained information that comes from a trial or plea agreement’. [...] [I]n South Africa, many victims’ families wanted to know where the remains of their loved ones could be found for proper burial...<sup>6</sup>

To this instrumentality of testimony, Anneleen Spiessens adds morality and social responsibility:

The witness ‘was there’, has seen and experienced events – catastrophic events – that are unknown to the audience, and is therefore endowed with authority. [...] [A] testimony is not a simple “transfer of information”, a static report on verifiable facts, but constitutes an ethical act, as the witness “incarnates” a truth about history and becomes a “living memory.”<sup>7</sup>

Humphrey argues that speaking and listening, i.e., testifying, are at the heart of the process of reconciliation. This enables the actors to reconstruct what he calls public recollection of past mass violence and therefore to pave the way for future reconciliation. Reconciliation is needed, more especially for people who need to continue living together as a nation again. And Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have been resorting to the collection of testimonies of what happened during past violence, whether wars, massacres, genocides, or any other form of killing or human right violation. When perpetrators and victims narrate their experiences of the past, this becomes the starting point for paving the way for healing and later on reconciliation. But the testimony has its own difficulties.<sup>8</sup>

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Analysing the South African case of apartheid and the work of the TRC in that country, Verdoolaege explains how lack of testimony about apartheid is an act of forgetting the “brutality of the past” and collecting testimonies became the main task or mandate of the TRC.<sup>9</sup>

In the Rwandan case, a careful analysis of the content of perpetrators’ testimonies reveals that they contained valuable information about what happened during the genocide, what role the perpetrators played in general in killings of Tutsi that took place from April to July 1994, and their responsibility in the victimization of the particular victim that they were interviewed with in this research. In this section, I present cases of survivors who proclaim to have reconciled with their perpetrators because of the information they gave them about what happened to their families during the genocide.

The testimony of the perpetrator was important first in providing information about who killed the victim’s family members. It contained other useful details that helped to reconstruct the circumstances under which this killing took place. There were two possibilities. In the first, the perpetrator was the only one who provided this information to the victim; hence, the information became very precious. In the second possibility, the perpetrator provided information known to the victim as well, but brought additional details. These became also useful.

### ***Where the Perpetrator is the only One who provided this Information***

Because of the uniqueness and scarcity of this information, even when the victim thought the perpetrator knew more than he/she narrated, still he/she forgave him/her. For example, one perpetrator from Karongi District, Munyaneza Israel, informed Rwemarika Yesaya, a survivor of genocide, that he was among those who killed his wife and children. This was the first time this survivor heard about this. This confession gave him some relief, later on he forgave him. The perpetrator was among the hard-core killers of Mubuga, since he testifies to have killed nine people, including one child from the survivor Rwemarika Yesaya. Rwemarika reconciled with Munyaneza despite the fact that he was not satisfied about the amount of information he gave him. He thinks that Munyaneza knew more than what he narrated.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, when the perpetrator gave an information hidden by the in-law family about their involvement in the killing of a Tutsi in-law, this information came as precious. This also instilled forgiveness and reconciliation. In this regard, a perpetrator from Nyarugenge District, Kalisa Elias, was among those who attacked the children of Twahirwa Innocent, a survivor. He had fled to Kigali city and hid in the Sainte Famille Parish church. He survived but lost children, except one daughter who went to hide at her maternal grandmother who was Hutu. Kalisa gave five names of perpetrators who killed Twahirwa’s children. Among the killers there was a certain Kayiranga who was brother-in-law of Twahirwa. No one else had provided this information to Twahirwa. So, when he learnt this from Kalisa, he decided to forgive him for having given him this information.<sup>11</sup>

The perpetrator could also inform the victim about his/her own role in killing victim’s family members. This was both information and testimony for apologizing. When the perpetrator disclosed other perpetrators who took part in the killing of the victim family members, that was much better. For example, a lady Nyirampfaguterura took part in the killing of the mother of Nzabamwita. She also came to apologize about it in 2003. She informed the victim about who were responsible for the killing of her family members and apologized for the killing of his mother. She also informed the victim about the whereabouts

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of the body of his mother. When they dug the place, they found the body there. No one knew that she had taken part in this killing. Because of this confession, Nzabamwita forgave her.<sup>12</sup>

A respondent who was not perpetrator could also decide to apologize on behalf of his/her family members. At the same time, he/she could give information about how the killing of victims took place. For instance, a lady called Umugwaneza Honorine decided to apologize for the crime of her father Bitihinda John. She apologized to the family of Mababa John. This family had fled to Kibuye and was hidden by Bitihinda. But the latter collided with the killers against two daughters of Mababa's family. These two daughters were killed and thrown in the Nyabarongo river. Later, Honorine informed the daughter of the victim called Mukeshimana Sadiya about the killing of her sisters. Sadiya says that this information about who killed her sisters and how they were put in the Nyabarongo river made them accept to reconcile with Honorine's family. This case shows to what extent reconciliation is a family matter, because children apologize to children, although parents are the ones who had committed the crime. Yet in formal justice, crime and punishment are individual.<sup>13</sup>

In the same vein, Uwamariya Shadiya went to apologize to Uwamahoro Seraphine for the crime that her father Uzabakiriho committed against the family of Seraphine. He had been part of the mob that killed Seraphine's parents. Seraphine was a baby at the time of the genocide. She got rescued and raised by her grand-mother. It is her grand-mother who informed her about what happened during the genocide. The testimony of Uwamariya Shadiya informed her about the way her parents were killed, and about their plot of land located in a place called Biryogo. Since they were neighbours, they knew the size of this land. Seraphine could not know about it since she was a baby in 1994. This information enabled her to recover the portion of land that the neighbours had confiscated. Now she has an updated land title thanks to this information. The two later proclaimed to have reconciled.<sup>14</sup>

The apology of Uwamariya Shadiya also proves to what extent the information given to survivors who were babies at the time of the genocide about how their parents were killed, where their bodies were put, and their homestead is precious. Another case is the testimony of the perpetrator Munyakazi Damien to Juliette Uwizeyimana who as a baby in 1994. She was six years old when the genocide took place. She survived alone, losing five siblings and parents. She got raised by a Hutu family neighbour. She knew about her family history only from her aunt and from neighbours. It was only the perpetrator Munyakazi who gave her details about how her family members were killed. She says that this information gave her some peace of mind, because she was always tracking this information without finding it in the Gacaca testimonies and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

In the following case, perpetrator and victim's family members are strengthening the reconciliation process that had been initiated earlier. Bushishi took part in the killing of seven family members of Musoni Casimir. He apologized to the victim Musoni and provided information about the whereabouts of their bodies. This enabled Casimir to bury the bodies in the Bisesero Genocide Memorial. But when this interview took place, Bushishi had passed away. So, her wife Nyirahabiyambere Odette came for the interview with Musoni to testify about this reconciliation process between the two families. This again shows that reconciliation was a social matter, even if the crime was individual.<sup>16</sup>

The perpetrators disclosed also the methods of killing. In this regard, they gave information about extremely violent ways in which victims were killed. For instance, Niyotwagira Bonaventure confessed to Mukarumongi Monique that he was part of the mob of those who killed the father and the brother of Mukarumongi. They threw them alive in a

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hole from which laterite soil was extracted. Eventually they suffocated in that hole. During the Gacaca trials, the family of Mukarumongi never knew how their father and brother were killed. It is Bonaventure who gave these details about who killed them and how they were killed. Bonaventure also testifies about several killings he was involved in, which shows that he was a hard-core killer. Later, the families of Bonaventure and Monique reconciled.<sup>17</sup>

The provision of information by perpetrators or perpetrators' family members seems to have paved a way not just to apology, but also to deep friendship. Two examples corroborate this case. Ngezenubwo John testified to Rurinda Vincent. He apologized for having been part of the group of killers that killed his children, wife and sister-in-law. He informed him who the killers were and where the victims' bodies were located. Later, the bodies were taken to memorials. Rurinda and Ngezenubwo became friends as a result of this information. Moreover, it is reported that Rurinda forgave tens of perpetrators to the extent that they nicknamed him "the king of the Hutu". After the genocide, he also married a lady from the Hutu group. In his neighbourhood, he is presented as an iconic figure of reconciliation.<sup>18</sup> Nyirangezahayo Rahab was a neighbour to Ntabanganyimana Bosco's family. She did not take part in the genocide, but she informed Bosco about who killed his father, sisters and nephews. She also showed to Bosco where the body of his father was located. She apologized to him because the father of Bosco was killed by her step-son called Phaniel. She provided this information only in 2013 long after the Gacaca trials. Because of this apology, and because she had provided precious information about the killing of Bosco's father, Bosco forgave her. They later became friends. She gave to Bosco a cow as a sign of family reunion. She also proclaimed Bosco as her own son.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Where the Perpetrator provides additional Information***

Sekamana went to apologize to Nyirasafari for having been part of those who came to kill Tutsis in Bugesera. He was among those who cut her with machete and threw her in a hole, thinking that she is dead. They also threw stones at her, she got injured but survived. During the Gacaca testimony collection, Sekamana narrated how he killed people, then Nyirasafari remembered his face among the killers. She forgave him because, as she says, he told the truth about what happened at the killing field. She knew what happened there, Sekamana did not give her new information, but corroborated what the victim knew. She also says that she forgave him because she wanted to free herself from feelings of accusation.<sup>20</sup>

Rusimbi Jean Claude knew about how his brother Nkundanyirazo was killed. They were hiding together at Murama in Bugesera. Then Nkundanyirazo felt hungry, he decided to go in the vicinity to see a lady he knew who could give him some food. When he went out of the hiding place, two ladies saw him. One lady is Nyirabakasi Sara. These ladies made some noise to alert killers, saying that they had seen a Tutsi person. So, killers came and killed Nkundanyirazo. Nyirabakasi Sara confessed having taken part in the killing of Nkundanyirazo. She also went to see Rusimbi and apologize about this. In her confession, she mentioned several names of perpetrators. Rusimbi knew about the hiding of his brother, but did not know how he got killed once he went outside. So Nyirabakasi's testimony was useful in that it enabled him to identify those who were responsible. Rusimbi forgave her for having given him additional information on how his brother was killed and who killed him.<sup>21</sup>

Murekatete Hajara is a survivor of genocide in Nyakabanda, Nyarugenge. She lost her husband. He was killed by someone called Nsekambabaye. So, in 2009, a young lady called Nyirandabamenye Flora came to apologize to Murekatete about the crime committed by Nsekambabaye who was her paternal uncle. At first, Murekatete did not understand why she apologized for the crime she did not commit. Flora explained her that she felt guilty because

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the perpetrator had raised her, so it was a big shame for the whole family. She gave more details about the circumstances under which the husband of Murekatete was killed. She had inquired to family members in order to know what happened. So Murekatete felt indebted to her for that additional information. Ultimately, they got along, and thereafter the family of Flora came to apologize as a group. The two witnesses say that they have reconciled, even though Flora is not perpetrator.<sup>22</sup>

Another case of a young lady who apologized on behalf of her family is Umulisa Assumpta. She was only 10 when the genocide took place. Her maternal uncle called Kamana Cyprien was a soldier. He got involved in the killing of the husband of a lady called Kabarenzi Marie Claude. When the Gacaca trial took place in 2008, the name of this soldier got mentioned. But they learnt that he had died in exile in Congo. Two years later, Umulisa Assumpta met with Kabarenzi in a celebration. She decided to inform her that the perpetrator Kamana is her maternal uncle. She apologized on behalf of her uncle. At first Kabarenzi got chocked by the apology, since Umulisa was not responsible for that killing. However, after five months, she decided to accept the apology and forgave her. When she told her that she had forgiven her, Umulisa went to inform her mother about that. So, the mother came also to meet Kabarenzi. Other brothers and sisters of her mother also came to meet Kabarenzi and thank her for the forgiveness. The additional information here is the kinship relation existing between the perpetrator and Umulisa.<sup>23</sup>

Nsengimana Alphonse was part of those who went to kill a person called Mukurarinda Frederic who happened to be brother-in-law of Mukankusi Angelique. Nsengimana decided to apologize to Mukankusi for that crime. Mukankusi argued that she forgave him because she realized that the details that he gave her - about how Mukurarinda was killed, and names of other perpetrators - were corroborating what she knew. But she had not known that he had a hand in this killing.<sup>24</sup>

Shyirakera Jean Baptiste is a cousin to Nyiransangabera Emilienne. Yet he had taken part in the killing of her husband called Twigiredute Pierre and their two children. He had refused to testify about these killings for many years. During the Gacaca trials, other witnesses accused him. He denied. Ultimately, he confessed. In his confession, he gave more details about how Twigiredute and children were killed. This new information led Nyiransangabera to forgive him, and ultimately, they reconciled.<sup>25</sup>

Musabyimana Celestin spent many years refusing to testify for the killing of Nkurikiyinka Alphonse who was husband of Mukeshimana Therese. Then he decided to confess. In his confession, he enumerated the people who were hard-core killers and who were part of this killing. Mukeshimana says that she learned new names of perpetrators that she had not yet heard about. For that reason, she decided to forgive him.<sup>26</sup>

Nkuranga Sosthene was cousin to the father of Uwihanganye Sylvere called Butera. Yet he took part in the killing of Butera. He refused to admit it for many years. Ultimately, he confessed about it. Uwihanganye had learned about it through his grand-mother and other neighbours. So, the confession of Nkuranga did not bring new information, instead, it corroborated what Uwihanganye knew. However, the new information was about the role

Nkuranga played in the killing of Butera.<sup>27</sup>

The above cases show to what extent testimony's information was valuable. There are two levels that can be discerned. First there are types of information that informed survivors about totally new things that they did not know before. There are also types of information that were not new, but that corroborated what survivors knew. Whatever the case, the provision of both types of information led to the decision of forgiveness and reconciliation. However, the

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forgiveness and reconciliation efforts mentioned above are recent. This means that they should be seen as processes rather than final results.<sup>28</sup>

As far as the agents of reconciliation are concerned, we noticed that the two persons were involved in the process of testimony and forgiveness, but in the implementation of this, family matters arose in both victimhood and perpetration. Single perpetrators sought forgiveness to individual survivors and to their family members when the latter were available. Family members of perpetrators sought forgiveness for their sibling or parent when this latter was not alive. This is in line with what Phil Clark called Local Reconciliation. By this, he meant individual-individual efforts of reconciliation that took place in Rwanda in light with the Gacaca trials and testimonies. In our case, it is individual-individual, but also individual-family and in some cases family-family reconciliation.<sup>29</sup> Family members who intervened in the testimony and forgiveness processes were called “third-party participants” in Towner’s research.<sup>30</sup> My respondents consider their family members to be an integral part of the process, not third-party members.

### **Testimony for Healing**

Murray offers a compelling explanation of the importance of storytelling for victims and survivors. This includes memory keeping but healing:

The overall impact of such storytelling is often understood through the lens of trauma theory, in which personal testimonials provide an important therapeutic exercise for traumatized individuals seeking to reconcile themselves with the terrible circumstances of their past experiences.<sup>31</sup>

In the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hearing the apartheid narratives was believed to bear some healing capacity. Therefore, some testimonies were publicly broadcast so as to bring the whole nation to share those experiences and come forward to testify before the TRC as well. This emphasizes the centrality of the audience in the healing process.<sup>32</sup>

The Michalinos Zembylas also points to avenues of healing found in the act of testimony. Here post-conflict victims are asked to manage their emotions in order to avoid revenge, listen to the perpetrators’ testimony, forgive them, and possibly reconcile. Perpetrators are also requested to become humble, empathetic and confess their crimes. It is expected that both the perpetrators and the victims will benefit from this management of emotions a number of desired ends such as therapeutic healing, truth, justice and reconciliation.<sup>33</sup> This management of emotions at individual level takes into account the official or political management of emotions as well.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the provision of information, the testimony about genocide and about reconciliation provided some therapeutic healing. This is at least an assertion from a number of respondents. This section uncovers the feelings that some perpetrators and survivors had before and after the confession/forgiveness processes.

For perpetrators, asking for forgiveness was a therapeutic session in itself. The therapeutic feature here appears in two ways. On the one hand, there was the reduction or cure of what I would call negative feelings. On the other hand, there was a gain of what I would call positive feelings. For survivors who forgave their perpetrators, negative feelings also reduced or cured and positive feelings appeared. For both the perpetrators and the survivors, social interaction increased, while social avoidance disappeared slowly and slowly.

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A few cases show that testimonies of perpetrators were not always beneficial to survivors; some information traumatized them.

### ***Perpetrators***

As one perpetrator narrates, “testifying and confessing healed my wounds of guilt. I was always dreaming about the crime I committed. Now I feel better. I remain guilty, but feel relieved.” Asked about when he ascertained that his victim had forgiven him, he answered that it took a long time. “I was always putting myself in his shoes, then understood why it took him a long time to forgive me.” This statement shows that he had learned to have empathy. He thanks the government of Rwanda, and Christian associations that sensitized him to confess his crimes.<sup>35</sup>

Another perpetrator argues that confessing his crimes solved his physiological disorders: “Before confessing, I was not sleeping nor having appetite. Now I am a normal person.” But most importantly it made him become again a friend of the person that he had wronged.<sup>36</sup> One lady whose parent is a perpetrator says that testifying reduced the shame and the remorse she felt about belonging to a family of perpetrators. These feelings are referred to in different Kinyarwanda language words such as *igisebo*, *ikimwaro* and *ipfunwe*.<sup>37</sup> Another perpetrator explains that he healed from shame, here expressed as *isoni*.<sup>38</sup> Another perpetrator talks about the restoration of trust following his confession.<sup>39</sup> Another perpetrator says that he felt more empathetic after receiving forgiveness.<sup>40</sup>

Many more perpetrators argue that they were always tormented by their crimes and that they obtained some peace of mind only after testifying and asking for forgiveness. They use words such as “*inkomanga*”, “*ikidodo*” (literally, something knocking in the heart) to explain the feelings that they had before testifying; and *kubohoka* (to feel liberated, i.e., relieved) after testifying.<sup>41</sup> One perpetrator, Nyandekwe Marc, was hiding from the person whose family he killed, i.e., the family of Nyirantagorama Mariana. The latter searched him in order to reconcile with him, but Nyandekwe continued to hide. He was working in Kigali, but was coming home in Karongi in weekends. Nyirantagorama feared that one day he would kill her again. So, she pled the wife of Nyandekwe to tell him not to hide again. Ultimately, Nyandekwe accepted to show up. They met, then he testified before Nyirantagorama about his role in the killing of Nyirantagorama’s family members. The latter forgave him. Following this reconciliation effort, this is what he narrated:

I argue that it is my testimony to Mariana that healed her, that also her forgiveness made me heal. Before that, she feared that I would kill her. I also feared that she would kill me, though she is a woman. It was possible for her to collide against me. I always feared that I would be killed in a bar while drinking beer. So, I drank my bottle quickly like a robber so as to avoid falling in a trap. Why was I afraid? Because the family of Mariana has been exterminated while mine is alive, yet we are neighbours.<sup>42</sup>

Ryimarande Eliab had taken part in the killing of the father of Macumi Vedaste in the massacres of Tutsi of 1973. Although crimes committed before 1990 were not taken into consideration by the Gacaca tribunal, Ryimarande realized that he needed to be on good terms with his neighbour Macumi. In 2015, he decided to approach him and his sister, confess his crime, and ask for forgiveness. They told him that they have forgiven him. Since that time, the families of Ryimarande and Macumi assert to be interacting harmoniously.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Survivors***

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In general, survivors express satisfaction for the information provided in perpetrators' testimony, for the relief it caused and the safety of living side by side with people who are no longer their enemies. The feelings that express this satisfaction read as follows: Joy for hearing the truth<sup>44</sup>, feeling trust towards the perpetrators who come forward to testify, although there are many others who are keeping silent<sup>45</sup>, and healing fear of seeing the perpetrator.<sup>46</sup>

One survivor explains that forgiving gave her enough energy and time to engage in lucrative activities that had dwindled before forgiving: "We spent many years thinking on how those people hate us; as a result, this slowed our business. When we forgave them, we felt relieved, now we have more energy for work." She and the perpetrator have taken part in a joint activity of cattle rearing. A cow was given to them by a nongovernmental organization called CARSA working on reconciliation.<sup>47</sup>

Another survivor who was in the same association as the previous narrated this:

The state and associations (i.e., CARSA) taught us that we need to forgive our perpetrators so that all our psychological wounds can heal. Although I was communicating with people, I was not smiling nor happy. I was always visualizing my children and husband. [...] I was always thinking about the way I got widowed very young. Then we learned that forgiving is a cure for the heart, so we decided to forgive.<sup>48</sup>

One survivor enumerated benefits that she derived from forgiving those that had wronged her during the genocide. These include feeling healed psychologically, feeling secure in the neighbourhood since the bulk of her neighbours are perpetrators and receiving their help whenever she is sick or in need.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, listening to the testimony of perpetrators often became painful on the side of victims of genocide. To the extent that we wonder how legitimate this action was. For example, Mukarurinda Alice learned about the person who had cut her arm during the genocide. She got choked:

We were together [with Ndayisaba Emmanuel] building a house for one of our members of the association [*Ukuri Kuganze*]. He was on top of the building, so he went down, started to prepare the sorghum beer for us to drink after the heavy work, as he was among the leaders. This beer however had another purpose: to make a get together for us. He had planned to confess his crime to me for a long time, since we met in the association, but had failed to do so. He had even planned to flee on many occasions, but then decided not to. Then he decided to tell me that he is the one who cut my arm during the genocide. Since I was not prepared to receive this information, I immediately fell down, fainted and lost consciousness. They took me to hospital, then I recovered. Thereafter, I started to think about it, and realized that it was necessary to listen to his testimony. That enabled me to know more details about people who took part in the killing at Bugesera valley. He told me how they cut with machete my child, and how they killed my mother and sister. Then he accompanied me to the prison to hear from those other perpetrators. They informed me where they had put the bodies of my family members. That enabled me to collect their bodies and bury them properly.<sup>50</sup>

The second case is about a young lady, Uwamahoro Seraphine, who was a child during the genocide. She says that the testimony of Uwamariya Shadiya "destroyed" her since it made her understand how her parents were killed. But at the same time, it made her learn more about "the history" of her family.<sup>51</sup>

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### **Reconciliation Testimonies**

Barker links the effort of reconciliation to citizenship which is understood here as a negotiated way of addressing social conflicts and living together among citizens,<sup>52</sup> while Barkan and Karn emphasize the importance of apology for past wrongs for reconciliation, using the power of language, religion and *Ubuntu* (humanity).<sup>53</sup> The case of East Timor also shows how confession by perpetrators and expressing their shame for wrongs they did in the past, and forgiveness on the side of victims were used in the effort of seeking reconciliation.<sup>54</sup> In a country like Rwanda where perpetrators and survivors live side by side, reconciliation is needed in order to normalize social life again. For this reason, testimonies of confession and forgiveness are followed by testimonies of reconciliation processes between the perpetrators and the survivors.

All the above testimonies were geared towards reconciliation. But they reached healing benefits first. Testimonies of reconciliation however, are about the benefits of social interaction that perpetrators obtained from survivors and vice versa. Some few cases of interaction following apology and forgiveness are worthy of note here. Interaction here appears in two ways. The first is about social contact that creates interaction. The second is interaction that comes in the process of material exchanges.

### ***Social contact***

Hakizimana Athanase and Mukantabana Rachel testify to have reconciled. The proof that they produce is the fact that social interaction has been restored between their two families. One example of this is when Rachel had a wedding ceremony in her family. She invited Athanase. Here is how he describes his experience in that celebration:

When she organized the feast, she invited me. She welcomed me with respect, I ate, drank, then realized that our conflict is no more. In fact, it is easy to notice love or hatred from the eyes of your interlocutor. The way she looks at me shows me that she does not hate me. We regularly meet at home and in our association called *Ukuri Kuganze*. Our interaction is always smooth. This is what shows me that we have reconciled.<sup>55</sup>

Nyirampfaguterura Consolee also sees a sign of reconciliation in the mutual participation in ceremonies: “We have reconciled [with Nzabamwita] because we eat together, because I involve him in the wedding preparations for my family, then I realize that everything goes well. He protocols my guests, and everyone gets happy.”<sup>56</sup>

Sekamana who reconciled with Nyirasafari also sees reconciliation as the capacity to be seen by the latter as a brother:

When I went at her home, she welcomed me as a brother. I also invited her at my home. She found my extended family there. We got along. In fact, when you invite someone, then you share a drink in the same cup and food in the same plate, this is a proof that even in the heart there is no problem.<sup>57</sup>

Umugwaneza Honorine also sees reconciliation as her capacity to intervene in wedding ceremonies of Mukeshimana Sadiya and vice versa:

Few days ago, my brother had a wedding ceremony. I invited her [Mukeshimana Sadiya]. She came and got involved in the logistics. All of us at home got happy. In the coming days, she also has a wedding ceremony for a family member. She has invited me.<sup>58</sup>

Uwamariya Shadiya sees reconciliation as her capacity to send her children to stay at Seraphine’s house, they remain safe until when she comes to take them back home. As for

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Seraphine, she says that she has come to trust Uwamariya enough: “I consider Shadiya as my elder sister, because I seek her advice whenever necessary.”<sup>59</sup>

In the case of Mukankusi Angelique and Nsengimana Alphonse, paying each other visit at hospital became the proof that they had reconciled.<sup>60</sup>

### *Material exchange*

Umulisa Assumpta testifies how the survivor she reconciled with (Kabarenzi Marie Claude) turned out to be a good Samaritan for her family:

This is how I realized to what extent reconciliation is useful. Whenever I am not around, that lady would look after my home. In 2012, I took my husband to hospital. This lady visited me regularly, she helped my house girl with some little money to buy food. She even gave raw food to her to cook for me. This lady is a widow, is not rich, but she shared the little she had with me in those hard times. This became proof enough that we have reconciled. But most importantly, one day she told me that she treats me like her daughter. For this reason, she used to advise me on how to live harmoniously with my husband.<sup>61</sup>

Kantarama Solange and Nyirahabimana Hilarie have reconciled. The latter explains that the evidence for Kantarama’s forgiveness is the financial help she got from her and the interaction that followed:

The Parish Priest gathered us and taught us on how we must be humble and ask for forgiveness. We spent six months learning how to reconcile. But what showed me that my fellow neighbour has forgiven me is when I had a financial problem. I realized that she has the willingness to help me. I needed 1,500 Rwandan Francs to pay my monthly membership fee in our microfinance association. She lent me that amount of money. When I have means, I also pay for her when she is in need. That is how I realized that we have reconciled.<sup>62</sup>

Kaberuka Deo was in prison. Then he got released in 2004. When he reached home, he learned that the lady he had wronged called Mukamuhashyi Esperance was helping his wife and children. This lady had created associations of widows, orphans and wives of men who were imprisoned. These associations were empowering members in savings and agriculture cooperative works. She ultimately got decorated a medal of recognition by the state for that. Kaberuka had killed the brother of Mukamuhashyi. When he got released, Mukamuhashyi approached him, and made him his advisor to help her accomplish those community driven activities. This is how Kaberuka describes his reaction to that recognition:

I got the evidence that we have reconciled when Esperance told me that I have become his advisor (*Umujyanama*, in Kinyarwanda). That was only two years after I apologized to her. You should know that if someone call you his/her advisor, then he/she trusts you. [...] That made me feel that though I was among those who have killed his brother, she has made me become her brother, because an advisor is like a brother.<sup>63</sup>

In this case, the seal for forgiveness was not only friendship, but what I would call symbolic brotherhood. This idea of symbolic brotherhood runs in some other cases, for example with Sekamana and Nyirasafari above.

Mugabo Emmanuel thinks that reconciliation between him and Uwimana Louise became possible because they regularly met in construction work organized by their association *Ukuri Kuganze*. This association had construction among many other activities. It is during one of

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the construction gatherings that Louise remembered that Mugabo was among those who killed her younger sister in 1994:

We were building a house. Then I saw Mugabo. I noticed that his face was familiar, then checked him closely. Then I remembered that he was part of those who killed Egidia, my younger sister who was seven years old at the time of the genocide. I approached him, confronted him, and accused him. Then he accepted that what I said was true. Later on, he apologized.<sup>64</sup>

The apology came when association members went to build the house of Uwimana Louise. This is how Mugabo narrates his experience:

I guess she forgave me because we usually worked together in the construction activities. However, when we built her own house, I took a very active part, since I am a professional builder. I am the one who went put doors and windows on her house. So, when she noticed my dedication and hard work in her favour, she welcomed my apology. Even now, whenever there something to fix on the house, she calls me and I come to help her.<sup>65</sup>

Nyirabakasi Sara and Rusimbi Jean Claude adopted something mutual to seal their reconciliation: they planted avocado trees for each other as a sign that they have reconciled. This gesture goes beyond the material to embrace the symbolic realm.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

When perpetrators were sensitized to testify about what they witnessed during the genocide against the Tutsi, about how genocide was planned and carried out in their vicinity and their role in it, they thought the sole benefit of testifying was judicial. That is, testifying, confessing their crimes and asking for forgiveness would prompt judges and Gacaca committees to reduce their punishment or have them released. Survivors also thought that forgiveness was an understandable response to apology from perpetrators.

However, it transpired that the content of perpetrators and survivors' testimonies would offer many other opportunities. These include knowledge-based opportunities and even healing opportunities. It has also showed to what extent testimonies of perpetrators and victims opened up avenues of social interaction between them. Indeed, it is this social interaction that is viewed as reconciliation at local level.

This became clear enough following the micro-level analysis of reconciliation in the five districts of Rwanda. The major contribution of this article was to reconstruct reconciliation experiences of two individuals – a survivor and a survivor - and to understand their multiple uses of testimony. This leads to a number of implications. First, they are about cognitive aspects geared towards learning about the history of the genocide against the Tutsi at local level. Secondly, there is an emotional regime at play here. The state and the civil society associations have championed a reconciliation agenda in the context of post-genocide peace building. At local level, this agenda has been translated – and even used – as a tool of knowing the genocide past, but also healing the emotional wounds caused by the genocide. And so, it is necessary to understand how reconciliation policies get translated into local practices, what outcome they yield and how they are redefined.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Rutayisire, *Historique du processus*.

<sup>2</sup>Kabwete Mulinda, *A Space for Genocide*; Brehm, “Subnational Determinants”; <http://www.cnl.gov.rw>, accessed on 20 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup>NURC, *Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer*.

<sup>4</sup>Graham, “Can Testimony,” 121.

<sup>5</sup>Vanhuynne and Falla, “Surviving in the margins.”

<sup>6</sup>Zehr quoted in Kohen, “The personal and the political,” 401-402.

<sup>7</sup>Spiessens, “Voicing,” 316.

<sup>8</sup>Humphrey, *The Politics of Atrocity*, 98-114.

<sup>9</sup>Verdoolaegep, *Reconciliation Discourse*, 2.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Rwemarika Yesaya and Munyaneza Israel, Mubuga, Karongi, 4 October 2016.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Twahirwa Innocent and Kalisa Elias, Kanyinya, Nyarugenge, 17 August 2016.

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Nzabamwita Emmanuel and Nyirampfaguterura Consolee, Bugesera, 24 August 2016.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Mukeshimana Sadiya and Umugwaneza Honorine, Nyarugenge, 25 August 2016.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Uwamahoro Seraphine and Uwamariya Shadiya, Nyarugenge, 25 August 2016.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Uwizeyimana Juliette and Munyakazi Damien, Bushenge, Nyamasheke, 15 November 2016.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Musoni Casimir, Mubuga, Karongi, 4 October 2016.

<sup>17</sup>Interview with Mukarumongi Monique and Niyotwagira Bonaventure, Muhanga, Shyogwe, 29 September 2016.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Rurinda Vincent, Mubuga, Karongi, 5 October 2016.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with Ntabanganyimana Bosco, Mubuga, Karongi, 6 October 2016.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Nyirasafari Irene and Sekamana Musa, Bugesera, 23 August 2016.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Rusimbi Jean Claude and Nyirabakasi Sara, Bugesera, 24 August 2016.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with Murekatete Hajara and Mukandabamenye Flora, Nyakabanda, Nyarugenge, 25 August 2016.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with Kabarenzi M. Claude and Umulisa Assumpta, Nyakabanda, Nyarugenge, 26 August 2016.

<sup>24</sup>Interview with Mukankusi Angelique and Nsengimana Alphonse, Shyogwe, Muhanga, 27 September 2016.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Nyiransangabera Emilienne and Shyirakera Jean Baptiste, Shyogwe, Muhanga, 27 September 2016.

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- <sup>26</sup> Interview with Mukeshimana Therese and Musabyimana Celestin, Muhanga, Shyogwe, 28 September 2016.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Uwhanganye Sylvere and Nkuranga Sosthene, Mubuga, Karongi, 6 October 2016.
- <sup>28</sup> On the idea that forgiveness is a process, see Kohen, "The personal and the political," 406.
- <sup>29</sup> Clark, "Negotiating Reconciliation."
- <sup>30</sup> Towner, "Truly Public Apologies," 65-66.
- <sup>31</sup> Murray, *Commemorating and Forgetting*, 172.
- <sup>32</sup> Young, "Narrative and Healing."
- <sup>33</sup> Zembylas, "The emotional regimes," 330-332.
- <sup>34</sup> Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 129.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview with Munyaneza Isaie, Mubuga, Karongi, 4 October 2016.
- <sup>36</sup> Interview with Kalisa Elias, Kanyinya, Nyarugenge, 17 August 2016.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Mukandabamenye Flora, Nyakabanda, Nyarugenge, 25 August 2016.
- <sup>38</sup> Interview with Hategekimana Valens, Shyogwe, Muhanga, 29 September 2016.
- <sup>39</sup> Interview with Nsengimana Alphonse, Shyogwe, Muhanga, 27 September 2016.
- <sup>40</sup> Interview with Kazungu Pasteur, Bushenge, Nyamasheke, 15 November 2016.
- <sup>41</sup> For example Gasherebuka Straton, Nyirampfaguterura, Niyotwagira, Ngezenubwo, Munyakazi, Nyirabakasi and Musabyimana.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Nyandekwe Marc, Mubuga, Karongi, 4 October 2016.
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with Macumi Vedaste and Ryimarande Eliab, Mubuga, Karongi, 5 October 2016.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Rusimbi.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with Murekatete.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with Mukarurinda Alice, Bugesera, Nyamata, 22 August 2016.
- <sup>47</sup> Interview with Mukarumongi Monique, Muhanga, Shyogwe, 29 September 2016. CARSA means Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance. It is a non-profit organization operating in a number of districts of Rwanda. For more details about this association, see their website: <http://www.carsaministry.org/>.
- <sup>48</sup> Interview with Nyiransangabera Emilienne, Shyogwe, Muhanga, 27 September 2016.
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with Mukantaganzwa Godeberthe, Kagano, Nyamasheke, 16 November 2016.
- <sup>50</sup> Interview with Mukarurinda Alice, Bugesera, Nyamata, 22 August 2016. *Ukuri Kuganze* is an association of perpetrators and survivors of genocide. It operates in many districts of Rwanda, including Bugesera and Nyarugenge where I did research.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Uwamahoro Seraphine, Nyarugenge, 25 August 2016.
- <sup>52</sup> Barker, *Tragedy and Citizenship*.
- <sup>53</sup> Barkan and Karn, *Taking Wrongs Seriously*.
- <sup>54</sup> Larke, "...And the Truth."
- <sup>55</sup> Interview with Hakiziana Athanase, Bugesera, Nyamata, 22 August 2016.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Nyirampfaguterura Consolee.
- <sup>57</sup> Interview with Sekamana Musa.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with Umugwaneza Honorine.
- <sup>59</sup> Interview with Uwamariya Shadiya and Uwamahoro Seraphine.
- <sup>60</sup> Interview with Mukankusi Angeliq and Nsengimana Alphonse.
- <sup>61</sup> Interview with Umulisa Assumpta, Nyakabanda, Nyarugenge, 26 August 2016.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview with Nyirahabimana Hilarie, Kagano, Nyamasheke, 16 November 2016.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview with Kaberuka Deo, Bushenge, Nyamasheke, 15 November 2016.
- <sup>64</sup> Interview with Uwimana Louise, Bugesera, Nyamata, 23 August 2016.
- <sup>65</sup> Interview with Mugabo Emmanuel.
- <sup>66</sup> Interview with Rusimbi Jean Claude.

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