More than a Perpetrator: Lived Experiences of Perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda who have Engaged in Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation

by

Tania Bakas

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Name:	**Tania Bakas**
Degree:	**Master of Arts (Counselling Psychology)**
Title:	**More than a Perpetrator: Lived Experiences of Perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda who have Engaged in Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation**
Committee:	**Chair: Patricia Nitkin** Clinical Professor, Education
	Masahiro Minami Supervisor Associate Professor, Education
	Michael Ling Committee Member Senior Lecturer, Education
	Yoshi Takano Examiner Assistant Professor, Psychology University of Prince Edward Island

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Abstract

The scope of post-conflict reconciliation and peace-building literature has largely focused on processes of atonement and outcomes for survivors. Few analyses concentrate on perpetrator experiences and even fewer on the phenomenological processes of change for offenders in ethnic/political conflict contexts. Four ex-prisoners, perpetrators from the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, were each interviewed on two occasions, one week apart, for approximately one hour. Participants shared their lived experiences in engaging with survivors through the Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation Approach (ABPRA). Situated within a social constructionist paradigm, this interpretative phenomenological analysis presents participants' change through ABPRA. Themes emerged centre on positive changes in self/group identity, interpersonal/intergroup trust-building and impact of community and government supports on personal development and symbiosis with survivor groups. The phenomenological experiences explored reveal psychosocial mechanisms that lead to enduring positive changes in attitude and behaviour, self-efficacy, and personal contributions towards community wellness and economic growth.

Keywords: psychosocial reconciliation; prisoner reintegration; perpetrators of violence; genocide perpetrators; peace-building

To the participants of this study, *abarimu wanjye* [my teachers], and the Mbyo community, this thesis is dedicated to you.

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee ii
Ethics Statement iii
Abstract iv
Dedication v
Acknowledgements vi
List of Tables ix
List of Figures x
List of Acronyms xi

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

Chapter 2. Literature Review 4
2.1. Processes Impacting Perpetrators' Lived Experiences 4
2.1.1. Forgiveness versus Reconciliation 4
2.1.2. Self-forgiveness 6
2.1.3. Seeking Forgiveness & Repentance 8
2.1.4. Receiving Forgiveness 8
2.1.5. Guilt versus Remorse 9
2.1.6. Shame 9
2.1.7. Social Psychological Processes: Dehumanization-Rehumanization & Recategorization-Decategorization 10
2.1.8. Commemorations of Atrocities 11
2.1.9. Perpetrators of Genocide – moving forward 12

Chapter 3. Methodology/Methods 14
3.1. Epistemological Framework: Social Constructionism 14
3.2. Theoretical Framework: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis 14
3.2.1. Idiography 15
3.2.2. Double Hermeneutic and the Role of Researcher 15
3.3. Methods 16
3.3.1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis 16
3.3.2. Research question 17
3.3.3. Recruitment and Sampling 17
3.3.4. Inclusion criteria 18
3.3.5. Exclusion criteria 18
3.3.6. Site Selection 19
3.3.7. Procedures 19
Introduction Visit 19
First Interview 19
Second Interview and local gathering 20
Member Checks and Community Celebration 20
3.3.8. Data Collection 20
3.3.9. Interview Schedule 21
3.3.10. Debriefing 22

3.3.11. Data Analysis 22
3.3.12. Validity and Quality of Study 24
3.4. Research Ethics 27

Chapter 4. Findings 28
4.1. Relationship with Others 30
4.1.1. Building intimacy, closeness. 30
4.1.2. Desire for change to be witnessed by others 31
4.1.3. Confidence in the repair 32
4.1.4. Change through relationship with survivor 32
4.1.5. Reparation facilitates personal growth 33
4.1.6. Impact of forgiveness 33
4.1.7. Re-establishing trust and safety for each other 34
Theme discussion 36
4.2. Relationship with Self 38
4.2.1. Coping and resilience 38
4.2.2. Confession and taking accountability 39
4.2.3. Accepting negative emotions as part of life 41
4.2.4. Self-forgiveness 42
4.2.5. Remorse motivates behavioural change 42
4.2.6. Proud of personal growth 43
4.2.7. Building empathy 44
Theme discussion 44
4.3. Relationship with Superordinate Systems 46
4.3.1. Repaired relationship with new/present superordinate systems 46
4.3.2. Reclaiming personal agency through healthy relationship with superordinate systems 47
4.3.3. Being part of a bigger cause 48
4.3.4. Systemic support 49
Theme discussion 50
4.4. New Identity and Self-Concept 51
4.4.1. More than a perpetrator, yet your crime is always next to you 51
4.4.2. Rehumanization 53
4.4.3. Recategorization 53
4.4.4. Becoming a better person 54
4.4.5. Change in self-concept, being valued in community 54
Theme Discussion 54
4.5. Discussion Summary & Conclusion 55
4.5.1. Personal Reflections 56
4.5.2. Implications 57
4.5.3. Applications in Counselling and Beyond 58
4.5.4. Conclusion: Actions Speak Louder than Words 60

References 63

List of Tables

Table 1 Findings from interview data: Major themes and subthemes 29

List of Figures

Figure 1 Diagram showing relationship between major themes. 28
Figure 2 Mango tree in Rwanda.. 61
Figure 3 Photo with my reconciliation teachers. 62

List of Acronyms

ABPRA	Action-based Psychosocial Reconciliation
PFR	Prison Fellowship Rwanda
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
PTG	Post Traumatic Growth

Chapter 1. Introduction

The scope of post-conflict reconciliation and peace-building literature has been largely focused on processes of atonement and outcomes for survivors/victims. These include public projections of apology, reparative actions and commemorations (Gabowitsch, 2017a) and a vast array of literature on forgiveness (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002; Neto et al., 2007; Roe, 2007; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002).

Relatively few analyses concentrate on perpetrators and even fewer on the phenomenological processes of change for perpetrators of ethnic/political conflict. However, some do touch on the lived experiences of genocide perpetrators in Rwanda through their research. Uwibereyeho King and Sakamoto (2015) make a poignant point regarding the treatment availed to non-survivors; "non-survivor", a term used to include perpetrators, bystanders and those who were not victimized by the genocide: they note that post-genocide trauma services that were widely offered by NGOs did not offer treatment to non-survivors under the presumption that non-survivors did not experience trauma from the genocide and thus did not require treatment. Yet, they had observed that perpetrators were exhibiting traumatic symptoms and discuss, for example, the commonality of displacement as a psychological coping mechanism in this group (King & Sakamoto, 2015). An important conclusion risen from their work is that not only did non-survivors experience traumatic symptoms but also that overcoming the enduring impacts from the genocide, for both survivors and non-survivors, must involve contact and interaction between the two groups to facilitate understanding, and to reduce hostility and isolation. Rutayisire and Richters (2014) also agree that there has been unaddressed trauma for a group of non-survivors and argue that the post-genocide community justice process, the Gacaca courts, left behind unresolved suffering and trauma for ex-prisoners and prisoners' wives in the community. Such work illuminates that there has been a void in reconciliation work; that the plethora of literature that examines reconciliation through a survivor lens, such as forgiveness-based therapy literature, largely neglects the other side of the coin, the experiences of perpetrators. Perhaps there is an implicit bias in research that assumes that the success barometer for reconciliation lies on the phenomenological experiences of survivors, even though the construct of reconciliation is a priori a dyadic process. This question does not negate the experiences of those injured by violence nor the unquestionable priority to attend to

their trauma healing and recovery but may illuminate the need to holistically address long-term outcomes of current reconciliation efforts for both parties involved, which may have larger implications in conflict prevention and peacebuilding work.

The inception of this project arose out of an interest in understanding the post-offense lived experiences of perpetrators, specifically those who have engaged in intergroup, mass-scale harm and to understand the psychological frameworks within which perpetrators may experience a positive change in their self-concept, an enduring attitudinal deviation from previously prejudiced or biased perspectives towards the victim and their group but also any behavioural changes towards desistance from repeating the same or similar transgressions. During my undergraduate studies I attended a talk by Dr. Minami where he shared his work in Rwanda and the action-based reconciliation approach he developed and implemented there. It was during this talk that he shared a snippet of a perpetrator talking about positive change he experienced within himself through the reconciliation process with the survivor, and this was when I realized the journey I wanted to take for my Master's research. I wanted to know more about these lived experiences. Rwanda was the destination.

Some context about Rwanda's recent history will be helpful in understanding the scope of this research and its connection to Dr. Minami's work. In 1994, Rwanda experienced one of the worst atrocities in the world. A mass slaughtering of the Tutsi minority took place, killing over 1,000,000 people in a span of only 100 days. When the genocide ended, the country was in disarray and there were over 120,000 perpetrators imprisoned in inhumane conditions. A shift in judicial practice permitted the reintegration of thousands of prisoners. Reconciliation programs were established to help perpetrators and survivors live side by side again.

Research undertaken by Dr. Minami (2020) in post-genocide Rwanda showed that activity-oriented contact in survivor-perpetrator dyads is an instrumental part of a successful reconciliation process. The intervention developed was designed to be an action-based interaction (versus a solely verbal interaction) between survivor and perpetrator by focusing on a common activity that benefits the survivor (e.g.: farming/harvesting). During the intervention, there is no requirement to discuss past transgressions or conflict if the dyad chooses not to. This action-based psychosocial reconciliation approach (ABPRA) (Minami, 2020) produced positive outcomes for both

survivor and non-survivor participants as the dyad rebuilt their relationship in an organic manner. Notably, when perpetrators were interviewed post-intervention, they shared how this reconciliation approach facilitated a reduction in shame and fear and a more positive self-evaluation (Minami, 2020). This Master's thesis work intends to focus on these changes in perpetrators' lived experiences after having participated in ABPRA.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Processes Impacting Perpetrators' Lived Experiences

As noted in the introduction, most literature is focused on processes of healing for survivors and some aspects of this will still be explored in this review despite absences of perpetrator-focused data. Developing an understanding of one side of the reconciliation "coin" can illuminate paths towards addressing the other side.

2.1.1. Forgiveness versus Reconciliation

Reconciliation may sometimes be conflated with forgiveness; however, the two differ in some significant ways. One important point is that forgiveness must be granted by the victim (voluntarily) and this can be independent of the offender's actions but also may be unconditional; reconciliation, however, is a process that involves both victim and offender to work towards building mutual trust (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015b). Forgiveness has been a key construct in reconciliation literature. Generally, research on this topic has been focused on the processes and conditions that contribute towards or against the granting of forgiveness, where typically victims' experiences are central. Also, it appears that the vast majority of relevant literature is in the context of interpersonal transgressions. Forgiveness as a process (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015a) is outlined as occurring in four phases/goals: a) An *uncovering* phase in which the transgression victim becomes aware of how the offense has impacted him/her, b) a *decision* phase where the victim comprehends the "nature of forgiveness" and voluntarily makes a commitment to pursue it, c) a *work* phase which sees the victim developing a more empathetic position toward the perpetrator and shifts happening in the victims' subjective affect towards the perpetrator, the self, and the relationship, and d) a deepening phase which appears to be more existential as it involves finding deeper meaning in adversity and a sense of purpose moving forward. This outline brings to light how explicit awareness, intentionality and effort is required on behalf of victims in order to move towards forgiveness, independently of perpetrator involvement.

Exploring the role of forgiveness for perpetrators, even if outside the post-conflict sociopolitical scope, may still illuminate paths to positive change and desistance. Ahmed

and Braithwaite (2005), for example, found that forgiveness granted by a victim can reduce perpetrator reoffending, however, this study focused on bullying within Bangladeshi schools – without examining or acknowledging any pre-existing intergroup contexts outside of the microcosm of the school environment and may not generalize to post-war/conflict contexts. What becomes evident is that, forgiveness, as it has been explored through Western literature is generally viewed as an intraindividual process; a notion criticized by Paloutzian (2010) as lacking cross-cultural perspective. Paloutzian (2010) explains that in some non-western cultures asking for and granting forgiveness is a public process that actively involves and engages the community. Nwoye explains one such process, restorative conferencing, as a "communal ritual" (2010, p. 125) where dialogue between the victim-perpetrator dyad is encouraged in a safe space where all those concerned are present, including relatives and supporters, and a community representative. Two other such examples of collective inclusion are the *Gacaca* courts in Rwanda (A. Rutayisire, 2010) and the *Sulha*, a traditional Palestinian peace-making process (Cohen, 2010).

Forgiveness granted to prior-offenders may provide closure for both perpetrators and victims (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Offenders tend to initiate forgiveness-seeking more often than victims pursue it as it can mark that the offense is over (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Where a positive relationship between offender and victim existed prior to the offence, the perpetrator may be more motivated to not repeat harm after receiving forgiveness as it may encourage the potential restoration of the relationship (Wallace et al., 2008). By the same token, not receiving forgiveness may indicate that restoration of the relationship is futile thus diminishing the offender's motivation to improve the relationship with the victim (Wallace et al., 2008), yet when offenders are unforgiving towards themselves, they show greater concern for victims (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Exline et al. (2008) note that the likelihood of forgiveness increases when victims can reflect on similar offenses to their own; this is mediated by both a deeper understanding of the offense and perceived reduction of offence severity. Finally, while the literature in this area is sparse with regards to perpetrator benefits, there is some evidence in favour of using forgiveness training in violent offender rehabilitation programs, particularly in early stages of anger treatment that focus on empathy building, but not necessarily on its own as a sufficient treatment to invoke enduring changes and desistance from re-offending (Day et al., 2008).

Particularly relevant to the context of this research is a study of forgivability of terrible offenses at the intergroup level: when individuals reflected on their own capability for similar offenses it did not increase their forgivability of the offenses, however, when reflecting as members of their ingroup and their capability of similar offenses, forgivability of the offense increased but also there was less condoning of harsh punishment for perpetrators (Exline et al., 2008). Wallace, Exline and Baumeister's (2008) work warns against premature preference towards forgiveness as a recidivism deterrent considering an understanding of the underlying mechanisms in perpetrator motivations and behaviours were inconclusive in their own studies and unexplored in most literature. Struthers et al. (2008) similarly recommend further exploration on the impact of forgiveness on perpetrators, noting that when forgiveness is offered explicitly (versus implicitly) it may negatively impact a perpetrator's motivation to repent and seek reconciliation due to the negative consequences to their private and public image. With regards to forgiveness of intractable and severe offenses, Cohen (2010) notes that:

> There is a risk when the forgiver adopts such a superior position, as the "good one" absolving the "bad one," that the gesture is a form of vengeance thinly disguised as an act of virtue. In cases of radical evil, this type of forgiveness does not offer a lasting resolution. Instead, what better serves trans-generational healing is an attitude toward forgiveness built on compassion (p. 147).

It is also noteworthy to include that victims' wellbeing and life satisfaction was found by Bassett et al. (2016) to be related to emotional forgiveness but not related to decisional forgiveness. Enright & Eastin (1992) pointedly proposed that a common issue in forgiveness research is that often there is no consensus on the definition of forgiveness; stating that the way forgiveness is defined can have significant influence on the process and outcomes of research. With these points in mind, and echoing Wallace, Exline and Baumeister's (2008) trepidation around the construct of forgiveness, further consideration of its nuances may prove helpful for future research.

2.1.2. Self-forgiveness

There are few forgiveness scales that measure forgiveness of self and psychological correlates. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) (Thompson et al., 2005) predicts a link between self-forgiveness and greater psychological wellbeing. In the context of interpersonal transgressions, specifically, self-forgiveness was found to be

linked to greater feelings of self-worth and a higher likelihood of those self-forgiving having more positive and constructive thoughts and behaviours toward themselves but also lower levels of depressive affect (Wohl et al., 2008). Additionally, self-forgiveness has an impact on perceived physical health, more so than forgiveness of others might have (Bassett et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2008). Hall and Fincham (2005) propose a model of self-forgiveness and outline the three determinants of self-forgiveness: Guilt and shame are the emotional determinants of self-forgiveness; guilt differing from shame as it is other-oriented and can often be linked to conciliatory behaviours, such as apologizing and forgiveness-seeking, whereas shame is self-focused and evaluative, most often linked to self-destructive behaviours and perceptions of low self-worth. Attributions are the social-cognitive determinants of self-forgiveness, such as placing blame on others or the self. Finally, offense-related determinants are a) conciliatory behaviours, b) perceived forgiveness from victim or higher power and c) the severity of the offense. If self-forgiveness occurs in the absence of guilt or shame, which is typically an indication that the transgressor does not genuinely believe he/she has done anything wrong, then this appearance of forgiveness is likely pseudo-self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005). These models are informed by research on interpersonal conflict and may not generalize to post-ethnic/political conflict processes. Also, interpersonal transgressions may appear to occur within a one-on-one microcosmic vacuum if literature tends to examine these occurrences as such; discourse without acknowledgment of intergroup contexts and influences negates that victims and perpetrators navigate through life as, also, members of superordinate group categories. Nevertheless, Hall and Fincham's (2005) discussion may be within limited parameters but encourages discourse to consider different levels of self-forgiveness and attempts to shift perspective away from a dichotomous forgiving/unforgiving framework. Hall and Fincham's subsequent work emphasizes how self-forgiveness increases over time as a linear progression, but it should be noted that this applies to transgressions of relatively low severity (2008). Cornish and Wade (2015) focus on the process of self-forgiveness and present the model of four R's of genuine self-forgiveness. First, taking responsibility for the offense and the consequences of one's actions helps lead to genuine self-forgiveness. Second, experiencing remorse upon accepting responsibility; in line with Hall and Fincham's (2005) distinction between shame and guilt, Cornish and Wade (2015) also suggest trying to work through shame-based emotions so that the focus is mostly on guilt as it is offense-specific. Third, restoration involves initiating repair of the

prior relationship, making amends (when possible) and addressing past behaviours associated with the offense. Fourth, renewal marks the attainment of self-forgiveness as growth is experienced as well as greater self-compassion and acceptance (Cornish & Wade, 2015). The authors also suggest these processes can help towards future desistance from re-offending (Cornish & Wade, 2015).

2.1.3. Seeking Forgiveness & Repentance

As with self-forgiveness, seeking forgiveness was found to be related to greater physical health, less psychological distress and more life satisfaction (Bassett et al., 2016). Chiaramello, Sastre & Mullet (2008) found, however, that certain personality variables which are linked to enduring resentment, less agreeableness and openness are related to inability to seek forgiveness. There are five factors which greatly influence a transgressor's motivation to seek forgiveness: a) responsibility, b) rumination, c) offense severity, d) relational closeness, all of which were correlated positively to forgiveness seeking and e) anger, which was linked to reduced likelihood forgiveness seeking (Riek, 2010). Guilt was the one common aspect that mediated all five factors of forgiveness seeking (Riek, 2010). Eaton, Struthers and Santelli (2006) describe offender repentance as taking responsibility for a transgression and validating the harm incurred. It was shown that repentance can help facilitate forgiveness for victims, but the literature does not focus on possible impacts on offenders (Eaton et al., 2006). Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) warns that pursuing forgiveness must be motivated by a genuine connection to the pain of those harmed as "empty" forgiveness seeking can cause more harm than good.

2.1.4. Receiving Forgiveness

Enright (1996) proposes a receiving-forgiveness model which provides a 21-point progressive list of phases to work through within a perpetrator-counsellor therapeutic relationship. This model, however, ultimately is centred around the act of forgiveness to be given – usually with hopes of future reconciliation - and less so on any restorative benefits that could potentially impact the perpetrator. Enright makes an interesting observation with regards to the connection between receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness: where forgiveness is sought for but not received, self-forgiveness, or the process towards self-forgiveness may be hindered (1996). Additionally, Bassett et al.

(2016) observed that feeling forgiven by God is linked to greater self-forgiveness, particularly when religiosity ranks high, and self-forgiveness (whether linked to religiosity or not) was found to relate to greater sense of both psychological and physical wellness.

2.1.5. Guilt versus Remorse

In most of the forgiveness literature examined, guilt and shame constructs appear more often than remorse. However, Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) points out how powerful an emotion remorse is in comparison to guilt for both perpetrators and victims. Differences noted are that remorse is more other-oriented; guilt still more focused on the self, albeit within the context of the offense. Guilt without the presence of remorse can still provoke defensive mechanisms such as denial of responsibility, rationalization or justification whereas remorse follows explicit recognition of the perpetrator's active involvement in harm-doing, awareness of harm caused to the other and obvious regret (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002). Remorse is particularly important for perpetrators who have committed crimes motivated by loyalty to oppressive power systems or in the name of totalistic ideologies; it permits harm-doers to recognize that prior "professional" or "moral duty" was in fact horrific, intractable damage. Fisher and Exline (2010) also note how remorse motivates perpetrators towards reparation and that this consequently effects a reduction in both guilt and shame. Reduction of guilt may also be attained by self-punishment but when this is prolonged and continuous it risks provoking greater shame and distancing from potential reparative efforts (Fisher & Exline, 2010).

2.1.6. Shame

Shame as a construct ignites varied discussions from scholars. It has been suggested that shame can hinder reparative efforts as it may promote avoidance behaviours in perpetrators, self-condemnation or other anti-social and aggressive behaviours (Fisher & Exline, 2010) but can also be debilitating (Woodyatt et al., 2017). Ahmed & Braithwaite (2006) on the other hand suggest that shame can be useful when managed appropriately; specifically, they found that adaptive shame management can prevent bullying behaviours, yet when shame management is maladaptive it increases bullying. Fisher and Exline's (2010) discussion is partially in line with this notion as they state that shame might be useful if only experienced briefly and promptly redirected in prosocial directions. In other words, shame must be managed carefully to be beneficial.

Reintegrative shaming is a public process whereas perpetrators must take responsibility for harm-doing publicly. The public process of admitting to a transgression in front of others can be a gruesome experience for the perpetrator but offers an opportunity for him or her to make amends and eventually “shed the offender label” (Nwoye, 2010, p. 128). This is vastly different from retributive processes which focus on humiliation and punishment with little or no opportunity to restore the relationship with the victim and be re-admitted into the community (Nwoye, 2010).

2.1.7. Social Psychological Processes: Dehumanization-Rehumanization & Recategorization-Decategorization

Dehumanization is a process by which members of an outgroup are consistently assigned non-human attributions so that eventually they are perceived as sub-human and unworthy of the moral treatment and respect that humans would typically receive (Baum, 2008). Two prime examples may be drawn from the pre-genocide propaganda that was spread by the Nazis to promote imagery of Jews as rats or the media propaganda building up to the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda where they were called cockroaches. When outgroups are dehumanized, the perceived moral obligation to value and protect human life becomes blurred (Baum, 2008). Dehumanization can be reduced by emphasizing similarities between groups or common group categories (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). As asserted earlier, pre-existing intergroup relationships are important to consider even when the transgression is interpersonal. When there has been historical rivalry between groups, Wohl and Branscombe (2005) found that collective guilt can carry over to future generations and may impact contemporary intergroup bias. Specifically, they found that assigned collective guilt to individuals from groups who have been historical perpetrators (e.g.: German Nazi transgressions from WWII) may impact the willingness of historical victims of transgressions (e.g.: Genocide of Jews in WWII) to forgive the perpetrator group; however, when an inclusive common group membership, namely, “we are humans”, was made salient, historical victim group members were more willing to forgive historical perpetrator group members and decrease distance sought from the other in the present. This was also observed in groups where historical strife existed but also continued into present day conflict (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Recategorization, thus, was found to decrease intergroup bias and most importantly impact not only an attitudinal change but also behavioural tendencies (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005).The Common Ingroup Identity Model proposes that

intergroup conflict and prejudice can be reduced when common identities are made salient between groups, thus transforming from a “we and them” to “us” representations (Gaertner et al., 1993). Prentice and Miller (1999) propose that another way to diffuse bias is through decategorization and personalization. By emphasizing more unique and personalized conceptions of the outgroup, the boundaries between groups begin to weaken and the personalization of outgroup members makes them more relatable to the self as they “move toward the individual end of the individual-group social identity continuum” (Prentice & Miller, 1999, p. 180). Minami’s (2020) research found that the ABPRA facilitated perpetrators’ subjective sense of rehumanization of themselves. Perpetrators reported how they viewed themselves as *inyamaswa* (beasts) prior to ABPRA and after the intervention they started to assign more human qualities to themselves, such as kindness and sincerity (Minami, 2020). It is important to include these constructs as they play a key role for this project in how perpetrators are/were viewed by society but also in how they view themselves.

2.1.8. Commemorations of Atrocities

Commemorations of past historical atrocities can validate collective pain and trauma and honour those who have suffered or lost their lives. Maintaining links to past conflicts, wars and other historical events keeps collective memories and emotions alive and are also important for learning from the past, but according to Tint (2010), while the ideal outcome is to move towards reconciliation and healing, conflict resolution practitioners often face challenges in their work. There appears to be a paradox in conflict resolution as Tint (2010) explains how there is a general desire to keep memories alive, to incorporate the past and use the knowledge moving forward, but that there is a simultaneous resistance against focusing too deeply on old pains out of fear of reigniting conflict and placement of blame. This can hinder the process of resolution. As ethnic identities become salient during periods of commemorations, there can be negative psychological impacts on non-victims as their outgroup identity becomes more distinct; thus, it is helpful to have a common national identity – an in-group – to identify with during commemorations (Tint, 2010). Rwanda enforced ethnic recategorization after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi to promote a unified identity as “Rwandans”. Recategorization could provide a protective shield against the lowering of self-esteem and the moral stigmatization that sub-group [perpetrator] identities experience as they

become central during commemorations; the strengthening of a national identity and consequent suppression of sub-group ethnic identities makes for an efficient policy in fostering intergroup reconciliation attitudes in both survivor and perpetrator sub-groups (Kanazayire et al., 2014).

In line with the common in-group identity model, Kanazayire et al. (2014) found that identifying with a superordinate group category (e.g.: we are all Rwandans) improves intergroup relations by increasing perceived intergroup similarities.

2.1.9. Perpetrators of Genocide – moving forward

Baum's (2008, p. 170) writings on the psychology of genocide offer this perspective on perpetrators:

> I will propose that most evil is the product of rather ordinary people caught up in unusual circumstances. They are not equipped to cope in normal ways that have worked in the past to escape, avoid or challenge these situations. At the same time they are being recruited, seduced, and initiated into evil by persuasive authorities or compelling peer pressure.

Baum warns about the dangers that come with salient social identities; that ethnocentrism and xenophobia can arise when personal identity becomes indistinguishable from social identity (2008). The author proposes an antidote to hate and the potentiality of a genocide mentality by shifting this salience of social identity towards healthy development of personal identity. One way of facilitating this shift would be to provide education early on with a stronger focus on "would-be" bullies and perpetrators (those who show early signs of prejudice and bullying behaviours) and to teach a) defiance, by promoting independent thinking and resistance to compliance, b) maturation, through childhood conflict resolution, c) tolerance, through promoting knowledge of historical injustices and d) empathy and diversity training (Baum, 2008).

Given the aspects covered in this review, it is apparent that taking into consideration the psychological processes that occur at intra-individual, interpersonal and larger macro-level contexts that people live in, is important for the development and evaluation of reconciliation efforts. This particular project will focus on Dr. Minami's ABPRA (Minami, 2020) and the outcomes for perpetrators as there is evidence of change in all three spheres of lived experience: a) perpetrators expressed a more

positive sense of self (intraindividual), b) perpetrators not only reconciled with the survivors they impacted but were able to restore their relationship in an enduring way and (interpersonal) c) the action-based aspect of reconciliation has larger implications for the community as there is an exchange of labour (development at a community level) and this is witnessed by the community, thus setting an example of reconciliation and collaboration at a community level.

ABPRA engages perpetrators and survivors in voluntary purposeful interactions to promote reconciliation (Minami, 2020). Implemented in the context of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, this approach involves perpetrators offering to be of service to survivors whom they directly impacted as a concrete expression of apology (Minami, 2020). Perpetrator-survivor pairs work together on a common task that helps the survivor and they meet for eight weeks. ABPRA has shown promising results in reconciling survivor-perpetrator dyads, with positive changes experienced in both dyad participants (Minami, 2020). The experiences of perpetrators in a post-conflict context (Baum, 2008) is largely unexplored; the vast majority of reconciliation research focusing on outcomes for survivors (eg: Gabowitsch, 2017). This notable void in perpetrator literature leaves a plethora of uninvestigated phenomenological experiences to enrich the reconciliation and peace-building knowledge-base and inform restorative justice and conflict prevention initiatives.

Chapter 3. Methodology/Methods

This project studied the lived experiences of perpetrators of genocide in a rural village of Rwanda who have engaged in ABPRA with survivors they directly impacted. With a focus on participants' meaning-making in the context of lived experience, within a social constructionist paradigm, a qualitative exploration through an interpretative phenomenological analysis was optimal (Smith et al., 2009). This chapter expands on and discusses the methodological choices made for this research.

3.1. Epistemological Framework: Social Constructionism

Constructionism poses that people construct meaning as they interpret their experiences in the world (Crotty, 1998). This study aims to present an understanding of how participants constructed meaning of their lived experiences in the context of their engagement in ABPRA (Minami, 2020). Echoing Crotty (1998), "the basic generation of meaning is always social, for the meanings with which we are endowed arise in and out of interactive human community" (Crotty, 1998, p. 65). Constructionistic epistemology is well suited for the context of ABPRA as participants make meaning of their lived experiences in relation to their interactions with survivors and more broadly as they interpret their participation in action-based psychosocial reconciliation.

3.2. Theoretical Framework: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenology looks for the meanings in participants' experiences with specific phenomena (Morse & Field, 1995). "People are tied to their worlds (embodied) and are understandable only in their contexts. Human behavior occurs in the context of relationships to things, people, events, and situations" (Morse & Field, 1995, p. 152). Philosophically grounded in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) seeks to understand the idiographic nature of lived experience with its own "perspectives and meanings" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). Aligned with this thesis project, with the acknowledgement that the meanings constructed and perspectives of perpetrators are under-represented in research and are specifically relevant in forming a holistic understanding of the impact of action-based

psychosocial reconciliation, IPA is most fitting as a theoretical perspective to illuminate the direction of this research.

3.2.1. Idiography

IPA, characterized by a focus on the particular, is idiographic in two ways, and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) explain how attention to the particular does not quite mean a focus on the individual, but rather: a) paying sharp attention to the particular details, which permit a deeper exploration in research, and b) seeking to grasp how individuals understand particular phenomena in specific social contexts. It is these notions of the *particular* that this study intends to illuminate and expound on in this research by exploring participants' understandings of their experiences. It may be useful to reiterate here that the vast collection of literature that speaks to the experiences of perpetrators of violence is largely nomothetic and generally focused on behavioural outcomes, such as recidivism rates; such approaches cannot fully capture the social complexities of post-conflict reconciliation nor the particular meanings and personal perspectives that are evoked out of these lived experiences.

3.2.2. Double Hermeneutic and the Role of Researcher

Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009) is instrumental for IPA. As IPA is concerned with the interpretations of personal experience, researchers find themselves in a dual role, referred to as the *double hermeneutic*: a) researchers can be in the individual's shoes to witness and seek an understanding of the other's interpretations of their personal experiences, and b) researchers step back into their own shoes and view and inquire about the individual's interpretations from a researcher/non-participant stand point. Combining respectively an empathic and at the same time questioning stance, is optimal, according to Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009). Aware of the dual role that I had to take on during this research, engaging with participants in their own environment and on their own time allowed me to immerse myself in their world and to witness the meaning-making of each individual as closely as possible.

3.3. Methods

3.3.1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Additional important considerations were made in the decision to use IPA in this study. First, the bottom-up philosophy behind the development of ABPRA which allows participant needs to guide the trajectory of intervention, rather than *theory-driving* intervention, aligns with the foundation of IPA that seeks understanding to emerge from participant experiences, rather than data being used to verify a favoured theory. Minami (2020) poignantly explains how reconciliation approaches and research have been predominantly conducted: many of the prominent scholars doing Rwanda-focused reconciliation research have employed theory-driven approaches to research, a top-down philosophy that aims to generate data that will further test and verify the theory, which poses the risk of negating the lived experiences of those directly impacted by genocide. Further informed by the literature review here which highlights the dominance in theory-driven perpetrator research; this selected approach presents not only an opportunity to enrich idiographic scholarship in this area of research, but a responsibility to pursue knowledge on the relevant topics from within the field itself.

Second, and relevant to the first point, using western-generated theory to support academia in post-colonial field work can reignite a pattern of knowledge-mining reminiscent of colonial oppression. As a researcher from a Western university conducting a study in a post-colonial African society, I made considerable efforts to ensure that the generation of knowledge was co-constructed with participants and not *mined* from the field. IPA permits a relationship to evolve within the researcher-participant interaction that honours the participants' agency in the co-construction of knowledge, playing an important role in the clarification of themes, patterns, and the development of theory.

There is ample, often unexplored, room within social sciences to expand our understanding of individuals' lived experiences from within the field rather than from outside of it. Taking into consideration that the reintegration of ex-prisoners at such a large scale was an unprecedented undertaking by the Rwandan government, how can pre-existing theory be applied, with the expectation of new data to fit a pre-set theoretical framework? Given the recent colonial history of Rwanda, having gained independence in

1962, I would propose that it is responsible practice to encourage knowledge to be generated from within the personal experiences and fields where phenomena and processes occur.

Finally, as a graduate student in a Canadian Counselling Psychology program, I was guided by my own academic training and experiences. As defined by the Canadian Psychological Association (*Counselling Psychology Definition – Canadian Psychological Association*, n.d.):

> Counselling psychology adheres to an integrated set of core values: (a) counselling psychologists view individuals as agents of their own change and regard an individual's pre-existing strengths and resourcefulness and the therapeutic relationship as central mechanisms of change; (b) the counselling psychology approach to assessment, diagnosis, and case conceptualization is holistic and client-centred; and it directs attention to social context and culture when considering internal factors, individual differences, and familial/systemic influences; and (c) the counselling process is pursued with sensitivity to diverse sociocultural factors unique to each individual.

These core values of honouring personal agency, the therapeutic relationship and paying attention to idiographic and contextual nuances, guide me in how I engage with individuals, and this extends to my approach in research. My training and disposition align with and are congruent with the philosophical framework underlying interpretative phenomenological analysis.

3.3.2. Research question

The overarching research question is: "How do perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda come to understand their lived experiences in the context of their engagement in action-based psychosocial reconciliation?"

3.3.3. Recruitment and Sampling

The four participants recruited for this study live in the reconciliation village, Mbyo, in the Mayange sector of the Bugesera region; an area that experienced a great deal of genocidal violence during the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Specifically, the participants for this study were perpetrators/ex-prisoners who have already engaged in ABPRA with survivors they have directly impacted. Participants were recruited through Dr. Minami's local community partner in Rwanda, Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR). Collaboration with PFR was optimal for the following reasons: a) as local partners for the ABPRA study, they were already acquainted with the participants, and b) safety was higher for both the researcher and the participants as PFR understands the local norms and best means of communication and outreach for the recruitment of participants. The participants were compensated fairly for the time taken to partake in the study.

3.3.4. Inclusion criteria

1. Participants who are perpetrators/ex-prisoners from the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda who have participated in the Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation Approach (ABPRA).
2. Participants express voluntary willingness to be interviewed.
3. Participants show no evidence of psychiatric/psychological disorders that might impact understanding and provision of informed consent and/or ability to respond to the interview questions in a coherent and clear way.
4. Participants agree to be interviewed and have their interviews audio-recorded for the purpose of data collection.
5. Participants are competent to understand, and agree to sign, the informed consent.

3.3.5. Exclusion criteria

1. Participants who are not ex-prisoners from the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda who have participated in the ABPRA.
2. Participants who do not express voluntary willingness to be interviewed.

3. Participants who show evidence of psychiatric/psychological disorders that might impact understanding and provision of informed consent and/or ability to respond to the interview questions in a coherent and clear way.

4. Participants who do not agree to be interviewed and have their interviews audio-recorded for the purpose of data collection.

5. Participants who are not competent to understand, and agree to sign, the informed consent.

3.3.6. Site Selection

The site selected for the interviews was based on two considerations: a) to interview participants in their own environment/space and b) to minimize any transportation inconvenience for participants and time required for participation. With these in mind, participants were offered a choice to meet in a local space, close to their residence or at their own residence which offered more privacy. The participants collectively chose to meet and be interviewed outdoors in front of one of the Mbyo houses with a large front yard. We sat in a circle, myself, participant and interpreter, when conducting the interviews.

3.3.7. Procedures

I visited Mbyo on four occasions. My first three visits took place in December 2019-January 2020 and my fourth visit was in September 2022 (post-pandemic).

Introduction Visit

My first visit was a more informal visit so that I could meet some of the Mbyo residents, introduce myself, and go over the informed consent with the participants who had already been recruited by PFR in advance.

First Interview

In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants over two separate meetings. The objective, as recommended in IPA practice, was to aim for

the generation of rich data (Smith et al., 2009), evoked in the story telling and in-depth exploration of the participants interpretations of their lived experiences.

Second Interview and local gathering

The second interview allowed the participants to sit with the discussion we had had the previous week and reflect on what they might want to add to our conversation. I had prepared follow-up questions for topics that may have not been covered the previous week.

Member Checks and Community Celebration

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was not able to visit Rwanda sooner, as I had planned. Once travel became safer, I was able to visit in September 2022 to conduct member checks with the participants and also have an appreciation feast with them. It was the participants' wish that we all share food together when I was able to return to Rwanda, so after member checks we all had a celebration with food, drinks, and music.

3.3.8. Data Collection

In line with IPA-recommended guidelines (Smith et al., 2009), semi-structured interviews were conducted, asking open-ended questions to evoke close explorations of participants' interpretations of their lived experiences in the context of ABPRA. While there was an overarching research question and anticipated interview questions to be asked, the participants' answers largely directed the trajectory of the interview. I was prepared to gently encourage us to come back to the scope of ABPRA-related experiences, if needed. For this reason, I allocated a fair amount of time for the interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice, each interview one week apart, for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour each time.

Consent was obtained with the assistance of an interpreter and the collaboration of PFR. Informed consent forms were translated into Kinyarwanda and were explained orally to participants first, and each had time to review the consent form and to give signed consent. The consent form included details on how confidentiality was to be maintained, participants were informed that participation is voluntary, that they may withdraw at any time from the study (up to the date of publication of data) and may refuse to answer any question for any reason. Participants were given a pseudonym to

protect their privacy as personal quotes are used in this thesis (participants were also offered an option to review quotes prior to publication, during member checks). A key sheet containing pseudonyms, as well as participant names along with other identifying details are kept in a password protected laptop belonging to me. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed; stored on my password protected laptop during the period of analysis and have been backed up on an external hard drive, which is also password protected. All data on the laptop/external hard drive has been transferred to the office of Dr. Minami (SFU Faculty of Education, Surrey) to be stored safely.

3.3.9. Interview Schedule

The interviews allowed for flexibility in the content that was shared by participants and as important constructs/themes emerged, I followed their lead and expanded from there.

Initial open-ended questions I was prepared to ask:

- Tell me about your experiences in engaging with ABPRA.
- Tell me about the experience of being of service to the survivor during ABPRA.

Intermediate questions:

- What were your thoughts while working with the survivor?
- What were your thoughts after leaving from a day of work with the survivor?
- What was your highest hope when you volunteered to engage in ABPRA?
- How would you describe the person you were before engaging in ABPRA?
- Do you think of yourself in any different ways now, since engaging in ABPRA?
- What was your life like in the community before ABPRA? (and after ABPRA)

Ending questions:

- Can you tell me about how your views may have changed since you engaged in ABPRA?
- Have other aspects of your life changed since engaging in ABPRA?

- After engaging in ABPRA, what advice might you give a perpetrator who has yet to engage in any reconciliation activities?
- What positive changes have occurred in your life since engaging in ABPRA?
- What do you most value about yourself now since ABPRA?
- What do others most value in you?
- Can I ask you to describe the most important lessons you learned through experiencing ABPRA?
- What has been the greatest benefit for you from your experience with ABPRA?
- Is there something else you think I should know to better understand your experiences with ABPRA?

3.3.10. Debriefing

At the conclusion of the interviews I explained to participants that I was planning to transcribe the interviews and analyze the information within the following few months. I added that I would be summarizing the information gathered and would ask participants for their permission to be contacted during my next visit to Rwanda so that we may review the prepared summary together. During the review they would be able to offer their feedback, possible corrections, clarifications or any additions.

3.3.11. Data Analysis

When data was collected, I also took notes immediately after the interviews (at the end of the day) documenting my impressions from the in-person interactions, communication nuances and personal impressions from the experience in the field. I opted to take notes post-interview so that note-taking during the interview did not detract from the interaction with each participant. I reviewed my notes prior to engaging with the transcripts. The next step was to transcribe the audio interviews. The core messages/themes that were expected to emerge from participants' expressions, would be found in the lines of repeated topics, meanings, understandings and metaphors in their stories. Particular attention was paid to information on personal change, self-concept, relationships, salient topics related to ABPRA and important events in the

participants' lives. The analysis began with an initial thorough read of the transcripts. I took a deep exploration into the content through the following steps:

1. Annotations: I read through the transcripts after uploading them onto the NVivo analysis software. During this first read, I made brief annotations.

2. Coding: Using NVivo software, I conducted a line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant. This process generated 279 codes.

3. 3 column amalgamation of notes, transcript content and coding: Once coding was completed, I transferred all coded transcripts into Word, with their respective codes and annotations on the same rows. This allowed me to view important transcript sections alongside my notes and reflections and make additional comments.

4. Exporting transcripts to Excel: Moving all transcripts with notes/codes to Excel for further analysis allowed me to see common themes across participants and move between the individual stories - case by case - and then across cases. At this point I was able to identify emergent themes across cases.

5. Identifying salient quotes: I highlighted the most descriptive and representative quotes for each salient theme.

6. Common themes identified and grouped: I used "Trello" cards to sort major themes and subthemes, noting under each subtheme which participant(s) supported each one and hierarchized themes in order of those that were supported by all or most participants.

7. Additional step: At this point, I noticed that while there were several methodical and deliberate steps taken to identify themes, group them and sort them, I sensed how this technology-assisted deep dive, while very helpful, had distanced me from the felt-sense of the stories shared on that Mbyo front yard, as well as my own experience as researcher who had established a meaningful and warm connection to my study participants. I decided to bring back that felt-sense by taking a break from technology and sitting with the data in a more holistic and unstructured way. My intention was to step outside of the work and look at it with fresh eyes and engage with it "hands on". I printed a list with every code/theme from the analysis and

created small paper labels, each with one theme on it. I mixed them up and held them in my hand, and one by one started laying them out on my desk, slowly creating groups and moving them around, re-grouping intuitively, until I had 5 groups of cards, each representing a major theme. This process greatly deepened my understanding of the emergent themes and how each fit the bigger picture that was painted by the lived experiences of the men I had interviewed.

8. Final step in analysis: During the writing of the analysis more insights arose and it became more clear that the fifth major theme and subthemes emerged in step #7 fit into other themes in a more coherent way. This resulted in four major themes with variable numbers of sub-themes under each.

3.3.12. Validity and Quality of Study

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) assert that the quality and validity of qualitative research is often measured against standards commonly used to assess quantitative research and should rather be measured against criteria that are appropriate for qualitative research; thus, they recommend Yardley's four principles for assessing qualitative research. Yardley (2000) outlines four essential qualities indicative of good qualitative research as follows: a) Sensitivity to context, b) commitment and rigour, c) transparency and coherence, and d) impact and importance.

Researchers who use IPA as an approach are inherently sensitive to context as the choice of IPA is a reflection of the researcher's interest in and respect for the "idiographic and particular" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180). Additionally, researchers can demonstrate **sensitivity to context** through knowledge of existing literature, an understanding of sociocultural nuances, competent and attuned engagement with participants, as well taking extra steps to verify with participants that the analysis produced is an accurate a depiction of participants' lived experiences, which can be verified in the member checking stage (Smith et al., 2009). In this study, I made considerable efforts to provide a thorough literature review to support the study, immersed myself in the culture by first engaging with the local Vancouver Rwandan Community and actively participating in the annual commemoration of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda (I participated and supported the community in 2018 and 2019), travelling to Rwanda for a 4-month stay prior to data collection to

continue learning the local language, meeting with stakeholders in the community, such as AEGIS Trust, an organization which was assigned to establish the Kigali Genocide Memorial site and coordinates genocide prevention education internationally, volunteering as the coordinator for Globe in Peace, Dr. Minami's project on Action-Based Psychosocial Reconciliation Approach as well as working as his Research Assistant since September 2018, which has permitted me to thoroughly understand the ABPRA work. Furthermore, I took steps to ensure that the interpreter selected be qualified and prepared to engage with participants in a sensitive and gentle manner.

Commitment and rigour, the second principle, requires a demonstration of care and attention both during the data collection and data analysis (Smith et al., 2009); I took considerable care in preparing for the interviews, was accompanied by an experienced interpreter, explored the participants' lived experiences as thoroughly as possible, while prepared to hold a safe space for any sensitive topics that could have risen in the context of reintegration and reconciliation. It was my goal, through this phenomenological approach, to allow for participant voices and interpretations to be closely represented and to guide the co-construction of knowledge.

For the member checks on my fourth visit, I had prepared to share the themes that had emerged during analysis in a one-on-one conversation with each participant. I had a printed summary to review and to seek for approval, comments or additions. However, when I arrived with the interpreter, the participants chose to do the review as a group. They shared with me that they all knew each other's stories and that they wanted this to be a group discussion. I respected their wishes. As we sat together casually on benches in a shaded area, Fabien, one of the participants, opened the conversation with some heartfelt words on behalf of the group, welcoming me back. They had been anticipating my arrival with much enthusiasm. To them, this was so much more than a follow-up visit and the term "member checks" does not do justice to the experience we shared. This visit was ceremonious for them from the moment of my arrival to the last hug and wave goodbye.

When we moved into reviewing the study, I mentioned that I planned to use specific quotes from them and started sifting through my printed material methodically. They listened attentively to my comments and nodded as Chris (our interpreter) relayed the information to them, but the more I looked at the papers in my hands, the more I felt

a disconnect from the process. I soon realized that the pages were coming between us, as if a beacon of Western practice, and this was tainting our synergy. When reading my notes to them, I wasn't connecting through eye contact. At this point, we were suddenly interrupted by the village leader who had come to welcome me and offer his gratitude for the work we were doing with the participants, noting how important it is for their stories to be heard. Once he parted, his words continued to echo in our circle and the synergy was restored. A wonderful conversation between us ensued. The participants started to recall stories about Masa (Dr. Minami) and the impact he had on them personally. I started remembering everything they had shared with me during the interviews and relaying poignant pieces back to them. After combing through the transcripts myriads of times, I had memorized all important points and every theme that had emerged. So, there we were, "reviewing" the analysis in the least methodical and planned way, but the deepest and most heartfelt way possible: by sharing space, seeing and hearing one another and sharing stories. We talked for two hours and in that time I received the validation I was hoping for: that I had gained a fair understanding of their experiences and a good grasp on how they wished their stories to be shared with the world. During our conversation, Theodore, one of the participants, chimed in and noted that one of the things that we (referring to Dr. Minami and me) had done that no other visitor had done, was to know them and call them by their name. I should note here that while they were all addressed by their real names when I was with them, their names have been changed to pseudonyms in this thesis.

The third principle, **transparency and coherence**, serves as a standard for maintaining and demonstrating meticulous organization, reporting/illustration and the specific steps, processes and analyses employed in the study. Additionally, striving for coherence within an IPA framework means to be able to reflect the interpretative nature of the study, while highlighting the centrality of the participants' experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Finally, qualitative research should aim to have **impact and importance** (Yardley, 2000). Supported by the literature review here, I trust that this study will be able to provide a potent depiction of the meanings and understandings of a group of participants whose experiences have not yet been explored in depth with the particular phenomenological and idiographical focus that IPA endows research with. Thus, aiming to adhere to the high standards of qualitative research, as outlined here, to guide this

research study, it was my goal to produce a study that will further knowledge and illuminate important aspects of reconciliation and ex-prisoner reintegration.

3.4. Research Ethics

I received the following required organizational permissions and approvals:

- Ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics
- Ethics approval from the Rwanda National Ethics Commission
- Letter of Support from Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR) – Local partner

Chapter 4. Findings

In the multiple themes that emerged during analysis, change seemed to happen in three spheres of lived experience: a) through relational experiences, b) in personal healing/relationship with self and c) relationship with superordinate systems. Personal and group identity was impacted by these lived experiences. I introduce each theme/subtheme below and have deliberately subdued my own presence as researcher in this section, so as to amplify the participants' voices and their understandings of their experiences.

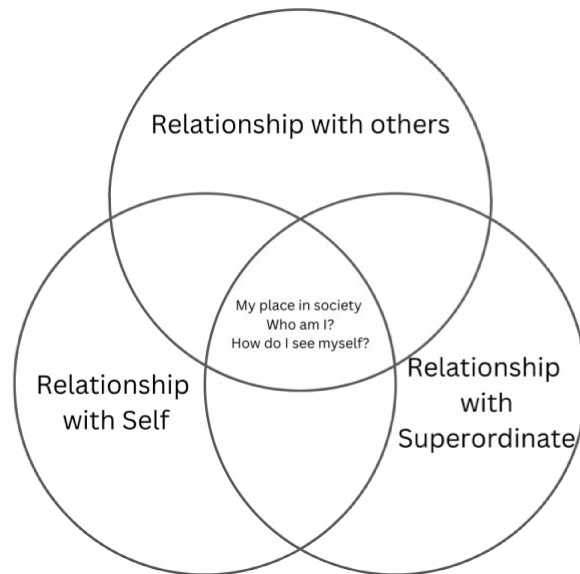

Figure 1 Diagram showing relationship between major themes.

Table 1 Findings from interview data: Major themes and subthemes

Major themes	Subthemes
Relationship with others	Building intimacy, closeness
	Desire for change to be witnessed by others
	Confidence in the repair
	Change through relationship with survivor
	Reparation facilitates personal growth
	Impact of forgiveness
	Re-establishing trust and safety for each other
Relationship with self	Coping and resilience
	Confession and taking accountability
	Accepting negative emotions as part of life
	Self-forgiveness
	Remorse motivates behavioural change
	Proud of personal growth
	Building empathy
Relationship with superordinate systems	Repaired relationship with new/present superordinate systems
	Reclaiming personal agency
	Being part of a bigger cause
	Systemic support
New identity	More than a perpetrator
	Rehumanization
	Recategorization
	Becoming a better person
	Change in self-concept, being valued in community

4.1. Relationship with Others

Lived experiences were so often referenced and understood in the context of relationship with others. The following themes encapsulate these understandings.

4.1.1. Building intimacy, closeness.

ABPRA created an opportunity for perpetrators to connect with survivors at a deeper level, in a voluntary and spontaneous way. While working together on a common project, the pairs engaged in conversation and as time passed, the depth of self-disclosure increased, allowing the pair to learn more about each other's personal experiences. For the study participants, this meant developing a greater sense of closeness with the survivors, leading to an enduring bond between them. Both Fabien and Claude share that despite having had interactions with the survivors and participating in common community incentives prior to ABPRA, the closeness had been missing.

> Fabien: Before Masa's experience I didn't know about her life because apart from meeting and confessing and her forgiving me there was just that, there was nothing more than that. […] But with Masa we took time to actually go into depth, so she told me her experience, everything that happened to her, even during the time of the Genocide. And then me too, I was telling her what happened in my life so that is a good outcome. […] His approach really came out very big that many things changed. For instance, we became close and then we opened up. Survivors and ex-prisoners.

> Claude: …before we were side by side, we were meeting at the cooperative, but that closeness wasn't there, so this is where Masa came in and this is where he emphasized and that closeness is key when you are living this kind of situation.

Alain shares how having one-on-one time to work with the survivor created the space to develop that closeness.

> Alain: when you are working together with the person you offended, with the person you used to be in conflict with, it's also an opportunity for you to bond more.

4.1.2. Desire for change to be witnessed by others

How valuable it is to be seen! To have made great changes in oneself and for that to be witnessed and validated by others. Claude names this process as “beautiful”, and says “when other people see us doing it together, being together, it’s an impact, there’s an impact there”. Fabien echoes that sentiment by sharing how “it portrays another image, especially for people outside who see us going together, sharing life together”.

This desire for change to be witnessed fuels Theodore’s motivation to continue presenting his best self and showing others, especially survivors, that he is a changed person; this, in his understanding, is a way to impact others’ impression of who he is and ensure their acceptance of him.

> Theodore: I have to keep fighting, I have to keep proving myself to be the best person, try to greet them, be there for that person because that persistence is the one that can actually change the person; my being there, being consistent maybe at the end of the day the other person will receive me and see that I’ve changed, but if I become different maybe I’m failing again and become bitter, that won’t help, it will make things worse.

Claude and Alain also see the value in their activities with survivors being witnessed by others. There seems to be a desire to provide evidence through their actions that they have united with survivors, that they are received by them.

> Claude: …sometimes we are invited to participate at an event for instance at a district and then they invite our troupe, so we go together, you know, former prisoners and survivors, forming one team and then we go there we do the thing and then people are like, wow, that’s very good, they can see that there’s something happening.

> Claude: Every time you do something good and then you get recognized, you feel good about it. When someone affirms you, you feel good because it’s in the human nature to be recognized and praised. Just like a child who does something good, and they are recognized by their parents, they feel good about it.

> Alain: When you are working together with the person you offended, […] it is another opportunity for someone who can see from afar that there is something way more, that unity is really attainable.

4.1.3. Confidence in the repair

Through their participation in ABPRA, participants were able to feel secure in the repaired relationships between themselves and the survivors. In witnessing the survivor's forthcomingness and cordial behaviour during their collaborative work tasks, they were able to trust that the improved relationship was authentic.

> Fabien: From the time we spent with Masa I remember the survivor I was working with, we had more time to interact so there are many things she told me that I didn't know, so there are many things also I told her that she didn't know, and then there was that kind of confidence and that because we talked about everything.

> Theodore: And before I didn't have the confidence, even though I know that she had forgiven me but there was really not that confidence that things were ok.

> Theodore: If Masa didn't come, I wouldn't commit genocide again, that wouldn't happen, but again there's this thing that I was always questioning about, the forgiveness. Because I was always wondering about, did she really forgive me? Is it real?

The reconciliation process does not end, it is a dynamic process that continuously validates itself through the actions of those engaged.

> Claude: And it's not just words; there is an impact. If you see a survivor giving an offender a cow, and then they can have milk, that's something beautiful.

> Fabien: The second thing is also having that experience, the opportunity to talk all the time, talk throughout because as I said that didn't exist, we were just living sufficiently.

> Alain: …the other thing that showed me that there was the unity is when we started to give our children to marriage, like, survivor would give a child to a perpetrator in marriage and so that was also a sign of tangible unity.

> Alain: You know, my son, is married to a girl who comes from a survivor's family. So, for me, that is hope. I see hope in that; that anything is possible, giving my son to a girl that comes from a survivor's family, knowing that I committed the Genocide.

4.1.4. Change through relationship with survivor

There is a relational process of change for the participants where in sharing space and time with survivors, they find meaning and value through that interaction.

Change happens in seeing how space and time can be shared and what fills that space/time with the survivor is their co-creation.

> Theodore: But if we could spend a day together then yes, that's when my life really started to change.
>
> Claude: We were two, and then we started working together and then we started joking and chatting and I was like, wow, what is this, you know, that never happened before; ever since then we said, you know what, we are going to keep doing this because it is now bringing positive results.

When Claude is the recipient of kindness from the survivor, this not only repairs the relationship but elevates it to a level that it hadn't existed before. There is a "love" that is expressed through gift giving.

> Claude: The survivors wanted to show me love, and then, you know, one survivor gave me a cow and that cow delivered three calves.

4.1.5. Reparation facilitates personal growth

Claude goes through a great personal change as he experiences the reparation in his relationship with the survivor. As he realizes that a closeness has developed between him and the survivor, amidst the ABPRA activities, this prompts a behavioural change for him; he decides to start sharing his story with others and is motivated to go out into the community to promote reconciliation:

> Claude: So when we started it was usual, it was nothing special but then in the middle that's when change came, and then I realized that I have to, I mean if I say that I'm… that there's reconciliation between me and the person I offended, then we have to be close, and then that closeness was key, and then actually that is when I started going to churches and teaching and preaching the people that you know helped me to change. Because you know if maybe Masa didn't come, I wouldn't have had this courage, this understanding to go out and then open up and start saying these things publicly.

4.1.6. Impact of forgiveness

Receiving forgiveness from survivors plays an important role in healing and moving forward. The participants speak of a sense of hopelessness and sadness at the possibility of not having been forgiven.

> Fabien: So when that doesn't happen then it's very bad, like your mind is damaged again so you are not good, so your life is really miserable… So if there was no forgiveness it would be bad, I would lose hope. Because it would take you back to that moment, so it would not be a good thing.

> Fabien: You can tell when someone did not really forgive you from the way you relate. It's hard and it's painful because now you confess, for instance, you've given yourself up to that person but then that person did not do the same, so what happens, you stop there, right there, and then you start going backwards and then things can even get worse.

> Theodore: Offering forgiveness is a choice, someone can choose to forgive you or not. So if they decide not to forgive you, if that happened, then I will take it like it is, I will not say this person is bad or maybe start to hate him or things like that. Of course I will be sad in my heart because who would be happy with that because the essence of asking for forgiveness is to make peace with that person but again I will not think negatively of that person.

> Claude: In the case where someone has not forgiven me I think I will try to do good on my part, even though it's difficult, even though it's painful, but again I have to do it, I will keep doing it until this person maybe will realize that I'm trying my best to make peace with them, hopefully they will accept or receive my apologies.

Claude further notes that receiving that validation that he indeed was forgiven was a pivotal point for positive changes to start happening in his life. Fabien speaks of "thinking of the future" when harmony is established after forgiveness.

> Claude: That's it because before I was afraid I didn't know what would happen and I was guilty inside of my heart, but when I met with them then I started talking with them and then I saw their face and how they are willing to forgive me then the change came.

> Fabien: […] when you confess to somebody and then somebody forgave you, because when there is that harmony then you start thinking about the future, nurturing your relationship.

4.1.7. Re-establishing trust and safety for each other

During their interaction, the participants were able to develop a sense of safety with their survivor counterparts in ABPRA. While they had lived together in the same community for some time, there was a lingering doubt about whether the forgiveness received was heartfelt and genuine. What on the surface was a peaceful co-existence was riddled with omnipresent ambivalence. Spending time together through ABPRA, and having the opportunity to connect on a more personal level allowed the pair to develop

trust in each other. Theodore talks about how his doubts dissipated during this process and how he was able to feel confident that it was a mutual feeling between him and the survivor.

> Theodore: Yes, I'll give you an example, for instance, we'd be in the field and you know both building with the hoe, and you know I have the hoe and she has the hoe and I was like what if she hits me with the hoe, you know what goes into somebody's mind, but thank God it didn't happen. Just to show you that things run through somebody's head just like that but as you work as you keep doing things together you get rid of these things but, you know, they cross your mind. So what Masa did is build confidence, the suspicion disappeared because we had trouble trusting each other; and that helped me to realize that this thing was real.

> Theodore: It was good to see how I was trusted; seeing trust especially from someone you offended, so that gives you confidence.

Trust continues to be validated outside of ABPRA-related activities as survivors and perpetrators share major life events together. Theodore shared the following emotion-filled story, an event that signalled not only repair, but full trust in one another.

> Theodore: So I will give you an example, you know the person that I harmed during Genocide, she has a daughter and then her daughter had a wedding and then she invited me to be in the wedding and then I was in charge of receiving, of welcoming visitors. And then whenever I think about it, you know somebody that I wanted to kill, harm in the Genocide, now I'm the one who is welcoming her guests, and then take care of them; that shows that we have trust. So whenever I come back to that, I don't know how I can explain that…

> Theodore: So you can imagine how much she trusted me with that and then that place of authority, because when someone gives you that authority to welcome the visitors, you have access everywhere.

Through their actions, the participants with the survivors as their counterparts, continuously affirm their trust in each other. This requires showing up for one another and supporting each other.

> Alain: But it would be mixing the dirt to make the brick and then you are there and maybe a survivor, is helping you; is above you… I would be there thinking what if this person hits me and hit my head and finish me right here, so you have all these funny thoughts crossing your mind.

> Alain: crime is painful, especially when you know that you have done something wrong to your neighbour; so when we work together it was an opportunity for us to, again, it's like to build the trust, because there was this distrust and even though we live together but there's residue, but the

more you engage, you know, together, the more you be engaged with those activities, it's an opportunity for you to see that the other person is more receptive.

Alain: For me, it was very important to see these people that I offended opening up to me and that trust we create in the process. I will give an example, like, we are digging together and then, you know, all of a sudden, you know, there is a bit of a something that can go in your eyes; and then the other person comes and then cleans it. So it's more like, we are caring for one another.

Alain: You know that that person trusts you; and then sometimes we'd finish work and then go to a certain house and then we all together have a drink, that kind of atmosphere… it was really important and very pleasant.

Theodore: And then whenever I think about it, you know somebody that I wanted to kill, harm in the Genocide, now I'm the one who is welcoming her guests, and then take care of them; that shows that we have trust. So whenever I come back to that, I don't know how I can explain that…

Fabien: I was there with the survivor doing the work together and then I thought, I said… it's like I came back to myself I was like "I really offended, how come I offended this person?".

Fabien: And then I thought how this person came and then she's with me and she gave me her time and then we are working together and then she shouldn't have been doing that really and then I realized that was trust. Of the highest level.

Fabien: From that point I said I can't hide anything from this person. If she can do this to the person who offended her so much there is nothing I can't do for her."

Fabien: But the reason why I say that, if you take time to talk with the person, you speak with them, you make way into their lives then that person can open up and then they are going to be able to share the most intimate things they wouldn't share otherwise.

Claude: We keep doing that and you know before it used to be us, the offenders, who would take a step to go to support the survivors but now the survivors are also doing the same; it's no longer, the burden is no longer about us, on us alone, everybody is engaged, is involved in the process.

Theme discussion

The findings related to building intimacy and closeness between perpetrators and survivors align with social psychology research on the importance of self-disclosure in developing close relationships. Research has shown that self-disclosure plays a critical role in building intimacy and closeness in interpersonal relationships (Reis & Shaver,

2018). By sharing personal experiences and learning about each other's lives through self-disclosure, perpetrators and survivors in the ABPRA program were able to develop a greater sense of closeness and establish enduring bonds. ABPRA created opportunities for voluntary and spontaneous interactions between participants.

The desire for change to be witnessed by others can be understood as a need for social validation and self-presentation. Social validation theory suggests that people seek confirmation from others that their beliefs and behaviours are correct, and that positive feedback can enhance feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Self-presentation theory, on the other hand, proposes that individuals engage in strategic self-presentation to manage the impressions others have of them, especially in situations where their social identity is threatened or when they are seeking acceptance or approval from others.

By engaging in collaborative work tasks with survivors and having open and honest conversations, the participants were able to build trust and confidence in the repaired relationship. The tangible signs of unity, such as giving children to marriage, further reinforce the confidence in the repaired relationship.

Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis proposes that positive contact between members of different groups can lead to a decrease in prejudice when certain conditions are met, such as equal status, common goals, and cooperation. In the case of the participants in this study, the shared space and time with the survivors created the conditions where they could develop positive attitudes towards the survivors (and vice versa), leading to a change in their perspectives and behaviors.

Claude's decision to share his story with others and promote reconciliation can be understood as a form of post-traumatic growth, which refers to the positive psychological changes that can occur in response to trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Overall, Claude's experience highlights the potential for reparative processes to promote personal growth and healing for both perpetrators and survivors.

In alignment with the literature review content and the participants’ sharing, forgiveness plays a crucial role in their healing. Finally, spending time together and having the opportunity to connect on a more personal level allowed the pair to develop

trust in each other. The survivors showed the participants that they trusted them by supporting them and showing up for each other.

4.2. Relationship with Self

The participants' emotional world shifted significantly through their engagement with ABPRA.

4.2.1. Coping and resilience

Participants mentioned that since engaging in ABPRA they are more resilient against social judgement, exhibit a secure sense of self and have experienced healing.

> Fabien: Before Masa I used to have these nightmares, like dreaming about all the killings, what happened, the Genocide… but after that, after I took time to sit with the survivor and have discussion, I no longer have those. Never. Never came back.

Theodore speaks of coping with fear which arises when he ruminates over past events:

> Theodore: Fear happens many times and you can't control it because conscience is very sensitive; because oftentimes you keep revisiting your history and whenever you open those chapters of your life, then fear comes in and then you can't control it.

Fabien speaks of how the past is a constant part of present life and that it's possible to ruminate a bit but talking about the past is therapeutic.

> Fabien: We talk about this thing all the time. We can't pass by without receiving visitors, whether from the country or from outside the country, so it is also good when we talk about this more often, it helps in your mind. But it does happen, for instance, when you go to the memorial site or something, it is possible that you can travel back in time and go back for a little bit, it can happen.

Yet, Theodore seems aware of his own vulnerability to negative thinking patterns and the events that may trigger these. He copes by challenging unhelpful thoughts and creating healthy boundaries for himself.

> Theodore: We go through a lot of things, for instance, we go to a bar only to have a drink with friends and then someone can spot you and then, not necessarily a survivor, even a Hutu, someone from your own group and then they could say: "Oh, look, see, the killer is coming". Whenever you

> hear that… what happens to me when someone says that, and well I hear that, but what I refuse is to keep thinking about that, because if I would take time to think about it maybe I can even reoffend… I can be offending even more; I can think more and do bad stuff so what I do is, I just leave that place. I leave that environment so that I can give myself some peace of mind.

Alain also remains resilient against hostility from others, secure in himself and his personal healing journey:

> [Hostile behaviour] doesn't happen here in the village but outside the village, it can happen and still it doesn't matter because you know that you are healed; you can see if someone is not correct with you, but in that case, you just keep on going, keep on doing what you are doing because at the end of the day you've done what you can do and then the rest is upon that person and that person is really more troubled than you because he's carrying the burden that you don't have.

A sense of inner peace is shared by all participants and Claude speaks to this with gratitude:

> So I thank God that life is like that and my heart is ok, I feel ok in my heart, so I think I'm really at peace.

4.2.2. Confession and taking accountability

Confession for the participants means more than admitting to past criminal acts. The participants are all Christians and they are quite active in their faith community. For some of them their relationship with their faith started in prison, but it continues to this day. The notion of confession is very much informed by the teachings of the gospel. When guided by the gospel, confession means an 'unburdening of sin'. This is different from confession in a legal context where it is the admission to a crime. Confession, as shared here during the interviews, is an intraindividual and spiritual process, a purification from past wrongdoings. Fabien's statement highlights how the past (sin-crime) can become integrated (healed) through confession (change in self), and is, in this context, an entirely inner process.

> Fabien: So when you change, you really change, it's when you confess, you confess. Even if there are no people to confess to if you decide to change then you change. You can't hide from your past.

Publicly recognizing harmdoing and taking accountability for that harm differs from confession in that it is more relational; it centres on the impact harmdoing has had on the

other, and the acknowledgement – often public - of one's part and responsibility for that harm.

> Alain: What I can say is that what anyone can learn from this is that in our case you have to know that you have to recognize that you are a criminal, that you have offended someone, and then that you have to confess that crime towards the person you offended and then from that point then the other person is able to receive you and step by step be able to forgive you. And then you start a new journey and new life together [mhm]. And then resentment, keeping that in your heart, it's very damaging, so one should always, try to find a way to get out of that mood [mhm].

Alain recognizes his guilt and decides to confess. As a public confession, he acknowledges the harm and helps the survivors by revealing where the bodies of their relatives had been thrown, but in this process of confessing (unburdening sin) he notes the emotional shift within himself as 'the moment I felt relief for the very first time'.

> Alain: The first time I remember is when I met face to face with the people I offended and then I was able to confess what I did, but prior to that when I was in the prison and then these preachers came they were preaching to us about forgiveness, about confession and everything, we were guilty, we recognized that we did something bad and then we decided to write the letters, confession letters to the people we offended, and there we revealed where we threw the bodies of the victims; so, and then when these letters were handed, were given to them, and then they came to us, the moment I confessed, was the moment I felt relief for the very first time.
>
> Alain: I know that maybe this person cannot forget that what I did to her, but again she hasn't seen me again like she used to see in the past, so and then she cannot based on that, hate me.

Claude speaks of the internal conflict regarding confession:

> Claude: For me I didn't see that it was just about the crime that I committed; I thought that maybe these people, these Tutsis were trying to kill us again by putting us in jail. So five years later in the prison Pastor Gahigi and Pastor Gashagaza came to the prison to preach. But then that Gahigi, the pastor came to preach us, I killed the members of his family. And the issue was this, they were Tutsis, they were preaching us on how to confess and repent, so that was a problem. And then how can he ask me to confess to the person, then this very person I'm the one who killed his family so it was very hard and difficult for me. But the more they pray the more they came the more they preached it came to a point when we said you know what, we need to confess.
>
> And after we confess we actually asked them to come and talk to the survivors, the people that we had offended, and then the next thing to do was to write, to put it in the form of a letter so that they can know it was us

> asking for forgiveness. And then later on the government decided to free us from the prison so we came back in the community and then we met face to face with the survivors, the people we offended.
>
> But I'm telling you it was very hard to look in the faces of the people I had offended cause we knew that these people they wanted to kill us; they had those rights. So I mean we were afraid the first meeting because there were 50 metres between us because if anything happened we would run, saving our lives.
>
> So nothing worked the first day, and then the second day we say, you know, we have to do it even though they will kill us, we will die, but at least we will have repented. So we came ready and then we repented…
>
> …So then we said the truth, we said everything, we were showing the survivors where we had thrown the bodies of their loved ones so that they can be buried in decency; so we were sharing information regarding their loved ones.

Theodore shares that confession is a duty to the next generation.

> Theodore: It is more of a responsibility and we owe that to the younger generation because we don't want these young people to feel that that maybe we apologize to their parents only, so we have to also confess and repent, apologize to them, tell them "maybe you were younger, so when we apologized to your parents you were younger but we feel we need also to apologize so that you know what happened" and then also sometimes they can give you the feedback, and maybe they can say we forgive you for what you did and then you feel that now this is it, this is the cycle that goes on and on.

4.2.3. Accepting negative emotions as part of life

Each participant copes with challenging emotions in their own way but one thing they share is that negative emotions are part of life and they find ways to move through these tough days.

> Alain: Shame is always there, more especially when we go to the Memorial site and then you go down to see the bodies of the victims so you feel the shame, embarrassment.
>
> Tania to Alain: When you do feel that, how do you cope? What do you do to get through the day so that it doesn't occupy you? Or do you do anything?
>
> Alain: So when that happens, what do you do? There is nothing you do, you just have to accept the reality but it becomes hard when you see other people dealing with emotional breakdown and in that moment then it

> becomes difficult, but I try to be a man and strong, but when I come back home and then having spent a rough day like that I tell my children to be careful so that they don't go through what I went through, staying away from bad politics…

> Theodore: When that happens I kind of sigh, I do that, take a deep breath and then you sit still and you let that happen and go and then you resume whatever you do, otherwise you can't continue with that heaviness on your heart.

4.2.4. Self-forgiveness

The topic of self-forgiveness was a difficult one for the participants and they expressed having the most struggle with this. Much support was needed and a lot of self-reflection.

> Alain: Forgiving yourself is important but then it doesn't take away this thought; it doesn't keep you away from thinking of what you did. You know that you are forgiven, you can even come to a point of forgiving yourself but what you did, the crime you committed is right next to you, it doesn't go far.

> Fabien: Forgiving yourself really takes time, really time. The same way somebody takes time to forgive you, now you also take more time to forgive yourself because you need really to think about yourself, to come back to yourself, to examine yourself and hopefully you come to a point where you forgive yourself but it's a long process.

> Tania to Theodore: So as you said, sometimes you cannot control if forgiveness is going to come or not and you can only do your best. What do you think of self-forgiveness? Where does that come from?

> Theodore: That was the most difficult thing for me because it is not easy, it's never easy to forgive yourself after being involved in such atrocities. I think by praying and meeting with other people, I think that is… especially meeting with other people they helped me so much to be able to forgive myself.

4.2.5. Remorse motivates behavioural change

Reflecting on the harm they had inflicted in the past brings up great guilt and remorse. The participants talk about how this does not dissipate, but rather serves as a motivator to continue to hold oneself accountable, and make better choices.

> Claude: …if I keep thinking about what I did it's also another way of making sure that I become better, because if I say I didn't do nothing then I will stay

there, but the more I know that I did something wrong that gives me strength to do it different.

Alain: So change, I realized that when the preachers, these pastors came to preach in the prison… because they read many Bible verses, lots of scriptures, to the point that I realized, it's like looking at yourself in the mirror and then you see the real person you are, and then you come, you face the real you, the real person you are… and then I became shameful, I was embarrassed, I said why did I do what I did?

Claude: And for example I'll be sitting and children there will ask me "why were you killing Tutsis?" and then I don't have an answer. And then I can say you know it is the government who forced us into this, but I don't have an excuse... There's shame, I'm just saying that everybody's… there's shame, you know, that is eating me inside. And then from then, then I say you know you have to make sure you don't do that because if you do it then you end up trying to, you know, teach them the right thing to do.

Tania to Claude: Are you saying that your remorse is a motivator for doing better things?

Claude: Yes, very much.

4.2.6. Proud of personal growth

The participants express a sense of pride as they talk about their accomplishments since reconciliation. Additionally, having these accomplishments validated gives encouragement to continue pursuing their socioeconomic development.

Fabien: For instance I have different crops, I do these activities that others don't even do; I've planted different trees, and I sometimes have people who come to visit my plantation, my garden, to see my innovation.

Claude: This village was awarded at the district level as the village that is promoting unity and reconciliation. And then they signed us one hundred thousand cheque; they gave us that money because they wanted to thank us for our participation and our role in this process. So we feel we are proud of that and then also that gives us the strength to carry on.

As Claude reflects on his life as it has changed through reconciliation activities, he notes how he is "open to development" and trying "new things in life". Here we see personal growth and a desire for life and continued growth.

Claude: This is why we are doing, what we are doing here is to strive for development… We are helping each other to move forward, making sure everybody is living a decent life. We are now training to do, to make soap, how to mix paint, so that we can use that and then try to earn a living. Now

> we've been, someone gave us sewing machines and then we are doing that, we can make clothes and everything. We want to start doing doors, so someone is going to bring those equipment, those welding machines. There is someone who is going to bring them some machines.

4.2.7. Building empathy

In hearing the survivor's story, Fabien develops empathy for her. This changes not only his attitude towards her, it motivates him to behave differently, more empathically, towards her.

> Fabien: For example if you don't have that understanding of what survivors went through you can talk to them anyway you want because you don't know how they feel, you don't know their pain, but now that you know, you are cautious, you are careful about how you talk to them because you can wound them. They're still a part of the rest of the community.

> Fabien: So you have to know the people, you have to know what people went through so that you won't touch their wounds again."

> Fabien: I think it went beyond my expectation because when you sit and listen to someone else's story, because I used to think that my story was worse and ugly but when I sat down and then I listened to the story of the survivor I realized that people go through a lot of things.

Theme discussion

The participants' experiences of coping and resilience are consistent with research on the positive effects of engaging in activities that promote healing and self-reflection. According to the concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG), individuals who experience trauma can experience positive psychological changes, such as increased resilience and a greater sense of personal strength, after processing their experiences in a meaningful way (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). In the context of ABPRA, the process can be a way for the participants to reflect on their actions, develop empathy for survivors, and find ways to make amends. This process can lead to a greater sense of self-awareness and a more secure sense of self, as noted by the participants. Additionally, research on coping strategies suggests that cognitive reappraisal, or the ability to challenge negative thoughts and reframe stressful events, can be an effective way to manage emotions and cope with stress (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2009). Theodore's use of cognitive reappraisal to manage fear and maintain healthy boundaries is a good example of effective coping. The participants' experiences of inner peace and gratitude

also reflect the benefits of positive emotions on mental health (Fredrickson, 2001). Overall, the participants' experiences suggest that engaging in activities that promote healing, self-reflection, and positive emotions can be effective ways to cope with trauma and develop resilience.

Publicly recognizing harm-doing and taking accountability for that harm is a more relational process and centers on the impact harm-doing has had on the other, and the acknowledgment - often public - of one's part and responsibility for that harm. Also, confession can be challenging as it may trigger internal conflict, as seen in Claude's case.

Alain speaks of feeling shame and embarrassment when confronted with the victims' memory during Genocide Commemorations, but he also recognizes the need to accept these emotions as part of his reality. Theodore similarly suggests that acknowledging and accepting negative emotions is key to moving through difficult times, as he describes the process of taking a deep breath and allowing himself to sit with the heaviness in his heart. These coping strategies align with counselling practices that emphasize the importance of accepting, rather than avoiding, negative emotions as a means of promoting resilience and well-being.

The concept of self-forgiveness is a complex and challenging one, particularly for those who have caused intractable harm. According to Cornish and Wade (2015), self-forgiveness is a process that involves recognizing and taking responsibility for one's actions, experiencing remorse, and making amends. It requires a willingness to confront and accept the past, as well as a commitment to change and make things right. As shared by the participants, it is a difficult and long process that may require the support of others, as well as a great deal of self-reflection and self-compassion.

The participants' experience of remorse as a motivator for behavioral change is in line with psychological research on guilt and moral emotions. According to Fisher and Exline (2010), guilt and remorse can act as a moral compass, motivating individuals to change their behavior and make amends for past transgressions. Guilt is associated with a willingness to take responsibility for one's actions, make amends, and engage in prosocial behavior. This experience of guilt can lead to a desire for self-improvement and a commitment to avoiding future transgressions. In the context of this study, the

participants' experience of remorse can be seen as a sign of their commitment to taking responsibility for their actions and making amends for the harm they inflicted.

According to the self-determination theory (SDT), personal growth and well-being are closely linked to autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the ability to make independent choices and feel in control of one's life, competence refers to the ability to achieve mastery in various domains, and relatedness refers to the sense of connection to others. The participants seem to experience personal growth and well-being through their pursuit of economic opportunities, mastery of new skills, and social connectedness. Understanding the pain of others, as expressed by Fabien, can promote empathy and a desire to behave more compassionately towards others.

4.3. Relationship with Superordinate Systems

4.3.1. Repaired relationship with new/present superordinate systems

The participants make frequent references to changes in their lives with respect to their relationship with superordinate systems, such as ruling governments and faith community leaders. They refer to the previous government as having let them down; there is a betrayal of trust, betrayal of loyalty. This trust is repaired through the actions of the present systems in place, including their relationship with their faith leaders.

> Alain: If you have time, I'm here, you can… I have a message for you. Yes, there's also this side of bad leadership, because in our case it's a bad leadership that pushed us into this killing, so I am wishing you that, and maybe what you can tell the people you meet is that people should really be careful of the intention of the government, bad leadership, because they can incite them into bad things like what happened to us; again the moment you realize that, then you have to confess and then you know you make sure that you come back to the right direction.
>
> Claude: …also the more we train, because they trained us about civic education, teaching us about the Rwandan spirit, so that we may see ourselves as Rwandans rather than ethnic class and stuff, so I started changing then in that way.
>
> Alain: I'm grateful for the pastors who came to talk to us in prison and then later they brought us to this village to live side by side.
>
> Claude: But it's not about us, it is about the government, because it is the government that helps us to be able to have the confidence to meet the people.

> Claude: But we can achieve all that because of the government. The government is really working hard to provide security for those things.

4.3.2. Reclaiming personal agency through healthy relationship with superordinate systems.

In trauma therapy, a pivotal point in healing is reclaiming the ability to choose for oneself and make decisions for oneself, or, in other words, reclaiming personal power. Perceived personal agency is very important for a sense of well-being. Here we see how participants speak about having personal choice and how this is connected to a strong sense of self and conviction. I noticed in their stories, when reflecting on how they were influenced in the past to engage in genocide through propaganda and other coercive controls, they had no choice over their circumstances. There was incredible poverty and political unrest in the country. Now, however, reflecting on post-genocide decisions and choices, the discourse shifts and I can hear participants speaking about agency and overcoming challenges; how they perceive that taking accountability, becoming a better person, is actually up to the individual. At the same time, much credit is given by the participants to the organizations, including government, for facilitating that change to happen. Noting that, reclaiming a sense of personal agency may yet be another dimension of healing and change that emerges through participants' engagement with superordinate systems; in this study's context, their engagement in ABPRA. So, while this process of reclaiming personal agency appears to be an intra-individual process, it is hard to neglect that these changes are happening in connection to their relationship with superordinate systems and the support received by these; these systems being government, church, and ABPRA as a program introduced from higher level authorities.

I recall how one of the participants had spoken about how great it was that they actually had choice in whether they would engage in ABPRA or not; that it was not mandated by a higher authority and their participation was voluntary. They also speak to their experiences with government and faith leaders:

> Theodore: It's about the person; it's about the conscience. Because for instance we are many who heard the word of God, but not everyone of us changed. We still have people who are struggling. So even though you hear the word of God, still it is up to you to make that decision.
>
> Claude: Let me say it this way, like in our situation, we know people, even during the time of the Genocide, when the government was forcing people

> to kill, the Hutu to kill the Tutsis, there are still Hutus who refused to kill the Tutsis, and even now these people are being awarded for having done that, so it's more about the choice of a person.

> Alain: So what ended that confusion was when Pastor Gahigi and Pastor Deo came to preach and then I was guilty and then I felt that I really needed to acknowledge and accept my responsibilities of what I've done.

4.3.3. Being part of a bigger cause

Theodore talks about how the changes he has experienced and sharing these publicly can impact the next generation. There is a sense of responsibility to others and a knowing that he can use his experiences for a greater cause – in his case to promote peace and healing for future generations to come. Claude is also proud of his role in the bigger scope of reconciliation.

> Theodore: It is more of a responsibility and we owe that to the younger generation because we don't want these young people to feel that that maybe we apologize to their parents only, so we have to also confess and repent, apologize to them, tell them "maybe you were younger, so when we apologized to your parents you were younger but we feel we need also to apologize so that you know what happened" and then also sometimes they can give you the feedback, and maybe they can say we forgive you for what you did and then you feel that now this is it, this is the cycle that goes on and on.

> Claude: When we see visitors from abroad and government officials visit us we feel proud and we are like a model to many people I think.

> Claude: This village was awarded at the district level as the village that is promoting unity and reconciliation.

After engaging in ABPRA, participants expand on their vision and desires for their own lives. They are able to reflect on the past that they played a major role in, take accountability for their part and carry their history with them in a way that can be used towards benefiting society, from their close community to global reach:

> Alain: I'm happy to answer to any question you may raise and also for you to be able to use what I'm saying if it can help someone else that's what I want, to use my life experience to build others.

> Alain: I wish I could get that opportunity to share my story with the rest of the world.

> Theodore: Please if you can share the findings with the rest of the world because there are many people who are still, whose hearts are hardened,

so maybe you can help the whole world through this, so please share with the rest of the world.

Claude: So I like doing this because it is a way of teaching the people.

Claude: And also I like to share my story because you know by sharing my story maybe I will build someone else's life, maybe I'm preventing a crime that's going to happen somewhere.

Claude: When someone reads this from a newspaper, from a magazine, from a TV show, this can prevent something. And it's not like I'm proud of saying that I killed people, I would be proud of talking of some other issues, maybe I donated some money, maybe I do this, but by doing this even though I know it's ugly but at least it's saving life somewhere. Because there's no beauty in wars, only losses.

Fabien: I'll give you another example, that before, like after, we guarded our children and then we were explaining to them what happened because they deserve to know that as they are growing up but that didn't happen before and then we are caring for one another in a deeper way than we used to do. I think now that we are going to have a mass release of prisoners we get to do that again because of these people who should go through the same experience we went through. You know for the outcomes we can see today.

4.3.4. Systemic support

I understood quickly how the participants attributed much of their healing to superordinate systems that created the paths and opportunities for it to happen. Without systemic support, which extends beyond economic support, they wouldn't have had a chance to connect with survivors, to receive training in prison that offered life skills, or to have access to opportunities to develop in a sustainable way.

Claude points out an important piece, the role that poverty played in the conflict that ensued prior to and building up to the Genocide. The economic insecurity civilians faced was dire and this vulnerability was used to ignite divisionism between people.

Claude: And you know sometimes conflict, divisionism, all this are somehow connected with poverty; you know when someone is idle you can start creating issues where there are not.

Economic sustainability is key for the participants because it creates a sense of agency and autonomy for them (and the community as a whole), where they can get a hand up (systemic support) so that they can be independent in their business and community endeavours.

> Fabien: We've been trained many times by PF Rwanda. We trained in many things, human rights, money management, household management, all these things they play a big role in shaping you and you end up becoming a better person.

> Fabien: It is not about me because I received different trainings on human rights, on different livelihood development, yes, and also other supports from other people and also from God so it is not really about me, it is about other people and me included.

> Fabien: At the community level there is always support, people are ready to support especially those who come from the prison, and for somebody who spent 30 years in the prison I'm not sure he would be willing to go back because that's another life. But again in the prison what happens when someone is about to get released they have this pre-release support. Yeah, they give, especially when there is going to be a mass release, they talk to them, prepare them for going to place them in the community and stuff so by the time they join the community there's also support from people who have been there so I think that says people can be assisted.

> Fabien: And then also there was this… and then we went through lots of training with PF Rwanda that also helped.

Theme discussion

The participants' references to the previous government as having let them down reflects a betrayal of trust and loyalty, and the repairing of this trust is attributed to the actions of the present systems in place. This is consistent with social identity theory, which suggests that individuals develop positive self-concept through identification with and loyalty to a group, which can be a source of social identity. The repairing of relationships with present superordinate systems can be seen as a way of re-establishing positive social identity, which could contribute to a sense of belonging and well-being.

The participants demonstrate the importance of reclaiming personal agency through a healthy relationship with superordinate systems, such as the government and their faith leaders/faith community. The participants speak about how they were influenced in the past to engage in genocide through propaganda and other coercive controls, with no choice over their circumstances. However, in reflecting on post-genocide decisions and choices, they shift the discourse towards agency and personal responsibility. This is consistent with self-determination theory, as noted earlier, which suggests that individuals have a basic psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and are essential for their well-being.

Participants expressed a sense of responsibility to future generations and a desire to use their experiences to promote peace and healing. They also saw themselves as role models and wanted to share their stories to prevent future atrocities. By seeing themselves as part of a bigger cause, they were able to take accountability for their actions and use their experiences to benefit society. This highlights the importance of promoting a sense of collective responsibility and providing opportunities for individuals to contribute to a greater cause.

Systemic support plays an important role in the healing and reintegration process. Claude's observation about the connection between poverty and conflict highlights the need for economic support that goes beyond addressing immediate needs. For the participants, economic sustainability is key as it fosters agency and autonomy, enabling them to become independent and productive members of their communities. The training provided by organizations like PFR, as shared by Fabien, is critical in shaping attitudes, building skills, and promoting human rights. Overall, these findings illuminate the importance of systemic support in facilitating the healing and reintegration of genocide perpetrators, and the need for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond punishment and retribution.

4.4. New Identity and Self-Concept

4.4.1. More than a perpetrator, yet your crime is always next to you

Navigating identity through ABPRA shows the transition from being a *perpetrator* towards becoming *a person who has perpetrated* AND has evolved beyond that. I asked the participants:

> Tania: Somebody once told me that “once a perpetrator, always a perpetrator”. How do you feel about that?

Their responses showed that while they do not negate the past and the impact of their actions, they see themselves as a new person, substantiating how they are “more than a perpetrator”:

> Claude: I don’t agree with that sentence because in my case I know that I was once a perpetrator but I am forgiven. So I try all the time to preserve that forgiveness so that I don’t take it for granted. Unless I lose it. Because once I did the wrong things, now I’m motivated to do better, to do better

> things, so that people can see I'm no longer the person I used to be. So I do not think of me as a criminal all the time because I know that I'm forgiven. So that gives me strength to do things and work very hard because somehow I know that I'm free, that I'm not a hostage of the past.
>
> …So if I keep thinking that I'm a criminal then I'm telling you that I wouldn't even attempt to do things, I wouldn't even think about the future. I will stay isolated, think about the crimes I committed, about everything, and then stop there.
>
> Claude: Yeah it is different because there's the bad person I used to be and then there's also to reflect or to remember what I did, but not… like as a way to improve but also there's thinking about where I want to take my life too.
>
> Theodore: If you are a criminal, maybe in the past, it doesn't necessarily mean that you keep being a criminal. When you repent you ask God for forgiveness and then you decide to move from the past and then you move towards the future and you make things right so there is no need to keep hiding yourself and keep going back to the person you used to be, it's different.

Despite the positive changes that happened in their lives, it was made abundantly clear that the past does not fade in memory nor significance. Memory of past atrocities persists; the difference is how it resides within each of them:

> Alain: You know that you are forgiven, you can even come to a point of forgiving yourself but what you did, the crime you committed is right next to you, it doesn't go far.
>
> Claude: There's no such a thing as a time where I don't think about it; a criminal always thinks about the crime he committed.
>
> Claude: If one doesn't think about it, I think that's a mistake, because in order to improve your life or maybe to decide what you have to do for the future, either for you or the community, you need to think about where you come from then from that now you can now sit down and write, you write your history and then you empower others. That's how it works.
>
> Theodore: You cannot really forget what you went through. It is something that is within you all the time, it is something that you remember or it comes to your mind at any given point. For instance, I could be sitting with my family or friends or other people and they'd be… as we discuss maybe somebody brings up a discussion or a story that touches on prison, then you remember that.
>
> Theodore: I spent 8 years in prison, I wish I didn't participate; if maybe I didn't participate I'd be someone else, I wouldn't be dealing with this that I'm dealing with. In other words, this is not something that you can get away from.

4.4.2. Rehumanization

During their engagement with ABPRA, in the opportunity that the program created to know one another on a more personal level, the participants were able to re-humanize those they had offended. They speak of survivors deserving respect, having the same blood as them, and understanding the value of a human being.

> Alain: That's a very difficult question you ask me. But even when we did what we did we said that we are Christian, so it didn't make any big difference. But in the context where faith is not really at the centre of everything maybe they can start from the human point of view knowing that someone has the same blood that you have, they deserve respect, they deserve life [mhm]. *Murakoze*.
>
> Theodore: And then you recognize that you did something wrong and that the person you wanted to kill or maybe you killed has the same blood as you and then you make that step to get out of that mess and then you try to create a new person, within yourself.
>
> Fabien: So they need more training so that they can cope up with the life in the community because they forget, it's completely different. So they need to be trained on how to live with other people on different things we learn in the community. Most importantly there should be a focus on human rights because it is important for them to understand the value of a human being and this will prevent them from reoffending or doing other bad things.
>
> Claude: So I no longer see a Tutsi as a threat, I see them as people as myself or others.

4.4.3. Recategorization

The former government had made identity cards that stated ethnicity on them. This was instrumental in identifying - and killing - Tutsi during the Genocide. Now, the current government eradicated the distinction of ethnic tribes on identity cards and all are now Rwandans.

> Alain: And again there is no mention of ethnicity on identity card; that gives me hope because children they grow up with that unity in their mind because there is nothing to really say this is who this is.
>
> Alain: I'll give you an example of something that shows me that there's a big change that gives me hope for the future. For instance, in the previous regime we have these national identity cards, that we had ethnicity, so that was very instrumental even during the Genocide, it was very easy to know who to kill because we used to be told that Tutsis are our main enemy, but

> the ID cards we have now, we are Rwandan [that's right], so there's no Hutus, there's no Tutsi. That is, that gives me hope.
>
> Claude: So it's been 14 years down the road there is no such thing as a Hutu and a Tutsi, it's just a history now.

4.4.4. Becoming a better person

Fabien sees himself as a new person and gives clear examples as to what has changed for him. He used to be a "drunkard" and now he is a "farmer" who cares for his family and is development-oriented:

> Fabien: In my life I was this kind of person who didn't care about someone else's life. For me it meant nothing, but now it is different, the way I look at someone's life, it's different.
>
> Fabien: Even the way I manage my own home, because before I was careless taking care of my own house, my own home, I didn't care for the needs of my family… a child coming to me that there is no school fees, it didn't matter, but now I take it seriously so this is how my life changed."
>
> Fabien: Before I used to be a person who would spend much of his time in the bar drinking but after that now I care much about my family. That's really important for me and now I'm involved in agriculture, I'm a farmer. So my vision is to take care of my family, I'm concerned about their development and what the future holds for my family. Sometimes I drink, I drink a bit of beer, but I'm so focused on where I can take my family, where I want it to be. I am today. I used to be a drunkard but now I'm family oriented.

4.4.5. Change in self-concept, being valued in community

Being valued in the community helps Fabien see himself in new light:

> Fabien: There is this committee of local authorities so sometimes they invite me to come in their meeting to share ideas and that shows also the confidence and the way people see you and I'm also encouraged by the way people see me and value me.

Theme Discussion

The findings under this theme suggest that while the participants committed atrocities in the past and may have moved beyond their past actions, the memory and impact of their crimes remain a part of their identity. A dissonance between former and present self may lead to a desire for redemption and a need to reconcile past actions with their current self-concept. However, as seen in the participants' responses, the

memory of their past actions cannot be erased, and it continues to shape their identity. This shows the importance of acknowledging the impact of past actions while also allowing for growth and change.

The constructs of rehumanization and recategorization have been widely studied in social psychology and are relevant to understanding the experiences of perpetrators of genocide. Rehumanization involves seeing the victims as human beings deserving of respect and dignity, and recategorization involves moving away from seeing individuals based on their group identity, such as ethnicity, and instead seeing them as individuals. The participants' ABPRA engagement with the survivors shows how through personal interactions and understanding their shared humanity, participants were able to rehumanize those they had offended and recategorize them as fellow human beings. The removal of ethnic labels from identity cards also suggests that the government's promotion of recategorization contributed to long-term social change.

These findings suggest that perpetrators of genocide can undergo significant changes in their self-concept and behaviour. Fabien's transformation from a careless, drunken person to a responsible farmer who values his family's well-being demonstrates the potential for positive change. Being valued in the community also contributes to this transformation, as social support and recognition can enhance self-esteem and promote prosocial behavior (Baumeister & Leary, n.d.). Fabien's participation in local authority meetings and the confidence and validation he receives from others in the community may have contributed to his sense of self-worth and motivation to become a better person.

4.5. Discussion Summary & Conclusion

Overall, this research has shown the critical role of interpersonal processes in reconciliation efforts, and highlights the potential of structured interventions/programs like ABPRA to foster meaningful connections between perpetrators and survivors.

The process of identity and self-concept change through relational processes with others, with superordinate systems and relationship with self, aligns with existing research. In the case of this study's participants, engaging with the survivors through ABPRA and recognizing their shared humanity contributed to a shift in self-concept and

identity, leading to a greater sense of responsibility for their actions and a desire to become better people.

Additionally, social identity theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of self from their group memberships and the perceived value of those groups in society (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). In Rwanda, the government's removal of ethnicity from identity cards and the promotion of a unified Rwandan identity was a major systemic shift, which in turn influenced the identity and self-concept of individuals. As Fabien stated, being valued in the community through involvement in local committees and the recognition of his contributions as a farmer contributed to a positive shift in his self-concept.

The importance of social interactions, group memberships, and superordinate systems in shaping one's identity and self-concept shows the importance of creating opportunities for positive social interactions and promoting a sense of shared humanity and value in diverse groups. ABPRA was instrumental in making this happen for the participants of this study.

4.5.1. Personal Reflections

This research allowed me to reflect on my own identity as a new researcher, as well as a woman visiting Rwanda. Depending on social contexts I was often seen as a *muzungu* (white person), but at other times was seen as "practically, one of us" because of my ethnically ambiguous appearance. Many Rwandans assumed I was part-African. I quickly became very fond of Rwanda and was so touched when I was embraced by the culture. I felt like I was home. In my own Greek ethnic heritage, I share many cultural similarities, such as the importance of sharing food, joyfully opening our homes to visitors, and allowing time to become trivial in the company of friends.

I noticed how gender played a role in many social contexts there, yet as a researcher when visiting Mbyo, I was identified more closely as being one of Dr. Minami's students; this, thanks to the warm relationship Dr. Minami had established with the village years ago, gifted me with an instant boost of credibility. However, as mentioned before, actions speak louder than words, and I soon had to hold my own and show who I am as a person. One of the first questions asked when I was introduced to the village residents was about my life in Canada. Do I have family? Am I married? They

wanted to know about me as a person, not so much about the research (not yet, anyway). I understood how important this was for trust-building, and was reminded how much I valued this myself! I learned so much about myself simply by being in the presence of the participants and the entire village that embraced me. Seeing myself through their eyes actually changed the relationship I have with myself to this day. It is a different kind of love and sense of belonging to be cared for and embraced by a collective of people accepting you with open hearts and a playful curiosity.

I came back home to Canada and my relationship with time, order, and life in general had changed and I am ever grateful for this. My *abarimu* (teachers) taught me invaluable life lessons beyond the margins of these pages. As such, this has impacted my practice as a counsellor. I have found greater patience in myself and others, I have also cultivated greater compassion and flexibility with time and schedules – I allow relationships to become a priority and this been incredibly rewarding as well as effective in reducing my anxiety around being productive, in that capitalistic, live-for-profit sense. In a nutshell, I have come to appreciate the importance of meaningful social connection, and this informs my practice as a counsellor as well.

4.5.2. Implications

As I personally came to experience through this research and my engagement with the participants, social support and the role of community is very important in shaping individual identity and self-concept. The findings in this study suggest that interventions aimed at promoting personal growth and developing positive self-concept may be effective in promoting post-traumatic growth and facilitating the process of reintegration into the community.

Additionally, this research showed the importance of listening to and acknowledging the experiences of those who perpetrate violence, rather than simply distancing from them and dehumanizing them. This approach can be useful in developing more effective strategies for promoting accountability and addressing the legacies of violence in post-conflict contexts, but also interpersonal contexts. Finally, this research has implications for the development of educational programs and interventions aimed at preventing future harm, whether interpersonal or intergroup, and promoting peaceful, and fruitful, coexistence. By understanding the experiences of

perpetrators, such programs can be better designed to address the root causes of conflict and violence and promote sustainable peacebuilding and community healing.

Finally, a bottom-up approach to research is imperative when exploring subjects that challenge morality and status quo. It is beneficial in our quest for understanding and knowledge, to be able to set aside our preconceptions and allow this knowledge to emerge from the field itself, thus removing our theoretical, sometimes oppressive "blinders", and allowing positive changes and growth to happen in academia and practice.

4.5.3. Applications in Counselling and Beyond

While this research took place in a very unique context, I often zoom out of that space and look at the incredible gifts that arise out of looking at both sides of the coin of violence. I then I narrow in on another context that is near and dear to my heart as a counsellor: helping people overcome impacts of relationship violence. In my practice as a counsellor, I have worked with a large number of women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). Prior to becoming a counsellor and throughout half of my academic studies I also worked as a coordinator for a municipal committee comprised of local non-profit and government agencies that focused on addressing and responding to IPV in the community. During this time I came to realize that male partners who had hurt their female partners, had little access to community support or counselling, unless they were already involved with the justice system. I should note that IPV happens in non-heterosexual relationships and men are also often victims of IPV, but the majority of IPV victims are women. From my experience, know that most often, those who harm their intimate partners, have also experienced some form of trauma themselves. However, the systems that respond to intimate partner violence, are generally designed to provide safety and healing for survivors of violence. As I write this, the introduction to my thesis starts to echo, and I may sound as if I'm repeating myself. Those who perpetrate IPV are commonly referred to as "abusers" and literature used as psychoeducational tools to help women identify violence in their relationships highlights how power and control is used in relationships by their abusers. This is necessary to keep women safe from violence, so I'm not arguing against the value of such literature and community response to help survivors. I will continue to echo my introductory comments. Once a person hurts their partner, they are labeled as abusers and are almost instantly dehumanized in an

effort to create distance from the survivor. This only creates a temporary sense of safety for both survivor and the community at large, however. Those of us who have worked with IPV survivors know how common it is for them to return to their “abusers”, repeatedly re-entering the cycle of abuse. Most IPV also goes unreported due to mistrust of authority, police, oppression, patriarchy, victim-blaming social norms – this list can continue. Given the picture I have just painted, I see a gaping void in our response to IPV: a desperate need to widely (not just in corrective institutions/programs) address the root of IPV by healing the personal, systemic and patriarchal traumas that plague those who harm their partners, not just the victims. This can start by understanding the lived experiences of “abusers”, listening to their stories and understanding what is needed for positive and enduring change to happen for them so that they can be “more than an abuser”. As long as we subscribe to a retributive justice system, our approach to abuse will always be filtered through an “evil versus good” lens, focusing on distancing from the abuser to find a sense of safety, yet hardly providing an opportunity for repair and healing to happen for the person who caused harm; I emphasize the word person. This attitude permeates therapeutic environments, where counsellors have few opportunities to train in how to respond to the needs of persons who have harmed their partners, thus contributing to the invisibility of this population that is in deep need of healing.

I sometimes express grievances with intersectional feminism – and I include myself here – which, in the fight to dismantle systems of oppression that create invisibility and marginalization, has neglected to take action to help men/abusers, perhaps because in their dehumanization, men who harm their partners have come to paradoxically symbolize the same oppressive system they are also victims of. Due to this, I believe they have become invisible and have very little recourse for healing and repair. If only we, service providers, researchers, and policy makers, set our anger and desperation for perceived safety aside for a moment, we might be able to catch a glimpse into how deep the wounds are on that side and maybe start listening with a compassionate ear to the stories these wounds might sing. When we listen, we can understand more, and when we understand, we can respond in healthier and more effective ways.

4.5.4. Conclusion: Actions Speak Louder than Words

As touched on briefly in the introduction to this thesis, much of the research that concentrates on perpetrators of violence focuses on behavioural outcomes in terms of recidivism – the absence of violence; few talk about positive changes, and contributions made post-offense or post-incarceration. During this study, recidivism wasn't the endpoint but rather a demarcation towards a new life and co-existence with survivors. In the shared stories of lived experiences, we see personal transformation, individual changes towards becoming a person who is so much more than a perpetrator, evidenced through concrete actions. The actions taken, prosocial actions, are contributions to the health of the individuals' families, their communities, their country and global community as they, with survivors, become teachers of reconciliation.

On my third visit to Rwanda and after we had completed the interviews, the participants asked me to go visit them before I leave, to spend time with them and see how they live their lives. Fabien took me on a tour of the village, into people's homes where I got to chat with some of the survivors, and their neighbours. I saw their kitchen gardens, cows, goats, chickens, and soaked in the beauty of their community. Finally, as a last stop, Fabien took me to show me his farm. When we arrived, we met his son, who was leaning against a mango tree that was loaded with mangoes. He introduced us, and then asked his son to climb up and cut a red, ripe mango from the tree.

Fabien, then, took the mango and handed it over to me with the same hands that killed his neighbour's family, and said to me: *This*, is reconciliation.

Figure 2 Mango tree in Rwanda.

This is one of the many mango trees I saw in Rwanda, much like the one on Fabien's farm.

**Figure 3	Photo with my reconciliation teachers.**

From left to right: Theodore, Fabien, Tania, Claude, Alain [participant names are pseudonyms; participants consented to photo being shared in thesis].

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