

# **Contribution of worldwork methodology for violence prevention and community recovery after mass violence: An example from Rwanda**

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(Draft) Final version is published in: *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, February 2017, John Wiley and Sons

## **Abstract**

In this article we propose that after violent conflict, and alongside tribunals and truth commissions, facilitated community dialogue is needed as part of a central strategy in transitional justice. Such facilitated dialogue supports community engagement in the task of recovery and prevention of mass violence and genocide. Facilitation is also needed wherever there are blocks to cooperation among international, government and non-governmental organizations in the field. We illustrate the methodology of “worldwork”, that is, Arnold Mindell’s Process Oriented Psychology as applied to working with small and large groups, organizations and communities, and facilitating conflict resolution. Its methods make it possible to work in polarized communities and with volatile issues. We describe the initial stages of our work with survivors and perpetrators in Rwanda, and also draw upon our long-term post-conflict work in the Balkans. We highlight that the need to bear witness to collective trauma and to search for accountability links psychological, spiritual, social, and political awareness.

**Keywords:** genocide; peace-building; reconciliation; transitional justice; worldwork

## **Introduction**

Innocent Musore, the head of a small non-governmental organization in Rwanda, contacted us at CFOR Force for Change, an organization devoted to conflict resolution and violence prevention. He asked if we would develop a project similar to the post-conflict work we did over many years in regions devastated by war in Croatia. Based on the work of Mindell (1995, 2002), using a “worldwork” methodology, we facilitate communities to access their innate resources, to transform relationships, and to find direction in even the most difficult situations. This methodology allows us to work with volatile issues, divisive polarizations, unresolved issues of accountability, and community-wide trauma.

Innocent spoke about the important work of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in supporting all Rwandans to move forward after the genocide. He also spoke about serious problems including community-wide trauma; the impact of rape from the genocide and the struggles of children born from rape; domestic violence; problems in families as perpetrators return from prison; the HIV crisis; disability; health; education; and the need for economic opportunities.

We spoke together about big questions. What is needed to respond to the extensive collective trauma? How do neighbors – survivors and perpetrators of the

gruesome genocide – live together again? What is needed to grapple with accountability for the past? How can society access its inherent vitality to work together on pressing issues? Can we prevent future violence for our children and grandchildren?

These questions for Rwanda and the Great Lakes region of Africa are central questions for the world, with our history of repeated shock, injustice, and cycles of violence. The tragic consequences of genocide and violent conflict, including its replay in future generations, call for far greater efforts and new patterns for community engagement and cooperation among individuals and organizations – in terms of civil society and at national governmental and international levels.

Facilitation is needed where there are blocks to recovery. People tend to think that problems are local, rather than systemic. Worldwork methodology helps us to perceive how local dynamics are influenced by and a reflection of the dynamics of the larger system. Working with the local system thus impacts the larger system. (Audergon & Audergon 2009) When forum participants interact and find resolution among themselves around issues they are meeting in their local communities, they are, in turn, more able to address these issues in the wider field; and when organizations working to support community recovery meet disturbances within their own teams or with other organizations, these are not just their “own” issues. If participants are able to process these disturbances, not only do relationships and teamwork improve, but also their ability to perceive the field dynamics and to find creative effective interventions.

In this article we propose that, after violent conflict, facilitated community dialogue should be considered as a central strategy in transitional justice. Community engagement is needed alongside tribunals and truth commission for the task of reconciliation, recovery and preventing recurring violence. Facilitation is also needed to support cooperation among different sectors working in the field, including local non-governmental, government, and international organizations.

We describe our first forum which took place in Rwanda in June 2016 with participants who were survivors and perpetrators of the genocide. We also touch on our long-term work in Croatia (1996–2001 and 2006–2012), which we implemented in cooperation with a local organization, Association MI, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). We illustrate how, with facilitation, communities grapple with issues of accountability and community wide trauma, resolve persistent tension and find pathways to recovery, while contributing to the prevention of future violence.

## **Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention – Facilitated Community Dialogue**

Across time and cultures, conflict resolution has been a task for elders and spiritual leaders. In our modern world, conflict resolution is largely in the hands of heads of state, along with international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), and international tribunals and truth commissions. The European Union (EU), as well as the African Union (AU) aim to prevent human rights violations and violent conflict. Civil society also has a central role in protecting human rights. More and more

universities have departments focusing on international peace building and it is a pleasure to see this field attracting so many young people wanting to make a difference.

Still, when we see outbreaks of violent conflict, there's a collective tendency to put up our hands in exasperation. Hopelessness about the magnitude of violent conflict pervades, many of us believing that an outbreak of violence came out of the blue, (though there are clear signs that might have been addressed). We feel at a loss, compounded by the fact that we can't deal with our own conflicts, let alone conflicts at this scale. Identifying with hopelessness – "There's nothing we can do" or "It's not my business" – in effect normalizes and perpetuates violent conflict.

Until now, facilitated community dialogue has not been part of a central strategy in post-conflict recovery at an international, national or civil society level. In part, this is because there's a need for case studies to show the impact of such dialogue. Another reason that facilitated forums have not been part of a central strategy is because of insufficient knowledge and skills for dealing with the inevitable volatility related to community-wide trauma, abuse of power, and open issues of accountability, that lie just under the surface.

If you invite people to speak about what is of concern to them in their communities, what you will notice is that, as they speak about a range of economic and social issues, they will also touch on potentially volatile topics related to injustice and community wide trauma. It is an understandable tendency to then want to back off from such hot issues for fear of setting off renewed conflict or triggering traumatic experiences. Yet, if our emotions and the psychological dynamics related to violent conflict remain unaddressed, they don't disappear: they impact the spirit of community, causing hopelessness, slow recovery and fresh rounds of violence.

Special methods are therefore needed to be able to address our most difficult and volatile conversations. Worldwork methods (Mindell, 1992, 1995, 2002) allow us to perceive and facilitate the interaction of polarized positions, rather than staying locked in those positions. The methods also allow us to work with dynamics of rank and power, and with "hot spots", which are points of escalation and where conflicts cycle. Rather than backing away or falling headfirst into a hotspot, we can carefully facilitate the interaction towards a deepening of understanding, with awareness of an underlying shared field.

It is well documented that in situations of mass violence and genocide, a range of terror tactics are used to intentionally divide communities (Hamburg, 2008). These tactics are dependent on our emotions being stirred and inflamed. Facilitating dialogue brings awareness of and to these psychological dynamics so that we are less easily manipulated into large-scale polarizations (Audergon, 2004).

### **Forum in Kigali, Rwanda (2016) – "Why Would the Authorities Lie to Us?"**

In 1994, during the genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda, over 100 days, some 800,000 people were killed in Rwanda in the most brutal way. The violence in the neighboring countries of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) persists.

Our first Forum took place in Kigali, 22 years after the genocide. Innocent Musore of Global Ecovillage Rwanda and Andrew Rutaganda, the District Representative of Kicukiro opened the forum with formality and hospitality. We, Jean-Claude and Arlene, spoke about how facilitated dialogue accesses the inherent wisdom and resources within community.

The 40 participants were local residents and/or worked in community organizations, including a representative of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). Many were survivors, including those who escaped as children. Some were perpetrators of the genocide, had been tried in the Gacaca courts, and had served their sentences. Others were refugees from Burundi and the DRC.

We invited the participants to meet in small groups. Then, in the large group, we collected the themes on which they wanted to focus. People spoke about the difficulty to reconcile; the difficulty to forgive; the need to know what happened to their loved ones, and to find their bodies in mass graves in order to find closure; the needs of young people; economic problems; issues around gender; rape during the genocide and its current impact; and wide-scale trauma. The participants, both survivors and perpetrators, repeatedly spoke of the need to talk about the genocide at a community level.

Several people said that they would like the perpetrators who were present in the forum to speak. Although the perpetrators had given testimony at the Gacaca courts, we learned that the participants had never spoken together about their experiences in a public forum or even privately. We were aware that it is difficult for perpetrators to speak about their part, and that they cannot and should not stand alone in assuming accountability for the horror of the genocide.

As a way of relating personally within the forum, and as a way of facilitating, we, Jean-Claude and Arlene, spoke not only about our deep sorrow about the genocide, but also about our own accountability as Europeans and United States (US) citizens. In this way we were not separating ourselves from the experiences of people in Rwanda, and were not asking perpetrators to hold the role of accountability on their own.

We spoke about the silence and inaction of the UN, the US, and the whole international community at a time when the genocide could have been stopped. We also spoke about the history of European colonialism in the Great Lakes region, which had divided Hutu and Tutsi.

A perpetrator of the genocide now asked to speak. He read from a small notebook. It was a sensitive moment. We facilitated by thanking him for speaking and saying that the group had asked to hear a personal experience from someone who had been a perpetrator of the genocide – and that if he were willing, it might be helpful if he could talk personally about what it was like for him. He looked taken aback, surprised, but also touched that his personal experience mattered.

Putting his notes aside, he spoke haltingly about how it became possible to dehumanize his neighbors. As a child, his teachers singled out the Tutsis, asking them to stand up in class. He spoke about how dehumanization tactics developed over time – Tutsis were called “cockroaches”, considered an infestation. He shared

how he gradually came to believe the authorities must be telling the truth, that Tutsi needed to be killed: “I thought”, he said, “why would the authorities lie to us?”

### **Croatia (1996) – The Bakery**

The genocide in Rwanda took place around the same period as the violent conflict in the Balkans. Many hundreds of participants were involved in our forums in Croatia. The participants, each personally affected by the war, and from all “sides” of the war, were impacted in very personal ways and formed lasting connections which allowed them to work together, and impact their organizations and communities.

In 1996, just after the war, on the first day of our first forum in Osijek, we facilitated an interaction between two women, close friends, Serb and Croat. Both had tragic and traumatizing experiences, but had never spoken together about these events. The group was riveted as the two women spoke personally to one another about their war experiences and about how the war had impacted their relationship.

Just before our work with them, we learned that a bomb had exploded in a nearby bakery that morning. Some participants had gone out to contact loved ones to make sure they were okay. One man said to us “It’s okay. It’s just the local Mafia.” We learned that this man, unbothered about the bomb, was a warrior who defended Osijek night and day for weeks when the city was under siege. Now, after the two women had worked on their relationship, he trembled. He spoke of the danger we might be in if certain people learned that Serbs and Croats were relating to one another so personally. He was visibly agitated, tremendously excited, and felt that what we were doing was of vital significance (Arye & Audergon, 2005).

Later, he stood up and said, “I need someone to stand opposite me to take accountability. How are we supposed to go back to the bakery and kiss each other good morning on the cheeks, when we know that every man might have been a sniper shooting at us?”

The bakery is a real place, at the heart of community. The bakery also reminds us of the need to come back again into community life after violent conflict, and to connect to something deeper than our differences. Yet, the very idea of kissing good morning in the bakery brings uneasy and distressing feelings linked to the trauma and tension just under the surface of neighborly relationships. A lack of dialogue and accountability is not only unsettling, but also perpetuates instability and trauma in individuals, whole communities, and nations.

In another forum in Croatia, a man made a plea, “Why is it that no one ever says they carried a gun? Surely”, he said, “not *everyone* was peeling potatoes!” Stillness came over the room. Then, a man responded, “My friend – you ask but never get an answer, because the truth is we were all carrying guns, and we are too ashamed to speak.”

### **A Brief History of the Rwandan Genocide**

The cited trigger of the Rwandan genocide was the plane that was shot down, killing Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien

Ntaryamira. Uncertainties still surround this event, but the genocide was the culmination of a long history and long planning.

Before colonial times, Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa lived together in the region of the Great Lakes. Distinctions between Tutsi and Hutu were considered class-related or socioeconomic. The German and later Belgian colonialists emphasized ethnic differences and characterized Tutsis as having higher status. They engaged Tutsi to help them in their colonial rule, exacerbating divisions between Tutsi and Hutu.

At the point that the Belgian colonialists left the country, in 1961, the Hutu majority came into power in Rwanda, linking anti-colonial and anti-Tutsi sentiment. More than 300,000 Tutsi were forced into exile to Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire. Armed attacks by Tutsis living in exile resulted in further retaliation. Thousands of Tutsis were killed in 1963 and 1964 and from this time a Hutu majority dominated the country. (Gruenfeld & Huijboon 2007)

By 1990 the country was in economic and political crisis. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), established in exile, entered Rwanda in 1990 and the resulting tensions and skirmishes brought a small UN presence into the country. The UN negotiated a power-sharing agreement between Hutu and Tutsi, the Arusha Accord, signed in August 1993. The UN presence was meant to support its implementation. Eight months after the accord, however, the downing of the plane triggered the planned genocide (Willard, 2014).

The genocide was planned by members of the political elite. In the months leading up to the genocide the main radio station, Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines, was used to dehumanize Tutsi in a call to “exterminate cockroaches”. After the downing of the plane, civilians were activated to use their machetes. 800,000 Tutsi and Hutu moderates were killed over three months.

Both Kofi Annan (then head of the UN) and Bill Clinton (then President of the USA) have apologized for the tragic lack of intervention on the part of the international community, at a time when it would have been possible to stop the genocide. The genocide was finally stopped by the RPF, led by Paul Kagame, who now leads the country.

### **Collective Trauma: Witness, Healing and Accountability**

In the forum in Rwanda, we spoke briefly about personal and collective trauma. We talked about the feeling of isolation linked to trauma. At the point of a traumatic event, there is a shock; one part of you goes forward to survive, to carry on, and this part cannot witness the events that are too terrible. Another part of you cannot move on, but remains inside the story, replaying it, in nightmares or flashbacks, and in visceral experience.

We showed how as an individual you are split in two – one part of you moves on and one part of you cannot, and stays in the experience. Collectively, one part of the world moves on and thinks it’s all in the past. Another part cannot just move on and is still suffering from this history (Audergon, 2004).

One way to understand the nature of recurring nightmares and flashbacks is that the story repeats until you can witness it, and include the story in your personal

history. This allows you to go forward intact, whole. The story also needs to be witnessed in community and included in our collective history or narrative. Witnessing and including our traumatic histories, as individuals, societies, and as a world, is a form of accountability so that as a society, we become whole and can create a different future (Audergon, 2004).

A quiet came over the room. Many participants felt personally spoken to. A young man stood up and asked if he could talk about what happened to him during the genocide. His personal testimony had a powerful impact. He described some moments in great sensory detail and then had gaps in his story. The extensive detail and the gaps in narrative can be recognized as symptoms of trauma, but, staying close to his sensory and sentient memory was already a pathway to healing, along with telling his story for the first time, in a facilitated community setting, among perpetrators and survivors, who were able to bear witness and so include his personal story into a shared collective memory and narrative.

“Our parents sent us to get milk.” He spoke at length about getting the milk that morning before the genocide began. His memories of getting milk seemed to connect him to a sense of home, to his parents, and a feeling of safety and love. “Then they told us to go hide in the church.... We didn’t make it to the church and hid near the church in a bush.” Now his memories were auditory: the sound of machetes on people’s flesh and bone.

He was on a bus with his brother. It stopped. Holding his little brother’s hand, they got off the bus as ordered. Now his mother was there. He gave his little brother’s hand to his mother. He heard the soldier say, “Why are you delaying killing them?” His mother and brother were killed on the spot. Now he was running through grasses, through a field, and the woods.

The group was quiet, feeling alongside him. He said, “I need an elder to help me understand what has happened, to piece together the story. I was just a child.” One man, a survivor in his 60s came forward, and told him how important it was that he spoke, even though it was difficult. “Have courage.” One of our facilitators, Milan Bijelic, came forward. “I was right alongside you as you were running in the grass.” He told the young man about how he had to leave his country, Croatia, and leave his family behind at the start of the war in the former Yugoslavia. He had struggled with going away, but knew that his family wanted him to be safe. Then he said, “And now you are no longer a child. You are a man, and you are teaching us.” He was the elder for the young man, joining him in his sentient experiences as he ran in the grass and in confirming that the young man’s parents wanted his safety. He also connected the young man to the “elder” emerging inside him by way of sharing his story in community.

After a coffee break, a woman said that she had known this young man for years. He was always agitated, but now, after telling his story for the first time, he is deeply relieved, safe and calm. Being welcomed to tell his story, witnessed by the community, and supported by his elders, had made the difference. She asked if we could teach her and the other participants skills to support the many people suffering in their communities.

We promised to teach more in the future. We immediately shared some basics about how to support people to speak about traumatic events. We spoke about an attitude of warmth to defrost frozen states, and the importance of always giving choice, but with a welcoming rather than clinical attitude. We appreciated the importance of choice about with whom and when someone wants to share their story, and that speaking in private might be important; but we also underscored that thinking of trauma only as mental health pathology can lead to further isolation. In our experience, it is immensely valuable for people to feel welcome to speak about their traumatic experience in a facilitated group setting, because their traumatic experience is a community matter.

We asked the participant if she would like to practice. She jumped to the middle of the room, saying that she wanted to share her own story as a way of also inviting others and supporting community. We invited her to continue and acknowledged the value and the difficulty for those listening, when one's own traumatic memories may also be stirred.

She told about the period in 1992 when her family had to go into hiding during the "trial genocide" against Tutsi. In 1994, at the age of 12, she went into hiding again in the woods. Her father who was very ill had stayed home. She went back to visit him. When he saw her, he sent her away in order to protect her, and that was the last time she saw him.

She also described sensory memories of lying under dead bodies, thirsty, not knowing if she was drinking water or blood. After many hours, she went out to get water for her brother who was with her, still alive. On her return, she found her brother dead. All the dead bodies began to call out to her, to call her name. She then was in a truck. She was told she would go to a hospital – but then she jumped into a hole (apparently a mass grave). To this day, she does not know where this hole is or how she got out.

Several in the group stood close, weeping, and touching her back. She then made a plea for anyone who may be able to find information about the mass graves still missing. We appreciated the group for witnessing her testimony and emphasized that getting help in locating mass graves was a vital step for community accountability.

### **Systemic Awareness, Worldwork and Roles**

Mindell (1992, 2002) has described the "deep democracy" needed to support interactions between all parts of a system, with the finding that communities are wiser, and can find pathways forward, when awareness is brought into interactions.

When we work with a group or community in conflict, we observe roles that underlie specific content, for example, in many conflicts we perceive the roles of oppressor and oppressed. A role is non-local, that is, it occurs systemically at different levels: at a geopolitical scale, within a nation, between different groups, inside a community or organization, within a relationship conflict, or in a conflict inside oneself.

A useful way to understand roles is that a role is greater than an individual (i.e., role > individual), but an individual is also greater than a role (individual > role). What

does that mean? A role is much more than an individual viewpoint – in fact many people are needed to bring expression to the role. Conversely, even though you may be drawn as an individual to act out or bring expression to a particular role, you might also recognize yourself in the opposing role. You are more than just one role (Mindell, 1992).

Mapping and enacting roles allows us to facilitate groups and communities, as participants witness the conflict that they are embroiled in together, rather than remaining only polarized. Representing roles can help to delineate the polarization, and even enable people to have facilitated heated interactions between the roles. Rather than remain locked in polarization, however, participants gain awareness through this interaction and even transform apparently intractable conflict.

A “ghost role” is a particular kind of role that is implicit but not directly represented. In conflict situations, the role of perpetrator is often a ghost role. Everyone refers to the perpetrator, yet it is rare for someone to speak about how they perpetrated conflict. Profound changes can happen when someone can speak about the injustice that they or their group caused to another.

After a transformative group interaction in a forum in Croatia, a man who had been a soldier said, “It never had occurred to me that I had any part in what happened in this region.” Importantly, he added, “This feeling of responsibility does not make me feel guilty. It gives me hope for the future, knowing that I make a difference to my community.” (quoted in Audergon, 2006, p. 44)

### **A New Dimension of Transitional Justice – Accountability and Awareness**

There is a central need in societies to have processes of accountability following violent conflict. The Nuremberg trials (after the Holocaust), the International Tribunals (for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda), as well as truth commissions (such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa) have had enormous significance for humanity’s attempts to grow beyond a worldview based solely in power and impunity, one side dominating another, to a worldview based on holding ourselves accountable to one another for our collective behavior and human rights.

Tribunals and truth commissions are sometimes seen to function at cross-purposes. Tribunals focus on criminal accountability in order to prevent a culture of impunity, whereas truth commissions focus on how society can hold itself accountable by way of bringing out the truth, grappling with the reality of what has happened and even sometimes offering amnesty in exchange for needed testimony.

While international tribunals are punitive, their purpose, like that of truth commissions, is to support society to be able to move forward. There is a growing consensus that tribunals and truth commissions are both vital and complementary processes for societies to recover and to prevent future cycles of violence.

The term “transitional justice” refers to a range of processes needed for a society to face issues of justice and accountability, in order to move forward. This includes national and international tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, public apologies, monetary reparations, and reform of state institutions that perpetrated the human rights abuses with impunity. The International Center for Transitional Justice

(2016) advises that each situation is unique and requires a combination of these processes.

We propose an additional aspect of transitional justice – i.e., community-wide opportunities for facilitated interactions about issues of justice and accountability. By way of addressing and resolving tensions, communities discover a “relational infrastructure” that enables them to also work together on the social and economic issues they face (Arye, Audergon, Audergon, Bijelic, Ivelja, & Škopelja, 2010).

### **Justice in the Grass - The Gacaca Courts in Rwanda**

After the genocide in Rwanda, more than 100,000 people were accused of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. They populated the prisons, awaiting trial in over-crowded, impossible conditions.

The Gacaca courts were set up as a method for dealing with such large-scale issues of justice and in order for society to reconcile and move forward. The Gacaca courts were a method of transitional justice based on traditional methods: people gathered and local elders participated in the process of hearing testimony. The word “gacaca” refers to grass, where communities might gather to resolve conflict. The Gacaca courts made a profound difference to the country’s recovery.

The Gacaca courts were particularly oriented to rebuilding community. The goal was for perpetrators to come forward and give information that survivors needed about what happened to their loved ones. In exchange, the perpetrators could ask for forgiveness and possibly return to their communities (Al Jazeera, 2012). Often they were asked to do community service or give reparations. The courts also had a punitive element, sometimes involving a prison sentence, though the sentence was often already served.

### **Awareness and Accountability Throughout All Levels of a System**

Another reason why facilitated community interaction is needed is that tribunals and truth commissions can only deal with a small tier of people most responsible for war crimes and human rights violations during violent conflict.

Both Claude Jordan, the president of the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia, and Carla Del Ponte, prosecutor for the Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, have spoken about this. While recognizing the profound importance of tribunals, they have also underscored their limits and supported the need not only for truth commissions, but also for other initiatives that would involve more of society in a process of accountability, recovery and prevention (Jordan, 2001; Del Ponte, 2008).

An underlying principle of tribunals is that holding accountable those who are most responsible can help free society from a persistent generalized accusation towards a whole ethnic or national group. In this way, the tribunals help the whole society to move forward. An underlying principle of truth commissions is that you cannot forgive what you do not know - the truth must come forward, so that survivors will be able to forgive and so that the whole society can move forward. In our view, tribunals and

truth commissions are both vital processes for society, but should be seen as the opening for further work.

Although tribunals help to establish the truth about what happened, and help to prevent historical revisionism, they do not take away controversy. Carla Del Ponte, the prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), believed that in addition to prosecuting those most responsible for planning and carrying out the genocide of Tutsi, it would be important to also prosecute individuals from the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) militia who had allegedly committed crimes against humanity as they put an end to the genocide. (Del Ponte & Sudetic, 2008) From her viewpoint, crimes on all sides must be tried. From the viewpoint of President Paul Kagame, who had led the RPF, insisting on trying members of the RPF for alleged crimes, alongside those individuals most responsible for genocide, was inflammatory; that it would in effect relativize genocide, as though it were a conflict between two sides, rather than a strategic attempt to eliminate an entire population.

When Slobodan Milosovic was called to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, victims of violence and destruction throughout Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, and beyond were deeply relieved. At the same time, others in Serbia thought that the international community had no business holding Serb leaders accountable, and the neutrality of the tribunal was naturally also called into question.

There was a tense atmosphere in Croatia when Croats accused of war crimes were also taken to the tribunal. While many people welcomed the process of accountability, a surge of nationalism took demonstrators to the streets. The alleged war criminals were seen not as criminals, but as war heroes who had defended and liberated Croatia from Serb violence and occupation.

Our experience was that when the Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was underway, it activated “hot spots” which needed facilitation throughout society. The Tribunal also created a context in which it became more possible to speak openly. In our forums, participants began to talk more easily about the atrocities and trauma on all sides, while searching for a way to go forward personally and at a community level.

It is typical in situations of conflict, whether at the kitchen sink or in an international context, that almost everyone identifies either as innocent or as a victim. As in a typical “whodunit” detective story, we have seen that the role of perpetrator tends to remain mysteriously unfilled; it is a “ghost role”: more implicit than explicit, and rarely represented directly.

In order to promote collective awareness and accountability, this ‘ghost role’ (i.e. one’s part in perpetrating violence) needs to be acknowledged at different levels of our societal engagement: in our national and international criminal justice systems; in truth commissions; in media and education; in facilitated community interaction; within relationship; and inside of us as individuals, as we grapple with becoming aware of our own part.

## **Trauma and Accountability go Hand in Hand**

In post-conflict regions, such as the Balkans and Rwanda, we have seen how community-wide trauma is linked to economic depression and young people leaving the region to seek opportunities elsewhere. Even when money is poured into an area to boost the economy, this cannot revive the spirit and vitality needed for the economy to thrive. Understanding this, in Croatia, we developed a programme that linked economic recovery projects and community forums to deal with the community-wide trauma and open questions of accountability (Arye, Audergon, Audergon, Bijelic, Ivelja, & Škopelja, 2010).

The fields of international development and of psychology are still dominated by a worldview that understands trauma only in terms of the individual, who, it follows, may be in need of mental health services. We believe that a new framework is needed that still values mental health services, but which recognizes community-wide trauma as needing to be addressed at a community level.

In our forums, individual stories are fragments of a puzzle that the participants put together. Their emotional narratives and interactions weave a fabric of community recovery. The strength of this fabric may help to prevent the kind of historical revisionism that can lead to recurring violence. Moreover, by witnessing testimony of someone's traumatic experience, some people feel moved to take accountability for their part.

### **Rwanda Forum (2016) – “They are my Neighbors”**

After the young woman told her story of surviving the genocide, a man asked to speak. He searched for words. “It is hard to speak of how we killed innocent people. I was a soldier, indoctrinated by the previous government. I am a Rwandan who killed other Rwandans.”

He said that as a soldier, he was assigned to go to the local church. He was told that he had to prevent an ambush that was being planned there. He was told that the people there would have weapons and it would be very difficult to fight them. He went to the church, but saw only his neighbors there. So, he went back and reported to the military leader that there must be some kind of mistake. The people were his neighbors, old people, families and friends, and they did not have weapons. The military leader said, “These are the people who are dangerous – they are just tricking you by making you see the old people and families.”

His agony was palpable as he spoke about how he went back to the church, betraying his own conscience and humanity by following orders. He did not describe the killing. He paused, then continued: “They called my name. We had played football together. I can still hear my friends calling my name. That is the shock I will have forever.” Then he said, “How can I stand by you and show you my feeling for what has happened to you, knowing that I have done this to you?”

The group fell silent. One of our facilitation team, Lungile Nkosi Hill, from South Africa, said that she had never heard someone in South Africa speak about their accountability in this personal way, and how much it meant to her. A Rwandan man said that, in the 22 years since the genocide, he had never heard anyone speak this

way. He underscored the importance of our facilitation methods, saying, “This is the first time we have talked ... all of this happened very near here.” Another man remarked on how unusual it was in Rwandan society for men to be able to show their feelings like this.

Tears now filled the eyes of the man who had taken part in perpetrating the genocide. The woman who had just told her story of survival – in that very church – went and sat next to him and put her arm gently around him. This moment seemed simple and natural between the two of them; yet, as a group, we were witnessing an uncanny moment in this world. Just as the perpetrator saw his neighbors in the church, the group now saw the perpetrator as our neighbor. This was not simply a crazy man who had let loose and murdered; this was a man who had tried to follow his conscience, doubted himself, and put aside his own awareness in order to follow his duty as a soldier. When you listen to this, you realize that this could be you, your brother or your son.

It also brings up many other stories, such as the propaganda in Nazi Germany about the Jews; and how people in 2003 in the USA and the UK believed the blatant disinformation in the mainstream news preceding the bombing of Iraq.

Such stories also bring another, parallel perspective on the lack of intervention in Rwanda and Bosnia. Just as the soldier froze when he saw his neighbors in the church and did not act on his conscience, so as a world, we did not act on ours. When we believe that the person perpetrating violence is “other” and not like us, we separate ourselves, and do not recognize our own responsibility. In his foreword to David Hamburg’s (2008) book, *Preventing Genocide*, the late Elie Wiesel wrote: “One of the most troubling... aspects of the debate on genocide is that in almost every case, it could have been prevented. The examples of Rwanda and Srebrenica are proofs of this.” (Wiesel, 2008, p. vii)

### **The Spiritual, Psychological, Social, and Political – Awareness Matters**

Bearing witness to community trauma and the search for accountability can be understood as a central search by humanity for awareness. This is a psychological and spiritual search as well as a social and political one.

Great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi (1927, 1929/2001), Martin Luther King (1991), and Nelson Mandela (1994) linked political leadership with psychological awareness and spiritual practice. Nonviolence is at once a practice of self-awareness and the basis of social and civil rights movements. Gandhi reminded us that nonviolence has nothing to do with being passive. Violence is not stopped by force, but rather by refusing to replay it, stepping outside the cycle of violence.

We often turn to the inspiration of Mandela. He sought and found the awareness he needed to be able to lead his nation out of its history. After 27 years in prison, he determined to step out of the whole system – realizing that the oppressor and oppressed had both been imprisoned under Apartheid (Mandela, 1994).

When working together to design interventions to deal with the aftermath of violence and its prevention, we need to remember that it takes our psychological and spiritual as well as social and political awareness.

## **Hatred, Compassion and Vigilance: A Group Process in Rwanda**

The forum participants frequently referred to the hatred and divisiveness that led to genocide. On the last day, we represented the ghost role that hates, incites divisiveness, and wants power at any cost. As we represented the role, participants were emotionally stirred. Several stood up to represent an opposing role that is passionately committed to stop the hatred and create a better future. As the polarization intensified, some tried to bridge the two positions. Then, with a surprising and transformative gesture, a woman who had barely said a word, stepped in and very gently took the hand of the person playing the role of the one who hates, saying that she didn't want to leave him alone. She said, "I know him." The atmosphere was charged, as we witnessed and felt her compassion. Another woman, a refugee from the DRC, came to stand beside her and reminded the group that this hatred is not something in the past, but very current and real. In this moment, there was a recognition among all of us that this role, the drive for power at any cost, is human. It is part of us, you and me, our sisters and brothers. Recognizing this requires both compassion and our vigilant awareness.

## **Outlook**

As survivors and perpetrators worked on their traumatic and painful history together in Rwanda, they transformed their personal outlook and relationships in community, with hope and resolve to pass on their experiences and work together to resolve the difficult issues in society.

In our forums in Croatia over the years, hundreds of participants worked together to process the persisting tensions and blocks to community recovery. Again and again, hope was awakened – not a "pie in the sky" hope but, rather, one that emerges from increasing awareness, personally and collectively.

Feeling with people the impact of mass violence on them personally, and on the community spirit, and witnessing the way communities are able to transform tensions, brings us a long-term outlook and desire to contribute to the work of transitional justice and violence prevention.

It is well documented that mass violence doesn't spring out of nowhere; rather, it is linked to deliberate state terror tactics (and non-state terror tactics) that develop over time. Knowing this means that prevention is possible, and that we have an imperative to work towards prevention of future violence (Hamburg, 2008).

One key to prevention is recognizing that our emotions are the fuel used to implement these tactics, to divide and polarize whole societies. For the tactics to be effective, people need to be easily inflamed. The emotional and psychological dynamics that get us going include our sense of justice, loyalty, identification with power and privilege, dynamics of personal and collective trauma, fear and need for safety, our love of altered states, and our susceptibility to disinformation, as we demonize and dehumanize the enemy, and then normalize this behavior (Audergon, 2004). Experience shows that facilitated dialogue can increase awareness around

these dynamics, so that individuals and communities might not be so easily torn apart in the next round. As David Hamburg (2008) put it:

Until now very little work has been done on the prevention of genocide, especially when prevention means stopping a problem before it becomes murderous. The time has come to draw together the worlds' knowledge pertinent to this subject and to stimulate worldwide reflection, discussion, research and education on prevention of genocide. (p. 4)

As societies, we need to grapple with the immense current violence and humanitarian crises, such as in Syria and South Sudan, and what is needed to prevent future violence, and we need to look towards the violence of history that has been insufficiently addressed and continues to shape our current problems and future violent conflicts – unresolved issues of accountability and collective dynamics of trauma from Europe's colonial history in Africa, Australia and South America; the genocide of native Americans; the slave trade accompanied by persistent white supremacy; the Armenian genocide; the legacy of Stalin; etc. – and the list has barely begun.

What will it take not to resign to the replaying nightmare of this magnitude of violence? It is part of human nature to be readily polarized: you don't have to go far to study this as it is within us all. Yet, it is also part of our human nature to become conscious, as individuals, and collectively in relation to one another, and find surprising and creative possibilities to get off this wheel.

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