

## MOTHERS AND CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE: MEMORIALIZATION, RECONCILIATION, AND VICTIMS IN POST-GENOCIDE RWANDA

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Rape is a common occurrence during the genocide and the presence of children born as a result of rape constitutes a challenge to post-genocide individual recovery and social reconciliation processes. This article deals with mothers and their adolescent children born as a result of a rape during the genocide in Rwanda. Qualitative analysis of individual interviews has provided a means to explore in-depth perceptions and emotions of mothers when faced with disclosing paternity and to investigate the reactions of adolescents. Social stigma related to rape and children born of rape created suffering and distress, as did the lack of economics and psychosocial resources for the women and the adolescents. These family problems are discussed in relation to the policies of reconciliation and forgiveness that characterize the post-genocide Rwanda, with particular attention to the conflict between collective memory and individual memory.

Key words: Sexual violence; Trauma; Memory; Forgetting; Survivors.

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Ethnographic research on populations that have suffered wars, genocide, violence, and different forms of discrimination, is becoming an increasing condition for anthropologists. After the appeal launched by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) to have an ethnography that does not turn one's eyes away from violence, the processes of globalization have intensified the humanitarian emergency situations in which an anthropologist may be at work or situations where the violence suffered has left deep wounds and lacerations in the social fabric. This scenario, which historically dates back to the failed decolonization processes in many countries of the so-called "third world" in the second half of the twentieth century, justifies and completes the theoretical and methodological change that cultural anthropology has undertaken in the last quarter century (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2003): a change mainly related to issues of ethics and reflexivity.

With regard to the ethical dimension, when entering into contact with minority and sub-culture history, the ethnographer is most often invested by narratives articulated to a level of depth in which the listener is aware of potentially being the only depositary. The recorder button turns off with the urgency and the promise of a civil commitment. What makes the collected testimonies unique and the involvement urgent is the level of depth of the story that in other contexts can appear as superficial rhetoric or behavioral patterns and pre-established roles.

Related to ethics, the other issue is reflexivity. Anthropology is built on the basis of its documents, notebooks, and transcriptions (Sanjek, 1990), therefore it has to resonate with the demand that human events raise. It cannot avoid it. Whether it is to explain how a mother tells her child the rape story that begot him, or how people seek to recover their national identity by unspeakable memory, any objectifying intent pales in front of the interlocutor and his human question. Consequently, the interviewee's story struggles to separate from the dialogic nature of the research, since he/she is reluctant to represent himself/herself in rhetorical and codified policies. A speech that wants to stay alive as much as its protagonists want to feel and stay alive beyond their own speech.

In recent decades, together with an anthropology of violence characterized as a discipline of intervention, social psychology engaged itself in a global scenario of conflicts and diasporas. For instance, the Rwandan context has been involved in many forms of post genocide intervention guided by psychologists (McGarty, 2014; Zamperini & Bettini, 2015). In particular, Staub (2003) coordinated several projects with various collaborators: training workshops for community leaders; communication courses for journalists to decrease linguistic forms of prejudice and hostility, which could be dangerous in the reconstruction phase of the country; interventions with local professionals to cope with the social consequences of trauma; expanded groups to work around the problem of reconciliation (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005). Also, for social psychologists to work with victims of collective violence and mass killings raises serious questions, not only at the level of intervention practices but also regarding their ethical positioning. For example, when a social psychologist is called both to theorize and to practice reconciliation, he/she cannot ignore the ambiguity of the policy of reconciliation in post collective atrocities scenarios. Within transitional justice it is not uncommon to come across a superficial adherence to reconciliation. It is as if reconciliation in itself resulted in a return to an alleged past of harmony and tolerance instead of becoming a societal platform capable of generating structural and relational change. In fact, reconciliation does not end around a table or in a public confessional, because the demand for social justice and sustainable living cannot find an answer only in producing excuses or in learning to apologize, to forgive, and to accept forgiveness.

Although from different disciplines such as anthropology and social psychology, but united by the critical reflexivity mentioned above, the authors of this research, conducted on the Rwanda field, address some problematic issues of this country through the social, psychological and family of "sons of violence" condition: girls and boys born in the aftermath of mass rapes during the genocide. The first part of this study explains violence against women during the genocide; the second analyzes the dynamics between collective memory and individual memory; finally, the societal strategies of the commemoration of the past and national reconciliation are articulated with the concrete existence of mothers and teenagers who impersonate the social conflicts of their community at an interpersonal level.

#### GENOCIDE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Throughout history, sexual violence perpetrated against women occurred with dramatic regularity during collective conflicts (Bourke, 2007; Guenivet, 2001). Such violence has taken many forms: rapes, sexual mutilation, forced pregnancies, and sexual slavery. The recourse to

demonstrate that these events are the result of human brutalization, typical of any war, is very frequent; however it is important to consider the historical and cultural framework within which these actions are performed. In other words, it is important to recognize that in the case of collective atrocity we are not in the presence of an instinctual violence, but rather of a political violence (Vidal, 1996; Zamperini, 2013), as well as during the colonial period policy was the construction of ethnic categories, or at least their exploitation (Chrétien, 2003; Vansina, 2004). Historically, as anthropologists have repeatedly suggested (Bowen, 1996; Fusaschi, 2009), the relationship between Hutus and Tutsis was harmonious until the advent of colonialism. After centuries of cohabitation, their social boundaries became blurred. Their “ethnic” opposition was demarcated according to the colonial policies of “divide et impera” and their racist representations. This heavy inheritance evolved into ethnic conflict, which led to the Rwandan genocide in April 1994. Since then, as a result, the ethnic categories of the Hutu/Tutsi were used in an oppositional form, playing a central role in the conflict.

The social attack against a group defined as “ethnic” through the violation of women’s sexuality does not have a universal manifestation; while using a body dimension, it is actually a form of abuse that radiates all its destructive potential only through a specific frame of cultural meanings (Taylor, 1999). In fact, in Rwanda we can identify a theoretical space for rape. During the Rwanda genocide, sexual violence was directed against Tutsi women on a large scale. At a national and local level, the leaders of the country exhorted and encouraged such violence to achieve their political goals: the destruction of the Tutsi as an ethnic and social group (Hatzfeld, 2009). Systematic rape was used as a weapon to terrorize, degrade, humiliate, dehumanize, and subjugate all Tutsis. The extremist propaganda described the Tutsi women as more beautiful and more sexually desirable than Hutu women: a tool by which the Tutsi community sought to infiltrate and control the Hutu community in order to undermine the Hutus’ power inside the Rwandan state system (Melvern, 2004). The Hutu men were informed about this danger. The social stereotype constructed by the propaganda represented the Tutsi women as arrogant, inclined to look down on Hutu men, despising them. Gender identity and ethnic identity were ideologically constructed, and became the peculiar elements that made the Tutsi women targets of terrible violence by the Hutu men, even assisted by Hutu women. Through sexual abuse, which often meant death for the women, the Hutu men were intended to test the alleged extraordinary sexual quality of Tutsi women in order to subvert the social distance in the relationships, and shatter their public image (Human Rights Watch, 1996). The Hutu women, fueled by a deep envy and jealousy of the Tutsi women, believed to be more beautiful and desirable, directly participated in the violent actions and encouraged their men to kill and rape (African Rights, 1995). As a result of rape, a large number of women became pregnant with the consequence of many births, a maternity dramatically lived because of the experience of violence in the traumatic context of the genocide. In addition, when the mother’s decision was to keep the child, instead of abandoning him/her or even committing infanticide (abortion was illegal), this choice caused deep division among family members between those who wanted to raise the baby and those who rejected him/her. Finally, the most common problem among raped women was the transmitted sexual disease, including HIV/AIDS, which could be transmitted to the child. Research shows that these raped family systems have lasting negative effects on parenting and on the life cycle of children (Almqvist & Broberg 2003). On the other hand, motherhood can give to the survivors of the genocide a reason to live, a way to cope with negative emotions and the adversities of life (Bernstein, Vujanovic,

Leyro, & Zvolensky, 2011; Brison, 2002). In both cases, for these mothers a major and unavoidable problem was the moment, usually during adolescence, when they would have to tell their children about their origins (Kantengwa, 2014); children who grew up in the post-genocide phase, in an engaged country in the elaboration of a collective memory and dealing with a transitional justice.

#### TRAUMA BETWEEN COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND BIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

Within the work of memory performed by societies or specific social groups, the past is transformed into concrete activities such as memorials, rituals, monuments, archives, testimonies, public discourses, and storytelling. Thus, the work of memory became a “memory practice,” through which the “memory communities” look to the past to obtain those elements that allow them to carve out a symbolic and social space to establish themselves as a community in the future. In this sense, the practice of remembering strictly adheres to specific dynamics of social change (Winter, 2012). Remembering does not solve the past, but becomes a cultural process that develops and highlights shared horizons of significance, which inform individuals and society in the present for future planning activities. In practice, the past is remembered not only in a community, but in the act of remembering that contributes to the creation of this same community. In other words, to share a certain common past means to participate in the construction of a collective identity. This occurs thanks to a “remembering together” pathway, in which the selective and omissive nature of remembering allows individuals to create a collective forgetting, often at the service of a specific political aim.

Social traumas assume an increasingly important role in building a collective image as well as reporting injustices and requesting a restoration of violated rights (Misztal, 2004). Furthermore, the past suffering, together with a sense of identity, has an ethical value: the memory becomes a “teaching deposit” that aims at helping those who live in the present so that certain negative events will not be repeated. The memory evolves into a duty to transmit to future generations (Booth, 1999). In this sense, specific commemorative rituals, also called the “practiced memory,” have the function of reproducing common group beliefs promoting social cohesion among the members (Halbwachs, 1950). It has frequently been noted that past representations, processed and transmitted by different social groups, are often divided, if not openly conflicted, just as the space and the public narrative of memory are often an arena in which the conflict between narratives and opposing representations is articulated. The ambivalence between memory as a creative tool of community bonding and memory as a symbolic resource for the production of conflicts between different social groups takes shape precisely in social practices such as commemorative rituals (in the vast literature of trauma studies, cf. Alexander, 2003; Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, & Sztompka, 2004; Andermann, 2012; Antze & Lambek, 1996; Assmann, 2004; Erikson, 1976; Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; Lim, 2010; Zamperini & Menegatto, 2013, 2015).

In this scenario, a conflict between oblivion and memory, or among those groups that recollect the past and those that want to leave it behind, can occur. At the same time, the duties of memory as a societal imperative may clash with the individual need to weep for one’s dead to free itself from a traumatic past.

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### COMMEMORATION AS A STATE PROJECT

Established by the request of the Rwanda government (Vidal, 2004), the commemoration of the genocide has the aim of combating all forms of denial and revisionism of history and preventing oblivion (Des Forges, 1999). Every year around the date of 7 April (the start date of genocide in 1994), Rwanda organizes commemorative events that take place in every village in the country, when people tell their stories of how genocide was organized and perpetrated.

The first commemoration took place in 1995 in a chaotic climate: it was necessary to determine an appropriate date for the ceremonies; it was necessary to find a *kinyarwanda*, term able to translate the term genocide, not present in the local lexicon then. The discussion was polarized on two dates: 6 April and 4 July. The first, 6 April, is the day that started the massacres of Rwandan Tutsis and the moderate Hutus, and also the date of President Habyarimana's death. The second, 4 July, refers to the official date on which the Rwandan Patriotic Front militia took power and officially declared the end of the genocide.

At the end of the Nineties, the Rwandan Youth Ministry raised the alarm about the tendency of Rwandans to remove and forget genocide memories. In a report drawn up by the Ministry, it emerged the possibility that the documents certifying the organization of the massacres could be destroyed, the tools used to carry out the carnage could be hidden, and attempts to hinder the identification of places where the bodies of the victims were thrown could take place (Ministère de la Jeunesse et du Mouvement Associatif, 1998).

To prevent the cancellation of the Rwanda past, the IBUKA association was created. Its name means "Remember" and the main purpose is to preserve the collective memory and defend the survivors' rights (IBUKA, 2001). For this purpose, the IBUKA association has promoted the creation of genocide databases and documentation centers; a map of the territory where the massacres took place, the barriers that facilitated the genocide, memorials, and mass graves; several collections and publications of survivors and perpetrators' testimonies; finally, the preservation and maintenance of the memorials. During the week of remembrance the schools are closed; afternoon work activities are suspended to allow all citizens to participate in various ceremonies; the flags are put at half-mast as a sign of respect; and every Rwandan must bring flowers to the graves of genocide victims. There are memorials throughout the country, where the bodies found after the massacres are buried. In many cases, these memorials are school buildings and churches where the victims sought refuge and protection in vain. Even in the Rwandan schools, precise programs to commemorate the genocide events are organized such as conferences to raise awareness, and all students must participate.

The Rwanda image that appears is that of a country almost obsessed with its memory of the past (Lemarchand, 2008; Thomson, 2010). In addition, two different interpretative polarities emerge from the historical genocide narratives. On one hand, a representation of the genocide as an absolute evil emerges, thanks to the action of the survivors' associations. This conception is transmitted particularly during the memorial services, visible in some memorials building where the victims' remains are exposed and in reports that describe many forms of perpetrated cruelty. On the other hand, a representation centered on forgiveness and reconciliation emerges, with a view to peaceful coexistence between Hutus and Tutsis. This is the prevailing interpretation supported by the legal legislation and the political authorities (Fusaschi, 2009).

## THE RESEARCH

### Aim

The purpose of this study was to investigate and discuss the theme of memory and reconciliation policy in the Rwanda post-genocide context. The general literature of the trauma studies offered a constructive step toward a systemic understanding of the victims' suffering linked to the specific Rwandan sociopolitical context, expanding the knowledge with an innovative approach that connects the perspectives of anthropology and social psychology. Therefore, the research intends to integrate a macro perspective (politics of memory) with a micro perspective (well-being and psychological distress of mothers and children born after the collective rapes occurred during the genocide).

### Participants

Participants were identified through public health services and non-governmental organizations from Butare, Kigali, and Nyanza cities. The selection criteria adopted were: a) be the mother of one or more children born of genocidal rape, b) be children born of genocidal rape. Participants included: 20 mothers and 20 children (eight males and 12 females).

### Procedure and Instrument

The material was collected through narrative interviews (Sparkers, 2005) and conducted using the participant situated observation method, which provides an intersubjective interpretation of events rather than objective truths (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The participants were allowed to put into words what they lived in terms of crisis and distress. By using open-ended questions, the interview encouraged the expression of thoughts and feelings related to the lived experience of traumatic events. The topics discussed mainly focused on violence endured during the genocide, the loss of their family members, the children born of genocidal rape, commemorations, living conditions, family conflicts, and so forth. The researchers encouraged participants to guide the conversation and share their stories in a way in which they felt comfortable. Each interview lasted about 120 minutes in spaces selected by the participants (usually at home, or at the non-governmental organizations office). Although the participants signed consent forms for the interview, to preserve anonymity, family names were omitted and first names were abbreviated. The interviews were conducted in French with the assistance of a native Kinyarwanda speaker. Presented here are the English translations.

ATLAS.ti software was employed to conduct a content analysis to identify and code themes arising from the data using quotations as the unit of analysis. Two researchers independently analyzed the interview transcripts following the phases of thematic analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, they openly coded the data, inductively developing a list of codes, describing the content of selected narrative quotes. Next, the researchers grouped the codes into higher-level conceptual categories, called themes. Two major themes are described here in detail.

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## Results

From the analysis two main ways emerged, through which the policy of post-genocide memory influences the psychological and relational status of mothers and children interviewed: 1) the prohibition to forget; 2) the duty to reconcile and forgive.

### *The Prohibition to Forget*

During public ceremonies, the individual memory, often kept concealed or hidden, meets collective memory. When this occurs the individuals suffer: the experiences and the painful memories resurface causing an explosion of symptoms. In fact, every year, these collective moments of commemoration cause an emotional and traumatic crisis in most victims. Consequently, a staff composed by psychologists and doctors constantly works in hospitals, health centers, psychosocial consultation services, to provide the necessary assistance. A woman's testimony explains well a widespread condition among the Rwandan population:

During the period of commemoration, I feel particularly bad. I cannot go to the stadium with others to participate in the ceremony; I cannot even follow the commemoration by radio. Every time I took part, I had some trauma problems because when I listened to the genocide songs and I heard the victims' testimonies, I felt dizzy, I fainted, I regained consciousness after two days. When I was taken to the hospital, I had no consciousness; they could pass two days without I knew where I was. Now, this discomfort no longer happens because I have decided to no longer participate in the ceremonies, I think that it is better to stay home and, even if, I feel bad there will be no one who can make fun of me; because someone says that the "rescapés du genocide" [genocide survivors], pretend to be sick. Thus, when the week of commemoration beginning, I have shut myself up in my room and cry alone, so I feel better, rather than to go to the stadium with others (B., 40 years old).

If this woman is able to cope with the suffering when it is reactivated by the public genocide commemoration, because she decided not to participate, preferring to stay at home where she finds temporary shelter and some psychological relief, a different and graver situation occurs for women that after a rape have become mothers. Their sons and daughters now are about twenty years old. They represent a generation that grew up within a social system, that cultivates the duty of memory as social and individual virtues: they are young people forced to commemorate and celebrate the genocide events, that live the memory as an obligation collectively imposed. In practice, they are called to live a public history of recognition that clashes with the personal denials of their mothers engaged to remove the painful past. In addition, they are young people who are going through a particular phase of the evolutionary cycle in which the construction of their identity, nurtured by the past and future aspirations, becomes central. Furthermore, they have to confront constantly with the peers and adults they meet, such as their teachers. In front of them, the questions about the father figure becomes central and stringent: who and where is my father? What are my origins? Why have other children a father and a mother and I have only a mother? In most cases, they discover the truth from their mothers, like this girl tells:

At school, I saw all my friends who had a dad and they asked me the name of mine and where he was (. . .). I had already heard from a nearby that my dad raped my mother (. . .) my mother told me that ten years ago, during the genocide, soldiers came to kill the Tutsi, she was raped and became pregnant. When I knew that, I started crying, I felt a strong pain in my heart. I felt shame, hate, anger. Now, at home, the relationship with my mother is good, although I continue to ask her the name of my father and she does not answer me, I do not understand how she does not know him! There are times when I feel lonely and I do not want to talk (G., 19 years old).

In the case of orphans, their relatives have to take care of them and to deal with the problem of biological parenthood and how to tell them during the adolescence; a daughter (the late mother was raped with her sister) tells how she discovered her origins from her maternal aunt:

I raised in my aunt's family and I always thought that my uncles were my parents, but every time I called my uncle dad, he began to shout that he was not my father that I had to leave home because I did not belong to the family. So, I started to ask many questions to my aunt: "Who is my father? Why he rejects me?" So, two years ago, when I was 17, she told me the whole truth. My aunt told me that during the genocide, she and my mom were hid with a group of Tutsis, but at some point, Hutu soldiers arrived and found them killing everybody with the exception of my mom and my aunt who were raped. The soldier who raped my mother decided to take her to his house where she became his woman. However, when the soldier discovered that my mom was pregnant and that the Rwandan Patriotic Front was advancing, he decided to abandon her. Anyway, my mom was able to give birth to me, but she has lived for years with a bullet in her chest, and when she decided to have a surgery she died during the operation. (. . .) When I learned the truth, I hate my uncle, I felt anger and sadness, life had no meaning for me. I do not want to eat no longer, and I can hardly sleep, I am often aggressive toward my cousins. I cry and often cut myself off that sometimes I want to run away from home. At school I started to leave apart and to see my friends as enemies, I felt that nobody loved me as before. At home the problems with my uncle continue, he prohibits me from calling him dad, and every time my aunt tries to defend me, he becomes violent creating many problems (L., 19 years old).

When a community and its members are called in various ways, to deal with a recent past of collective violence and genocide, it is easy to find a culture of denial. For instance, in the perpetrators' families, an explicit or implicit protection system takes to place, initiated by the parents that tell nothing about a blameworthy past and the children that ask nothing. A double denial wall (do not want to say and do not want to know) that sometimes can be strengthened by a third denial wall, represented by a community that pursues the collective project of "turn the page." As we have already illustrated, in the post-genocide Rwanda, children grow in a country that tells its terrible past. Also, the past violence is transformed into an educational project for the future. Thus, at a societal level we attend a systematic attack on any forms of removal, forgetfulness, and oblivion, well summarized in a commemorative exhortation: "You have to remember!"

From the side of the victims, this public narrative is in contrast with any attempt to forget the suffering and to get away from the trauma. In the case of this study, raped women that became mothers cannot rely on their children's silence because the latter are solicited to remember by community members and have to undergo a heavy political-educational pressure. As a result,

they have become bearers of questions damaging the silence wall erected by their mothers. To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to clarify the meaning of the mothers' emotional work, a two-faced effort: subjective and filial.

On the subjective side, the violence experienced by these women uncovers a totalitarianism of memory imposed by the State and even by a psychology of colonial mold. Both of these forms of totalitarianism are based on the assumption that individual well-being can be recovered only by digging in painful experiences, bringing them to light, and even reliving them. A sort of heroic project: we should travel through our lifetime with a great inner struggle, to reach the source of evil, where it is stuck, in order to eradicate it by naming it and acknowledging it. Unfortunately, although dealing with a past of suffering can have some value for the individual well-being, there is no guarantee that the healing necessarily passes through the door of remembrance. The mothers that we met in Rwanda suffer from an obligation to remember that makes it more difficult to live in the present. Hence, the subjective need to preserve the past in the past.

On the filial side, for mothers, it is meant to hide origins from their children to protect their identity from stigma. To reveal the truth is always the result of coercion. As it is exemplified in the following testimony:

I was constrained to tell her the truth, and the situation was really grave. My daughter lost consciousness for two hours and when she woke up the first thing she asked me was because I had hidden the truth about the fact that she was a daughter of a "interahamwe" [a genocidal militia]. I told her that I did not want to hurt her, she remained angry with me for a few days without speaking to me, but after I was able to tell the whole truth well. But since that day, she has changed, there are times when no longer speaks or remains isolated, but since I know I leave her in quiet. He also refused to enter into this association because it does not want to stay with other "interhamwes" children, I tried to convince her, but she completely refuses (K., 43 years old).

After learning of their paternity, the children' reaction ranges from lashing out their mother (experiencing anger and hate), to drawing away from the world (they feel emotions such as fear, anxiety, sadness, and a desire for isolation); these are some of the rape daughters' expressions:

I felt the end of my life, I wanted to die rather than live with this truth (I., 19 years old).

When I learned the truth, I was angry with my mom (H., 20 years old).

As soon as I discovered the truth I wanted to isolate myself and not to talk to anyone (G., 20 years old).

Even when the relational climate with the mother is sustainable and warm, with help of consultants and psychologists, the condition of "children of violence" continues within the community:

I wanted to know why I do not have a dad, and when I was nine years old, my mom told me that during the genocide she was raped and became pregnant, and she does not know who is my dad because he has forced her (. . .) I was really very angry and I did not want to live at home. I spoke with a friend who took me to his home because his mother is a psychologist, she comforted me telling me to be strong, really she helped me. Now I'm fine and I have no problem with my mom, but my peers continue to insult me and told me that I have no a dad (V., 20 years old).

The desire to have a father, together with the awareness of having a stigma that identifies the violence suffered, forces young people to cope with ambivalent and contradictory emotions and actions. First of all, the need of not being different and not being laughed at, with fear of social rejection, pushes children to deny the father's murderous and violent identity, even to idealize him, driven by the desire to be like their peers with a dad and a happy family. In this scenario, after knowing truth, children adhere to the practice of denial. In other cases, they may condemn their father or reject him for what he did, considering him guilty for the committed atrocities and the inflicted pain. It may also happen that the child identifies with the rapist and murderer father, embodying a violent identity in everyday life.

### *The Duty to Reconcile and Forgive*

Among the deleterious effects of war and atrocities on collective well-being, the erosion of social relationship appears to be a major problem, since, as it is well known, they are essential and necessary for the construction of the individual's biography and community development. The collapse of the social network — formed by shared norms, values, and trust — can create the conditions to see the other as an enemy. Thus, creating a societal schism, which compromises some abilities of the members of social groups such as to work, love, affirm their identity, tell their personal and community history (cf. Newbury, 1988). From here, at least in part, it has placed a great emphasis on the reconciliation process as the main way to deal with a phase of post-genocide transition.

It is known that the State and the Church, through public speeches and a widespread propaganda, tried to impose reconciliation and forgiveness processes on Rwandans. A bottom-up view toward a coexistence without hate or resentment. A public message that, at least on a superficial level, transmits the will of Rwandans to be able to forgive the genocidaires and the killers of their relatives, because they say: "Il faut pardonner" [You must forgive]. A similar attitude has been noticed in many interviews given by the "children of violence." Children declare to hope, sooner or later, to meet with their fathers, to receive some explanations about the violent behavior and then to forgive them. Here are some illustrative statements:

I would meet my dad and if he would asked forgiveness, but a true forgiveness that comes from the heart, I could forgive him because at school and church they have taught us that we must always forgive (M., 19 years old).

I feel too like seeing my father's face, he made a big mistake, I need explanations, but then I forgive him (H., 20 years old).

I think a lot of my dad, but I do not know him. I think we could have a nice relationship because he's my dad. I would forgive him because even those who killed were forgiven (F., 20 years old).

The emphasis on reconciliation in Rwanda must be read from two perspectives. One perspective is practical: to put half the population on trial is an impossible task, and the Rwandan government has adopted different strategies to implement a transitional justice. Since the final aim is the social reintegration of perpetrators, the government implemented the policy of "victimization": anyone who has lived under the genocidal regime, including the same genocidal, should be considered a victim, because it belongs to a generation of Rwandan manipulated by political

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leaders. This way, the government assigns the blame collectively, reducing individual responsibility, even for those who have committed crimes. A societal position of absolution that, at least on a discursive level, is internalized by the young Rwandan at the individual level, while above he would forgive his father because “those who killed were forgiven.”

Another perspective is that in a collectivist culture, that is Rwanda, reconciliation and forgiveness processes are indispensable tools to repair interpersonal relationships and social relations. Forgiveness is more frequently given by collectivist cultures because it looks like a means to maintain social harmony. In this context, forgiveness is given in a more undifferentiated way, both to the people with whom you have a close relationship and to those that are less intimate. A need even more accentuated in post-genocide Rwanda, a country dominated by an atmosphere of mutual distrust and tension. Nevertheless, to forgive the action to condone the fault is not enough, it is necessary that the guilty individual asks for forgiveness directly to the victim for what was committed. The victim consciously gives forgiveness as a result of a process of emotional re-elaboration and internalization of what happened. In the case of young people born from rapes, forgiveness depends only on the victim’s will, since there has never been a meeting, confrontation, or dispute with the father, during which the latter could explain the reason of his violent acts and in particular to ask for forgiveness to his child.

In addition, in the decision-making processes related to the choice of offering forgiveness, it is central the influence of the Church and the Catholic religion, which play an important role in the Rwandan culture, because they represent a great point of reference for social aggregation and support to most of the local population. In fact, the participation of the most part of children and young people in activities organized by the Church, and the constant relationship with religious figures such as priests and nuns, allowed that even the generation of the children of violence has grown by confronting and assimilating the values of the Catholic religion. As God forgives our failures, so should we forgive one another; to receive God’s forgiveness, we must know how to forgive.

## DISCUSSION

In a post-conflict society, the term “healing” is often used in a strictly psychological way as opposed to the term “reconciliation,” which indicates a specific phase of a mass mobilization process in order to pursue social reconstruction (cf. Bar-Siman, 2004). In the Rwanda context, a similar separation, between individual and community, is not possible. This is because the suffering caused by the genocide is not felt or perceived at a psychiatric level, rather on the basis of a suffering that cuts through all relationships and societal structure, damaging and breaking social bonds. In fact, the consequences of a “social relationship care” show often a decrease of symptomatic manifestations (Zamperini & Bettini, 2015).

In our vision, the choice of dialogues with mothers and children about the problem of discovery or revelation of their tragic past has not only allowed us to make the permeation between individual and collective levels clear, but, above all, to take the contradictions and the conflict generated by this permeation. First and foremost, the reconciliation dogma, preached by Church and State, assigns an undisputed centrality of forgiveness (cfr. Kanyangara, Rimé, Paez, & Yzerbyt, 2014), and ignores “inappropriate” responses such as anger or indifferent behavior.

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At a general level, inappropriate responses are considered a negative and morally reprehensible force to overcome, labeled as irrational or pathological obstacles to remove from the way of reconciliation (Brudhom, 2006). For instance, the emotion of resentment is excluded from every reconciliation program, both from government or religious and non-governmental organization (NGO) programs. From our field research, it emerged that the pressure for reconciliation and forgiveness can lead to a phenomenon of acquiescence: far too often, the pressure to forgive brings the victims to declare forgiveness in front of an NGO official, useful only at an instrumental level, because after leaving this interaction there is not much space for forgiveness in interpersonal and community dynamics. This should not be surprising if we consider that NGOs attribute to forgiveness almost a “pharmacological” value; in fact, we often hear about a form of “forgiveness plan” as an “AIDS plan” (Hatzfeld, 2009).

As the resentment is an enemy of forgiveness, so is the oblivion an enemy of memory, which is the public number one threat in a country governed by the “duty of memory.” Connerton (2008) affirms that

we generally regard forgetting as a failure. I may say that I “forget someone” or that I “forget something” or that I “forget to do something” or that I “forget that something has taken place” or that “I forget how to do something.” All these usages have one feature in common: they imply an obligation on my part to remember something and my failure to discharge that obligation. This implication has cast its shadow over the context of intellectual debate on memory in the shape of the view, commonly held if not universal, that remembering and commemoration is usually a virtue and that forgetting is necessarily a failing. (p. 59)

To advance this argument Connerton distinguishes between seven types of forgetting: repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, forgetting as planned obsolescence, and forgetting as humiliated silence. Since our concern is with the autobiographical memory and individual well-being, the third type of forgetting, which is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, is important. Not to forget might in such cases of extreme violence provoke too much cognitive dissonance and distress: better to consign the memories of terrible experiences to an archive of the past. The problem with bad memories is their complex relation to one’s sense of self. People who thought of themselves as victims of trauma often defined themselves in relation to what they remembered (Winter, 2012). It appears, then, that forgetting is vital to identity. The emphasis here is on the biographical and emotional gain for those who know how to discard memories that not serve in the management of one’s current identity and ongoing purposes.

The women we met revealed that at the sight of their children born by a genocidal rape they felt pain because it was, and it is, a constant reminder of the trauma experienced. Thus, their selective oblivion is understandable in spite of a dictatorial memory that requires them to remember. Their oblivion is broken only during the commemoration week, and their daily life is abruptly and suddenly awakened during their children’s adolescence, when they ask to know the true biological paternity, ritualizing mothers’ trauma and apprehension. Many women referred that they lived the moment of confrontation with their children in solitude: they felt alone, they could not benefit from counseling or mutual self-help groups, even comparing the situation with other women that have a similar destiny. Furthermore, the social stigma that affects raped women and their children becomes a particularly acute element of vulnerability in the problem of violence.

Finally, children born in consequence of a rape live in a society that does not legally recognize them as victims of genocide. Therefore, they do not receive financial support, medical and psychological aid, employment incentives, and they live in conditions of extreme poverty. In a large family, they are supported only by their mothers who, because of the rape (in some case multiple rapes), suffer from both mental disorders and physical problems. These women struggle to find a job, often work as domestic servants or farmers and often perform small jobs. As a result of their precarious life, children fail to meet basic needs, have no money for food, clothes, and school. When the women found an occasion to rebuild their lives by getting married, they reported that the marital relationship was characterized by strong disputes and quarrels, concluding the experience with a divorce. Consequently, these women are often alone, without material and social support from their community.

This research, starting from the concrete experience of mothers and children that represents the Rwanda “living memory,” is not limited to focusing on the precarious material and psychological conditions of those who have been marked forever by the genocide, but it also wants to be a contribute to challenge the reconciliation practices when — and in our opinion this is the case of post-genocide Rwanda — these seem to favor the “principles” rather than the individuals, at the expense of the population. A scenario where the abuse of memory is not questioned, and the reasonable use of oblivion is not understood; where the forgiveness phenomenology together with the inherent difficulty to remember are ignored, leaving open a pathway for an “easy forgiveness.” It is evident that the reconstruction of the psychic apparatus passes inevitably through the reconstruction of social bonds. And it is already unquestionable that individual memory is supported not only by subjective memories but also by collective frames. Nevertheless, the stories of these women and their children indicate that the embodied suffering claims not to be ignored by a present politically submitted to the past.

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