

# A reconciliation Project with Ruandese Hutu and Tutsi

by Pat Patfoort

In Belgium, and particularly in Brussels, many Ruandese refugees, Tutsi and Hutu, are living. Two years ago we started to work with a group of them, men and women, of all ages, of very different backgrounds and education, and as well Tutsi as Hutu. The group meets every month, with 12-15 people present at every meeting.

**The work methods** used are lectures, storytelling (of historical examples and own experiences) and discussion, analysis exercises, conceptual and experiential exercises, role plays, symbolic games.

What has been very important is that we have worked through "deviation". This means : we didn't immediately -or even not before several months- touch "the" item they all came for : the inter-ethnic conflicts and relationships between Hutu and Tutsi. First we used all kinds of examples which were outside of this matter, like conflicts in the family or in the workplace, or even inter-cultural ones different from theirs. It's only very gradually we moved towards the inter-ethnic field and particularly theirs. This gradual progression made it possible they could think and assimilate the new knowledge, skills and experiences without being disturbed or blocked by too big emotions.

**The theoretical models** which have been used are :

1) to clarify how people usually deal with conflicts, and what the origin and the mechanisms of violence are : essentially the "Major-minor system" (see fig.1) <sup>(1)</sup>  
2) to situate there is not only the offensive way of defending oneself, but also the nonviolent one, in other words : there is a third way besides being violent and being passive, following models have been used :

- "The Umbrella : The Linear and the Dualistic or Curved Way of Thinking" <sup>(2)</sup>
- "The Equivalence System" (see fig.2) <sup>(3)</sup>

**"The exercise of the two parallel lists of foundations"** has been the exercise through which the deepest results have been acquired. In this exercise people start from two contradictory points of view of two different people or groups, and go in depth to look in an Equivalent way what are the (possible) so-called "foundations" of both parties. To realize this exercise very strict rules are given, so that the Equivalency can really be put in practice, this means without judgment, without positive and negative quotations, without comparing. Below we see the results of two of those exercises.

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<sup>1</sup> : see Patfoort, Pat. Uprooting Violence, Building Nonviolence. Freeport, MA (US) : Cobblesmith pub., 1995.

<sup>2</sup> : see Patfoort, Pat. An Introduction to Nonviolence. Nyack, NY : Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1987; and Se défendre sans attaquer. La puissance de la nonviolence. Jeugd & Vrede/Baeckens Books, Mechelen (B), 2004.

<sup>3</sup> : see 1

### **Two people have a conflict about wanting the same house**

The first situation is the one where a family of one ethnic group, who left their house when fleeing, comes back and finds a family of the other ethnic group living in the house they left.

Here below is the analysis of the two parallel lists of (possible) foundations of, in the left column, the family who left the house and comes back, and, in the right column, the other family who lives now in the house.

Before reading : a very important remark about HOW to read.

I don't want to be sentimental or to make anyone cry. I just want we should read those words with their real content. So we should read those columns slowly and with empathy. Not like : "Oh yes, I know how much those people have suffered!" If when we read those columns, we have a lump in our throat, or we feel a heavy weight in our chest, there is a big chance we are reading them in the way they should be read.

### **Foundations :**

#### **A : I want to take this house back**

- 1)I was driven out of this house
- 2)I did build it
- 3)I don't have any other place to live in
- 4)I did invest my whole life in this house
- 5)I feel attached to this house and this property, the land where my ancestors were living
- 6)I suffer to see someone else living in this house
- 7)I suffer not to have a house for my family
- 8)I feel humiliated having been expelled out of my place
- 9)I can't imagine feeling good in another house than the one I did build
- 10)I need to be proud of my house
- 11)I feel oppressed having been driven out from my place

#### **B : I don't want to leave this house**

- 1)I have the conviction to have the right to have a war loot
- 2)I don't have another place to go
- 3)I lost everything I had before
- 4)I don't think I have the means to build something else
- 5)I have a family to put up
- 6)If I should be driven out of this house, I would have the feeling to be a thief
- 7)I don't have a job to pay a rent for a house

In this way people get to the point where they are capable to focus and to analyze on the one side what are their own foundations, and on the other side what are the foundations of their "opponent", and this without judgments, without insulting, without presenting themselves as right and the other one as wrong. Here there is only understanding, empathy, dialogue, respect, in spite of the enormous pain and suffering.

The next step is then to consider possible solutions, on basis of **all** foundations of both sides (cf. fig.3).

**Sketches and elements of solutions** proposed by the group through this process are :

- 1) A and B could meet to discuss the situation
- 2) There should be no thoughts at all of a relationship of owner against usurper (Major-minor positions)
- 3) They both could live together temporarily in the house during the time they need to find a permanent solution
- 4) One could propose to the other one to help to build another house, or could help to find money for it
- 5) A could help B to find a job
- 6) A could pay a rent to B
- 7) The property could be divided in two parts
- 8) B could say to A that if A would help him to find money, he would go elsewhere
- 9) A and B could go together to see the authorities to find out about the possibility of a "social" house
- 10) A could give some time to B to move
- 11) B can sell the house to A
- 12) A can return in the house and help B to have another house (by paying him a rent, or by building it together), but it will have to be very sure A will keep his commitment until the very end
- 13) A can help B to build another house, and afterwards go back to live in the house he did built
- 14) They should find a way B could leave the house without feeling like a thief
- 15) A should reassure B that he would not consider B as a thief if B would give the house to A
- 16) The two families can decide to sell the house and to share the money
- 17) There can be first a temporary solution, and afterwards a permanent one
- 18) There is the need for a guarantee that the solution will really be realized (through the government? a NGO?)

**The solution** can be one of those or a combination of several of those elements. Surely the solution will have to be decided by the two people involved, and not imposed by anyone outside. People outside just can give ideas and suggestions. And for each of this kind of situations the solution will have to be built in a unique way.

## The disagreement about the term 'Genocide'

### I use the term "Genocide"

- 1)I have a profound disgust of all the violence I have seen around me
- 2)I am filled with a feeling of horror when I think of the boundless cruelty I did go through
- 3)I lost all confidence in the human being because of the scenes of such horror
- 4)I feel out-of-date, terrified, because of the so enormous number of dead people
- 5)The tidal wave of violence was such that I had the impression everyone was killing and nobody was spared
- 6)I had the feeling not one child was spared
- 7)I saw victims of all ages
- 8)I had the feeling people had pleasure to kill
- 9)I had the feeling all Tutsis were killed
- 10)I had the feeling to be the only survivor of the Tutsis, because I have the feeling not to know anyone anymore
- 11)I had the impression only the Tutsi ethnic group was alluded
- 12)I had the feeling it was something well prepared long in advance, because some things happened I couldn't explain otherwise
- 13)I had the feeling there was a killing program
- 14)I heard speeches in which they said to exterminate all Tutsis
- 15)I have this huge suffering inside of me
- 16)I have the feeling not to be enough heard with this suffering
- 17)I would feel bad if we wouldn't talk about genocide, after I have lost my whole family
- 18)I feel relieved by the weight of this word
- 19)I have the feeling the world powers understand better my pain
- 20)I am afraid, if we don't use this term, the world will be unaware of how terrible it has been
- 21)I am afraid, if we don't use this term, people will make what happened commonplace
- 22)I have the feeling it's weight influences the fact of punishing the accused
- 23)I need to take a revenge
- 24)In this way I attempt to get their goods
- 25)In this way I work on it they would get penal servitude for life
- 26)In this way I attempt they never would be in power again, it never will happen again

### I don't want you to use the term "Genocide"

- 1)I saw/heard about the fact that as well Hutus as Tutsis were killed
- 2)I saw Hutu families totally exterminated
- 3)I have the feeling the expression doesn't correspond with my reality
- 4)I had the feeling not specifically the Tutsis but the FPR was alluded
- 5)I know so many Hutus who didn't agree with the killing
- 6)I have friends of the two ethnical groups who died
- 7)I remember Hutu neighbors who risked their lives to put up and hide Tutsis
- 8)I have the feeling the mass-medias can manipulate mass
- 9)I have the impression the big mass only wanted peace, and that it was more something of politicians
- 10)I have the feeling what happened was a power-fight and not an extermination of a group
- 11)I have had the feeling the killings were not programmed, but more the result of an anger beyond measure
- 12)I have the feeling this expression has been and remains a war weapon on the level of the medias and on the political level, to discredit a part of the population
- 13)I fear it makes my ethnic group diabolic
- 14)I'm afraid my ethnic group will be interrogated, examined, arrested
- 15)I have the feeling it divides the Ruandese in guilty people and victims
- 16)I feel judged, condemned
- 17)I am afraid of the consequences
- 18)I am afraid the future generations, our children, will be sullied, tarnished by this drama

In Equivalency or Nonviolence, it is very important not to be focused on THE solution, but on the process. A solution will come out of this process, but it's very important to have people go through this process, without making them feel pushed in any way towards a solution.

By going through this process, they work on healing, consciousness, understanding, compassion, respect and dialogue -all necessary ingredients to deal with the situation in a nonviolent way, towards reconciliation.

### **The learning's and building elements in this project**

I would like to report here some significant learning's the people expressed during this project, which illustrate how such work really is a basis for dialogue and reconciliation :

- 1)We are touched by the openness and sincerity here
- 2)It's hard to think again to all that
- 3)There are things which we can't formulate : with which words?
- 4)It's difficult to make yourself understood
- 5)It's important to recognize how we feel without feeling guilty. We have to cry, to shout it out.
- 6)Each has his experience inside of himself, and thinks he understood
- 7)Every time each is convinced of his truth, but in fact it's his interpretation of it
- 8)We have to learn to formulate our suffering without wanting to hurt the other side. This is not easy.
- 9)We have to learn never to speak in statements, as if we knew "the truth", because this way of talking or writing cuts the bridges and makes dialogue difficult. We have to use a soft and humble language : e.g. not : "It was something well prepared in advance!", but : "I had the feeling it was something well prepared in advance, because some things happened I couldn't explain otherwise".
- 10)It's important to examine carefully the reasons and feelings of the other one, to try to get into his/her way of considering and feeling things, to give those as much value as to what I'm feeling myself
- 11)I progressively discover a way to start again the debate
- 12)I'm learning to appreciate the complexity of conflicts
- 13)I learned that some Ruandese did react in state of unconsciousness and ignorance, and that today the two ethnical groups suffer from the genocide
- 14)I think truth has many faces. We have to try to open ourselves more to gather as many elements of the truth as possible
- 15)In the beginning I was blocked : I thought I wasn't going to be able to enter in the other column. But now I feel relaxed.
- 16)We have to discover the suffering of the other ones; there are no guilty ones and victims
- 17)One can support the weakest one, the oppressed, but not **against** the other one
- 18)I understood that to get peace, we have to be able to give it to the others ourselves

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