

Healing The Wounds, Bridging The Divide

Exploring “Community Participation” in Post-Conflict
Development through Trauma Healing in Rwanda

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Abstract

“Community participation” is a common concept in contemporary development initiatives worldwide. As an approach, it aims to include the targeted population in its planning and implementation, by recognizing the need in understanding local contexts, beliefs, and values. As such, this thesis aims to explore the possibilities, as well as limitations, of community participation, specifically in the context of post-conflict development through a case study of a development project, The Bugesera Societal Healing Initiative (BSHI), in Rwanda. This is done within the theoretical context of the anthropology of development and post-development theory. Through ethnographical inquiry into the lives of BSHI participants suffering from trauma following the 1994 Genocide, this thesis conveys the essence for development organizations in catering to the specific needs of a given local population. In turn, this is placed in a broader discourse, within the development sector as a whole, to understand the limitations and obstacles in achieving comprehensive societal transformation. It is argued that, while development initiatives driven by the idea of community participation may succeed on a local level and positively impact the targeted population, it may still leave wider political structures perpetuating issues of, for instance, poverty unaltered. In this, it seems that for these structures to be addressed, it requires a more radical approach to development in which the status quo is being challenged.

Keywords

Development, community participation, trauma, trauma healing, Rwanda, Genocide

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1. Introduction

I never thought I could feel so much relief [...]. But sometimes, it feels like the more we heal, the more we see how much more there is to be done.

-Daniel

In a village in southern Rwanda, a few people meet every Tuesday to talk about the devastating Genocide of 1994, some of them are survivors and some of them perpetrators. They share their stories, their pain, and their deepest regrets. They speak of emotions that are raw and uncomfortable, of anger and hatred, of loss and hopelessness. Yet, they also speak of forgiveness, of moving forward, and of healing. This group of fifteen individuals had previously participated in a development project, The Bugesera Societal Healing Initiative (BSHI), implemented by the international organization *Resilife*¹. Resilife is an organization that prides itself with their participatory bottom-up approaches to development. They value “community participation”, “local ownership” and “context-sensitive” development initiatives. Such concepts are today widely used in the world of development.

Community participation (or participatory bottom-up approaches) in development have been touted as the keys to unlocking the potential of development. Yet, as anthropologists and post-development theorists have pointed out, these can be buzzwords that mask political and economic interests of organizations, governments, and stakeholders (Mosse 2013). Furthermore, it has been argued that community participation can still be structured by power relations, and therefore leave wider structures of society unaltered (ibid.). In this, it seems like too often, development projects are seen as solutions in themselves, rather than part of a larger, ongoing process of social change. At the same time, it is still recognized that the people must be in charge of their own development, and therefore participatory approaches might be needed in the current development paradigm. This poses a problem within development, and the challenges of community participation and development are therefore at the forefront of ongoing debates about how to create meaningful social change (Assan and

¹ The name 'Resilife' used in this thesis is a pseudonym created to represent a real international development organization. The organization has been anonymized to shift the focus away from the specific organization itself, as this thesis does not aim to evaluate its work and projects.

Hunt 2018; Bakker and Nooteboom 2017, 64). In this thesis, I attempt to enter the debate and discuss community participation through an anthropological case study of Resilife's work in the village "Ntareho" in Rwanda, with the aim of answering the research question:

To what extent do participatory approaches to development empower impoverished communities in order to facilitate lasting change?

Without trying to evaluate whether the project was a success or not, nor critique Resilife for their work, the purpose of this thesis is to critically examine the idea and approach of "community participation". By delving deeper into the stories and lived experiences of the people enrolled in Resilife's project in Ntareho, I will discuss the approach's possibilities and pitfalls. The aim is to go beyond the results and success stories provided by the many development organizations, and instead conduct ethnographical inquiry into how these results are actually lived and experienced. This will be done in relation to trauma healing as it was the main focus of Resilife and is a significant focus of development in post-conflict Rwanda.

The thesis begins with relevant background information of Rwanda, Ntareho, and the BSHI project and an overview of the anthropological methods used to gather data. Subsequently, the theoretical background is introduced, including the anthropology of development and post-development theory, as well as theorists who emphasize the importance of trauma in post-conflict societies. Once a foundation of the theoretical background is laid, I turn to the main chapter of thematic analysis. Drawing on Harvey and Knox and their emphasis on "hope" and Victor Turner's concept of "liminality", I discuss trauma healing, as facilitated by community participation, and its importance in Ntareho.

In turn, the discussion is placed in a broader development discourse context to grasp the shortcomings of community participation. Mainly drawing on post-development theorist and anthropologist James Ferguson (1994), I argue, that while community participation is an important aspect of development, it must be approached with a critical lens that considers the wider structural issues that shape community dynamics. While participatory approaches to development may succeed on a local level – it can leave wider political structures that perpetuate issues of poverty and inequality unaltered if these are not addressed.

2. Background and Method

In this section, I provide a background of the 1994 Genocide that has caused significant trauma for many Rwandans, as well as the BSHI project that aimed to address this trauma. I put emphasis on Ntareho, the village where I conducted my fieldwork, and present some of the main interlocutors of the study. I also provide the research design I adhered to, reflexive accounts of the difficulties in navigating research in a post-conflict society, and some ethical considerations.

2.1 Background: Rwanda's 1994 Genocide and the BSHI project

The Genocide in Rwanda 1994 resulted in the loss of approximately 800,000² lives within 100 days, primarily fueled by long-standing ethnic tensions between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi populations. Extremist Hutu elements, exploiting historical grievances and political instability, orchestrated a systematic campaign of violence against the Tutsi population and moderate Hutus (Britannica 2022).

In the aftermath of the Genocide, both perpetrators and survivors are often seen as victims (Mamdani 2001, 267). This is due to how Hutus were encouraged to participate in the violence, or they risked being viewed as traitors. Today, Rwanda faces challenges in healing and rebuilding a traumatized nation, existing of both survivors and perpetrators. Despite these difficulties, Rwanda has managed to facilitate significant progress when it comes to health, education, and economic growth (Reyntjens 2015; Lemarchand 2013; Collier and Hoeffler 2000). However, many Rwandans still suffer from mental health issues as a result of the Genocide, serving as an obstacle for development to occur in impoverished regions (Rieder and Elbert 2013).

To address this issue, the international organization Resilife implemented the BSHI project during a time span of two years, and it ended six months prior to my arrival. The project aimed to provide mental health services, advance social cohesion, and promote sustainable collaborative livelihoods among the targeted population. The project draws on research

² The numbers of lives lost in the genocide is debated. While the constitution of Rwanda claims that more than one million people lost their lives (Government of Rwanda, n.d.), this has been widely contested (Meierhenrich 2020). Many scholars have agreed on a figure between 500,000 to 662,000 Tutsi deaths (Guichaoua 2019), and estimations including all deaths during the genocide has been made around the 800,000 mark (Human Rights Watch 2019).

studies that have shown the prevalence of mental health issues among Rwandans following the effects of the Genocide. There have been several interventions carried out by Resilife to support trauma healing and peace processes for Genocide survivors and perpetrators. In this thesis, the specific focus is that of sociotherapy. The aim of the sociotherapy groups were to treat mental health issues such as trauma, with an idea of such a treatment could lead to positive economic behaviors, food security, and civic participation.³

2.2 Ntareho and Beyond

In southern Rwanda, bordering the country of Burundi, lies a village which I will call *Ntareho* in this thesis. Ntareho is one of the villages targeted by Resilife, and where I spent most of my fieldwork with my informants. According to the Mudugudu (local village leader) of Ntareho, 935 people live in the village, of which 15 were part of the sociotherapy group. In Ntareho I lived with a man whom I shall call *Daniel*, a BSHI project participant. Daniel, of Hutu descent, had protected and hidden his Tutsi wife, *Ella*, during the Genocide, thereby making him a target for extremist Hutus too. Ella had lost her entire family in the carnage, and amid the chaos and bloodshed she became pregnant. They survived the Genocide and had their first child the same year in 1994. Today, the couple has seven children, the youngest of whom is seven years old, and the eldest 29. They are one of the many families in Ntareho and other parts of Rwanda that lives in extreme poverty, following the current most used indicator in the development sector of living under US\$1.90/day (World Bank, 2016).



Photography of the “center” of Ntareho⁴

³ For *Resilife* related references or more information of the BSHI project, contact the author of this thesis.

⁴ All photographs presented in this thesis was captured by the author, unless stated otherwise.

Ntareho is one of 14,837 villages that make up the intricate web of communities in Rwanda. From the smallest unit of a village, Rwanda is organized into a complex hierarchy of administrative units, comprising 2,148 cells, 416 sectors, 30 districts, and 4 provinces or Kigali City (Government of Rwanda *n.d.*). Ntareho is part of the Bugesera District of Rwanda. Bugesera is an area that had a large concentration of Tutsi prior to the Genocide, and were therefore a major target during the carnage, and even before it started in April 1994 as tensions rose (Tabaro, 2014). Reports have shown that, in recent years, most mental health challenges for people in the Bugesera District are related to symptoms of trauma (Bishumba, 2021).

Source: Ministries, Africa New Life (n.d.).

2.3 Research Design and Reflexivity

observation, a research strategy which typically involves a researcher living among and participating in the daily lives of the group being studied (Davies 1999, 67), in my case the villagers of Ntareho and specifically Daniel. This allowed me to engage and immerse myself in the community, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the people and the village (Emerson 2011, 1). “Interviews” were conducted more in the line of life histories (Davies 1999, 167) where so called “testimonies” were being shared by the participants.

When conducting participant observation in the field, it has been crucial for me to be reflexive. In broad terms, reflexivity refers to a process of when the researcher reflects on their own position and relation to the field, in which it is recognized that the outcomes of a study can be influenced by the researcher and the methods used (Davies 1999, 4). This has required me to pay close attention to how knowledge is shared, transmitted, and acquired within the community (Robben and Sluka 2012, 443). As an ethnographer, it is important to recognize that the meanings of a community are not objective facts, but rather constructed and conveyed through interpretations (Emerson 2011, 129).

In the context of my research, reflexivity becomes specifically important as I seek to illustrate development and its contact and relation to the local population. Development initiatives, as will be seen in the theoretical background, have been exposed for imposing external ideas, values, and knowledge on a community without the consideration of the local population. As I study the development sector, it is crucial for me to avoid making similar mistakes and approach the field with sensitivity. Furthermore, Rwanda’s colonial past marked by the historical control of Germany and Belgium, adds another layer of reflexivity to my research. As a white European and researcher in Rwanda, where I may be associated with the historical perpetrator group (Vollhardt 2014, 81), there was matter of gaining trust. For this to happen I had to first gain trust from the Mudugudu (village leader) in Ntareho which was made possible as Resilife vouched for me and my study.

Furthermore, navigating research in a post-conflict society with the scars of the Genocide still present proved to be challenging. Thus, the book *Engaging Violence* by Ivana Maček (2014) and some of its collective authors such as Johanna Vollhardt and Ervin Staub, has been important for me in shaping my approach to this study and to handle difficult talks about violent scenes. As my research involves engaging with interlocutors who are living with or have lived with trauma stemming from the Genocide, one cannot ignore the impact of this

historical event. While the primary focus of my study is not directly about the Genocide, there has still been a need to be aware that its aftermath permeates various aspects of the participants' lives which can influence their perspectives, experiences, and responses. In relation to this, I had to have in mind the potential emotional and bodily reactions that may arise in my participants as well as myself throughout the process (Maček 2014, 2), specifically when it comes to interviewing and knowing when to ask certain questions and what to not speak about, as well as when I attended the therapy sessions.

3. Theoretical Background

Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition [...] these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a pre-existing model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity.

Escobar (1995: 52)

In this section I provide an overview of the theories I will draw my analysis upon. The purpose is to situate the thesis within an anthropological framework, drawing on contributions from the anthropology of development and post development theory. Moreover, I situate the thesis in the context of a post-conflict society that suffers from trauma. Although trauma and trauma healing are not the main focus of this thesis per se, there is a need to cover what it has meant for the villagers of Ntareho as this was Resilife's main objective with the BSHI project. Furthermore, it allows me to properly examine community participation as the approach was used to address the trauma present in Ntareho.

3.1 The Anthropology of Development

“Development” is an incredibly broad concept and can be interpreted in several different ways. Therefore, I want to emphasize that when I refer to development, it is in the context of the field of anthropology of development. This refers to the body of anthropological work that has studied development through a critical lens. In general terms, “development” can be understood as the process of growth or progress towards a desired state. Therefore, when we use terms such as “developed countries” and “underdeveloped countries”, there is an assumption that the former has reached further in a development stage compared to the latter (Sachs and Esteva *et al.* 2010).

However, the anthropology of development has criticized this way of treating development, which is often seen as a top-down, expert-driven approach. Treating countries as “underdeveloped”, for example, has been seen viewed as Euro-American centric and oversimplified, while failing to account for cultural differences and unique needs and values of different societies (Bakker and Nooteboom 2017, 63). Foucauldian discourse analysis, which examines power dynamics in society, has been used to critique the way in which the

West has historically controlled processes of global change, including development interventions (Mosse 2013, 228). This means that language used to describe development, such as "third world", "civilized", and "expert knowledge", can be seen as a way for the West to exert power and control over countries in the Global South (ibid, 228). In this context, the anthropology of development emphasizes the need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to development.

As a result of the critique directed to the top-down approaches, we have seen a shift in development (Kaiser 2020, 93). Today it is widely recognized that development is a complex and multifaceted process that need to take a more culturally sensitive approach towards the targeted communities (Sumner and Tribe 2008, 11). Such an approach is often framed as "bottom-up" and "participatory", meaning to prioritize the active involvement of local communities in decision-making processes and emphasizing the importance of their knowledge and perspectives in shaping development initiatives (Kaiser 2020, 93).

Critiques of top-down approaches extend beyond the field of anthropology and includes scholars from development studies and economics too. William Easterly (2007), for instance, advocated for bottom-up approaches that prioritize empowering individuals and communities rather than relying solely on external aid. Additionally, Amartya Sen (1999) contributes valuable perspectives by emphasizing the expansion of freedoms as a fundamental aspect of development, moving beyond a purely economic lens. However, the anthropology of development offers an even broader critique. It examines development from a critical standpoint by recognizing that even bottom-up approaches can be shaped by power dynamics, rather than challenging them (Cooke and Kothari 2001). One main highlight of bottom-up approaches that is made within the anthropology of development is that while they may "succeed" on a local level, they often fall short of addressing wider structural issues that remain unchanged (Mosse 2013, 229).

While not a direct critique towards bottom-up approaches to development, this can rather be interpreted as not taking these concepts and approaches for granted. This is important since it has been recognized that buzzwords such as "participation" and "empowerment" play an important role in today's development policy as they influence how we perceive development (Cornwall and Brock 2006, 1056). Such a discussion can particularly be seen in David Mosse's (2004) ethnography on the relation between development policy and practice in

India. Mosse notes the high degree of ambiguity in the concept of “participation” used by development organizations. There is a need for such organizations to attract interest and support, he argues, through persuading stakeholders and outside actors by referencing both technology and social power (Mosse 2004, 35). Framing a project as participatory allows opposed views to be brought together, without anyone really questioning the nature of it (ibid, 35).

3.1.1 Theories of Hope

In their ethnography of infrastructure and roadbuilding in Peru, Harvey and Knox (2015) explore how development initiatives facilitate a sense of “hope” for the beneficiaries. While trauma healing and the process of addressing psychological and emotional wounds may seem distinct from the materialistic nature of roadbuilding, their acknowledgement of "hope" still comes in handy for exploring what emotions the development sector can generate amongst its beneficiaries. Specifically, to understand how the community perceived the project and how they saw and felt of their future in relation to it. For example, for many of the Peruvians, they saw roads as leading to new possibilities for them (Harvey and Knox 2015, 4). This might come across as obvious since development initiatives are supposed to bring about something positive, in its narrative at least. However, it is precisely this conventional understanding that requires particular emphasis. Looking at the hope that a development project generates, provides a lens through which to examine the community's aspirations, expectations, and visions for the future. As these initiatives are often long in its process, similar to that of “the promise of the road” (Harvey and Knox 2015, 22), this sheds light on not only the transformative potential of psychological healing, but the expectations of more tangible economic activities of the future. Therefore, emphasis on “hope”, as a common thread in this thesis, serves as a bridge between the non-materialistic aspect of trauma and the material outcomes and expectations of development initiatives, as will be seen in the creation of the rice-farming business by the BSHI participants.

3.2 Post Development Theory

During the 1950s, modernization theorists asserted that "underdeveloped" countries needed to be developed. The 1960s saw the rise of dependency theories, which argued that development and underdevelopment were inextricably linked. However, post-development theories, which emerged in the 1980s, took a different stance (Esteva 2010, 12). They viewed development

itself as an ideology and underdevelopment as a constructed idea, calling into question the very concept of development and the role of the West in shaping it (Sachs 2010, *xiii*). Post-development is building on theorists such as Michel Foucault (2000), who investigated the link between discourse and power, and Ivan Illich (1971), who argued that we are teaching people to be dependent on “experts” in industrialized societies. Differently from other “non-mainstream” approaches to development, post-development is not arguing for alternative development but rather alternatives to development which lies in its critique towards the entire paradigm. This is based in what Arturo Escobar (1995, 8-9) argues of how the development sector, today and historically, reproduces the dominant power structures of global capitalism and reinforces the marginalization of the Global South.

One of the main arguments of post-development theorists is that development agencies favor technical solutions to social problems and ignore political conflicts that are at the root of these issues. Technical solutions can take its shape in the form of transfer of capital, knowledge, or technology (Escobar 1995, 32-37). It has been acknowledged, however, that development is not only a technical process, but a cultural and political one that shapes people’s lives and identities (Escobar 1995, 52). This has particularly been explored by James Ferguson (1994) and his ethnographical study of a development project in Lesotho. Ferguson (1994, 194) argues that by uncompromisingly reducing, for example poverty, to a technical problem which can be solved through technical solutions, the question of poverty becomes depoliticized. This is Ferguson’s idea of the “apparatus of development”, in which it constructs problems as solvable without changing relations of power and claiming to be apolitical, while still carrying out political operations by arranging the distribution of resources and technologies to certain groups within a nation (Ferguson 1994, 65 & 251 *ff.*). This can, in an oversimplified way, be summarized as trying to help the poor without hurting the rich.

The apolitical stance that Ferguson argues that the development sector takes can be seen in one of his anecdotes of when a development “expert” asked him how they could help the people of Lesotho. He suggested that they need to take into consideration that the people of this project were migrant workers in the mines of South Africa, so something needs to be done about the oppression of unions in South Africa, such as contemplate sanctions against the apartheid regime (Ferguson 1994, 284). The development expert answered “No, no! I

mean *development!*” (Ibid, 284). Despite the clear interconnection between the two, this illustrates a perception that development and politics are separate entities.

3.3 Trauma in a Post-conflict Society

When exploring how the trauma has affected the Ntareho villagers of the BSHI project, there are some things to consider. First, one needs to be aware that my informants will interpret their own historical perspective and experiences differently, and this will come to shape their identities, perspectives, and emotions (Mamdani 2001, 267). This is important to note as there is a risk to group people into “perpetrators” or “survivors” without considering their individuality. With that being said, the psychological and emotional trauma inflicted on individuals from historical events, can be related to the importance of these individuals in reclaiming their agency and autonomy (Fanon 1963). In the context of Ntareho and trauma healing, these ideas will be used to understand the importance of how community participation as an approach in development allows for individuals to regain their agency and autonomy.

In Rwanda, the government discourages to even mention “Hutus” and “Tutsis”, something I got to learn very early on during my time in Rwanda. This stems from a “we are all Rwandans” narrative that the current Tutsi government is pushing (Staub 2014, 39). This narrative was followed by the many people I met during my fieldwork, which often made it difficult for me to know an individual’s background. The reason for this narrative may well be to move beyond ethnic divisions that led to the genocide and to instead foster a common nationality of Rwanda, but it can also have unintended consequences. For example, according to Staub (2014, 39), it can hinder meaningful dialogue and possibilities of discussion regarding important issues related to the historical context. The clinical understanding of trauma provides valuable insights in this context, as it highlights the overwhelming emotional experiences that cannot be integrated into one's existing inner world (Macek 2014, 4). When traumatic experiences are not processed psychologically, they remain unintegrated and isolated, preserved in their original form (ibid, 4). These insights serve as a foundation in this thesis to comprehend the significance of addressing trauma for the villagers in Ntareho.

4. Thematic Analysis

The idea of “community participation” or “bottom-up” approaches is to cater to the needs of the people that are aimed to receive the help. This process of including the disadvantaged and marginalized groups have been of significant focus of anthropological study of development (Bakker and Nooteboom 2017, 63). It certainly becomes relevant in the Resilife’s BSHI project as they, too, have explicitly disregarded top-down approaches, and attempted to facilitate community participation as a means of succeeding with the trauma healing. Allow me to share a story of a man that highlights the negative aspects of top-down approaches as opposed to bottom-up approaches.

During my time studying the BSHI project, Daniel introduced me to Jean-Paul, a middle-aged man who had been involved as a participant in the project just as Daniel. One day, as me and Jean-Paul sat together under the shade of a tree, he began to reminisce about his previous encounters with other initiatives. He shared a story of when he was given a cow as part of a presidential campaign. It was a gift intended to improve his livelihood, he explained. When I asked about how it had contributed to him, Jean-Paul’s eyes took on a slightly somber tone. He started to explain how the cow had become more of a burden than a blessing.

"We don't even have a farm to keep it in," Jean-Paul said. The cow had turned into a source of stress and anxiety for him and his family. He continued, "I would have much rather received a goat, which is not only cheaper than a cow but also much easier to take care of”.

The cow, which should have been a valuable asset for Jean-Paul, had instead become an obligation that he had to tend to. This ethnographic example is simple but does indeed show a problematic side of top-down approaches to development (Easterly 2007).

In this section, I explore the significance of community participation in approaching communities, by highlighting how such an approach creates trust among the local population and how it addresses their unique needs. This is done through ethnographic portrayals of the field, where I look at the impact of trauma healing on the BSHI participants. I draw upon Harvey and Knox and their ideas of “hope”, as well as Victor Turner and his concept of “liminality”. While acknowledging the value of participatory approaches to development, I also critically evaluate its limitations by situating the experiences of Ntareho, the BSHI

project, and trauma healing within the broader development paradigm. In relation to the insights of James Ferguson, who highlights the inherent limitations of the development sector due its apolitical stance, I shed light on the challenges and potential shortcomings of community participation in achieving significant transformative change.

4.1 Unlocking Transformation: The Power of Trauma Healing and Hope for the Future

When Resilife put me in contact with Daniel, I entered an unfamiliar world, knowing little about his life or family. The same went the other way, as he knew barely anything about me except that I was doing some kind of research. Despite this, he welcomed me into his home without expecting anything in return. Daniel is a curious man who enjoys discussions about the meanings of life and asked many questions about life outside of Ntareho and Rwanda. He is empathetic and once I explained what my fieldwork was all about, he was more than happy to guide me through his life in Ntareho: a mission he took seriously. The first days consisted mostly of us getting to know each other, me being introduced around the village, and working on his rice-farm. Eventually, one day, we sat down in his middle-yard and started to talk about his trauma, the BSHI project, and the process of healing.



The "middle-yard" of Daniel's house

As Daniel recalls of when Resilife first visited him, he speaks of his initial skepticism and resistance towards their project. He was approached by a group of “outsiders”, in his own words, who claimed to represent a project aimed at promoting peace within the community. At the time, Daniel struggled to see how such a project could be feasible, given the deep-seated animosity and distrust between victims and perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide. Daniel acknowledges the participatory approaches, without mentioning them explicitly, as he explains how Resilife, before implementation, was actively listening to the voices and perspectives of the local people. Their initial approach, according to Daniel, was careful and sensitive.

When Daniel agreed to participate, Resilife had gathered the group which Daniel would come to be part of. The development practitioners recognized the need to work with the community, to build reconciliation and trust, according to Resilife themselves. They made the community early on part of the process by, for instance, sharing ideas and speaking of the possible benefits. Some of the benefits presented by Resilife that Daniel recalls were psychological which could then potentially lead to greater economic benefits. Daniel, who lives in extreme poverty says how he and the others were chosen for a reason, referring it to the works of God. He explains to me how he saw an opportunity in bettering his own life, but most importantly, the lives of his family which he saw as he was responsible for. In his own words, “How could I not be part of it? What they said made complete sense, I saw new hope”. The very idea of “hope”, has proven to be important in development discourse, as shown by Harvey and Knox (2015). Hope is a key motivator for those involved in development projects, as it allows for an envision of a better future (Harvey and Knox 2015, 40 ff). As Daniel viewed a possible future of a better psychological, economic, and social state of living, he held on to the hope. Something that would be consistent throughout my time in Ntareho.

I asked Daniel to elaborate on this “hope” that he felt, and he explained how if there was more cooperation in Ntareho, then, “I guess I thought we could earn more money”. In resonance with Harvey and Knox, the development project is creating a sense of bringing something more to the table than not just the focus of the initiative. For Harvey and Knox, roads in Peru were the focus of that specific project, but it was glorified as being able to bring about positive change such as connectivity to other cities, leading to greater economic benefits (Harvey and Knox 2015, 62). For Daniel, it was clear that his priority was earning more

money in order to take better care of his family of seven children. His motivation of joining the project is that of a hope for a better future in the form of some kind of economic stability.

Resilife's facilitation of a group of 15 people in Ntareho, is only a small portion of their total work around the Bugesera district which includes people in the thousands enrolled in different sections of the project based on their needs. The group of 15 people, including Daniel, who had gone through a screening process had been referred to the sociotherapy group (see figure 1). Figure 1 showcases how the “experts” see the field and their planning of the project, as well as to how beneficiaries end up in a certain group.⁵

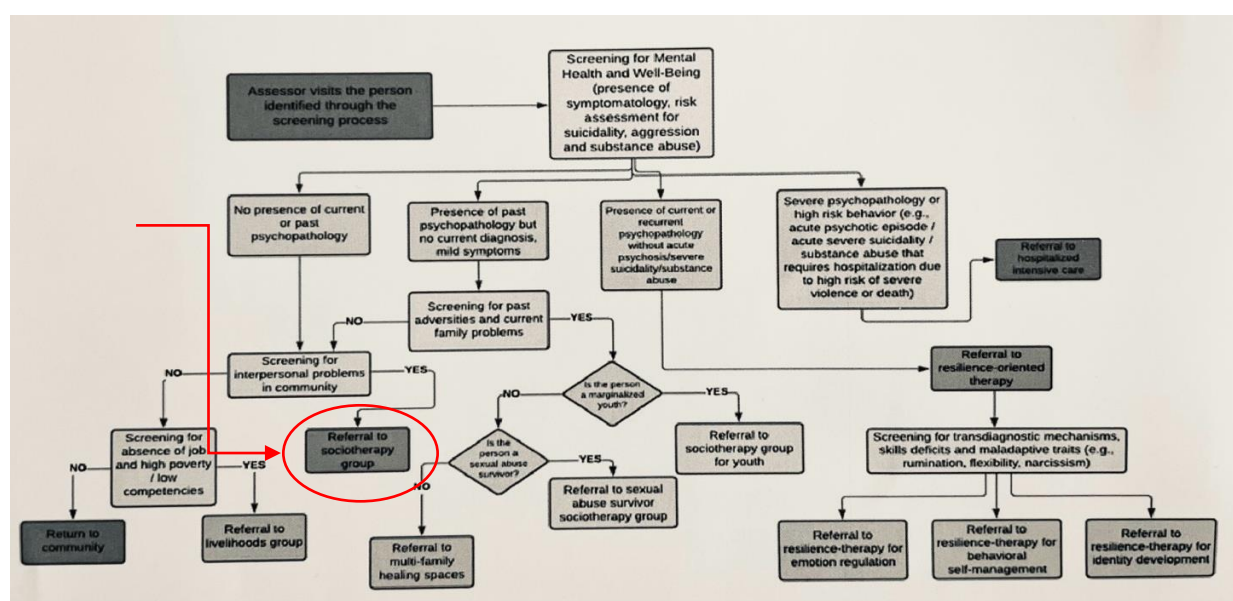


Figure 1: Process from screening to referral

As presented in the background and methods' section, the BSHI project viewed trauma and mental health issues as a major problem in the Bugesera district, and solving other issues such as poverty were being hindered by this. Resilife had planned for 15 weeks of sociotherapy for Daniel and the others in his group. According to a Resilife development practitioner, it was difficult in the early stages in getting people on board considering the attempt in making perpetrators and survivors meet and basically “talk it out”. However, once they explained the possible benefits, specifically regarding economic prosperity, they got a better response.

⁵ This opens up for a broader discourse of the contrasting viewpoints between “experts” and the local population, as well as the gap between policy and practice in development initiatives. Although this thesis does not cover this, it is of high relevance in the anthropological study of development. Thus, I advise the reader to explore the works of David Mosse (2005) and Harri Englund (2006).

Again, even the development practitioner acknowledged, implicitly, how hope for a better future allowed for people to be on board of the project.

Resilife had selected a woman, *Marie Louise*, to be the “facilitator” of the group, basically meaning a moderator. Marie Louise believes she was chosen for this because of her ability in being close in touch with her emotions and perhaps being more mentally stable than the others. At the same time, Marie Louise had also been referred to the sociotherapy group for healing purposes; the moderating and healing was simultaneous for her. She had been trained by Resilife in sociotherapy techniques and was responsible for guiding the group through the process by navigating talks and allowing participants to share their experiences. Differently to how the psyche treats traumatic experiences (Maček 2014, 4), the groups became a space where they got to explore their own trauma.

Traumatic experiences normally remain unintegrated or isolated within the psyche, preserved in their original form and capable of being re-experienced when triggered (Maček 2014, 4). However, through the process of trauma healing, the BSHI beneficiaries were able to confront and address their unintegrated traumatic experiences, allowing for psychological processing and integration. This process of 15 weeks, I argue, is a liminal phase (Turner 1969, 95) where trauma healing allowed them to move from a state of being overwhelmed by their traumatic past to navigating these emotions as they were in a state of healing. This liminal phase is understood as a temporary suspension of the participant’s ordinary roles, norms, and social hierarchies, a state of being between two distinct stages, or what Turner calls “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969, 95).

It is clear that Resilife emphasized the importance of the villagers of Ntareho to allow the process to go their way. Making Marie-Louise in charge of navigating the sessions is a great example of it. This is also in alignment with Frantz Fanon’s (1963) emphasis on allowing the oppressed to have a voice and agency in their own liberation. By providing a space for individuals to share their experiences, process their trauma, and regain a sense of agency and empowerment, the BSHI project opened up for reconciliation in Ntareho. By facing the trauma, they are addressing the historical context and events that led to the violence, and in turn, the trauma, experienced by Rwandans (Mamdani 2001, 267). This includes talking about the ethnical differences, such as presenting oneself, not necessarily as a Hutu or Tutsi, but as a descendant from either one. I did not meet any person who highlighted their background in

this way besides the participants of the BSHI project. The ordinary norms or implicit rules of Ntareho, and in my experience Rwanda as a whole, seemed to be to not speak of the Genocide. In this, since the BSHI participants did indeed speak of this matter, they were in a temporary suspension of the ordinary order (Turner 1969, 95). Furthermore, this is opposing the narrative pushed by the government, in which they are preferring people to avoid talking about being Hutu or Tutsi (Staub 2014, 39). For reconciliation to take place, it is essential to acknowledge these historical factors that built up the tensions leading to the Genocide (Mamdani 2001, 267), something that the BSHI project allowed the people to do. See an example of a woman referring to Hutu and Tutsi in one of the groups sessions:

“As someone of Tutsi descent, I have since the Genocide not trusted the Hutus. I would not smile or talk to neighbors, especially those from families of Hutu. [...], but since the Mvurankuvure [sociotherapy] I have been able to forgive. I want to live in peace, and I am doing that now. Hutu or Tutsi, I don't care no more.”

This is an example of when I attended a group session facilitated by the participants themselves following the end of the BSHI pilot. However, I was told that in the early stages it looked different; it was all about participants sharing their stories and getting to know each other in context of the Genocide. Progressively, it turned to themes and topics focusing on, inter alia, trust, forgiveness, and reconciliation. These themes often served as a starting point for discussions. Daniel recalls some of the very first facilitated sociotherapy meetings, and how he was reserved and uncomfortable in sharing his experiences. “I still was not sure if I wanted to share my personal stories with people I did not know”, he explains. During these early group sessions, Daniel mostly listened and observed as others shared their experiences, “It was scary to think, you know, the person who had killed my neighbors could be sitting next to me”. Instead of sharing his experiences, he kept to speaking about more practical matters, such as his work. As the sessions progressed and trust began to develop among the group, Daniel slowly started to open up. “I started to see that everyone was going through their own struggles, and that I was not alone,” he reflected.

The turning point for Daniel, according to himself, came during the fourth session in which the theme was “trust”, and he participated in a simple activity. He was asked to put on a blindfold and was told that he would be guided by another member of the group through a maze of obstacles made up of chairs and tables. Daniel, with his impressive and captivating

story-telling skills, reflects of how he, as he walked through the maze, felt a sense of vulnerability, “I did not know where I was going, or what was ahead”. He remembers how he laughed as he hit his foot softly in one of the chair legs, and how the group laughed with him. He describes it as scary, while also exciting and somewhat fun. As he approached the end of the maze and the group applauded, he removed his blindfold and was shocked to realize that the person who had guided him through the obstacles was an ex-prisoner and perpetrator. “My world turned upside down!”, Daniel says.

From what can be described as a simple activity from the outside, was an emotionally charged experience that would prove to be a major turning point in Daniel’s journey of sociotherapy. While the 15 weeks of sociotherapy was a liminal phase for the 15 participants, this experience alone can also be understood as a shorter liminal space for Daniel, a moment of transition and transformation. By placing him in a situation of uncertainty and vulnerability, Daniel experienced a state of being where he lost a part of his old self, before transitioning into a new self (Turner 1969, 94). He confronted his own biases, which ultimately helped him to build trust and empathy with others.

The liminal phase of 15 weeks in the participants went through sociotherapy, is described by Daniel as a slow and gradual one. It was a process defined by building a sense of trust and solidarity within the community, “we became like a small family”, Daniel says. Guided by Turner’s understanding of liminality as a transformative period and the creation of “communitas”, one can understand how the 15 weeks of sociotherapy allowed Daniel and the other participants to transcend their past traumas and redefine their identities and relationship towards each other and to the community as a whole (Turner 1969, 94-97). In connection with the participatory approaches of Resilife, the facilitator role held by Marie Louise emerges as a key factor to how this transitional period was possible. A profound sense of community and shared experience was established by having a participant, Marie Louise, as the facilitator, and might not have been possible by having a development “expert” in this position instead.

During the sociotherapy period, they were in a state of becoming, not aligned with the ordinary customs of Ntareho and had not yet reached their new sense of self and community. Once the 15 weeks were over, they had a new perspective of society and the people they lived with in Ntareho, they were no longer motivated by the ethnic divisions.

In Daniel's own words: "At first, I didn't trust anyone. I couldn't talk about what happened to me. But over time, as we shared our stories, I started to feel more comfortable. It was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. And then, I started to realize, I was no longer angry. I could see things differently."

The psyches and brains can indeed be damaged from traumatic experiences, just as it was for Daniel and many others. However, they can also be repaired (Maček 2014, 4). After a few days of getting to know Daniel, I had gathered the courage to ask more about his life during the Genocide. Something that I was hesitant to do previously, as I had learnt not to talk about the carnage. The way Daniel was able to describe and talk about the Genocide proved to me how he had been able to cope with these horrific experiences. Due to this, I got to learn his story: how he had almost been killed several times, how he and Ella escaped Hutu extremists, and the terrible things he had to witness with his own eyes. The difference from others in how he descriptively talked about horrible events was striking, so I had to ask him if it was difficult to talk about, in which he giggled, smiled, and then replied, "I am healed!".



Daniel

4.2 Navigating the Liminal Phase: Incorporation of Religion

So far, the significance of trauma healing for the participants has been conveyed as immensely important. To further emphasize how participatory bottom-up approaches can be a

way of acknowledging the local population's cultural norms and beliefs, I would like to include an example of how the incorporation of religion was made by the participants themselves, allowing them to navigate the liminal phase. Turner's (1969) theories of rituals and performances in creating liminal spaces becomes useful in this. Turner (1969, 42) argues that rituals are powerful social performances that have the ability to make sense of powerful emotions, such as hate, fear and grief. By making sense of such emotions together as a group, the BSHI beneficiaries created a collective identity and solidarity. When they integrated Christianity into their process, they made sense of their trauma healing process on their own terms.

The connection between Christianity and trauma healing was particularly shown during the theme of forgiveness in the sociotherapy sessions. One woman, *Muteteli*, whose entire family was killed by another man in the same sociotherapy group carried a deep-seated hatred for him. Yet, as Muteteli spoke about this pain, she also drew upon the teachings of Christianity. The bible, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness, was a reference for Muteteli as to why she should forgive. She would read the Bible every day and pray for guidance, and slowly but surely, she started to let go of the anger and bitterness that had consumed her since the Genocide, Muteteli explained. The religious symbols and practices embedded within the woman's healing process served as meaningful cultural resources (Turner 1969, 199) that she actively referred to during the liminal phase to guide her own healing. This illustrates that culture is not merely a set of learned behaviors, but a system of meaning that shapes individuals' perspectives of the world and their place within it (Geertz 1973).

In the context of the participatory approaches of the BSHI project, it can be viewed that the participants were able to tap into cultural meanings and values that held personal significance, enabling them to connect with their beliefs and make sense of the healing journey. For Muteteli, this transformative process allowed her to find inner peace and extend forgiveness to the man who had inflicted the pain upon her. In this sense, the sharing of personal stories and experiences, coupled with reflection on religious texts and beliefs, creates a powerful social performance (Turner 1969). This enabled Muteteli to navigate the liminal phase of trauma healing and suffering towards a state of healing.

Eventually, Muteteli decided to invite the man who had killed her family to her wedding, which was the ultimate gesture of forgiveness. She was proud to tell me that she had decided

to invite him, and it was through her unwavering faith in God and her determination to forgive, that made it possible for her to find a way to build bridges where there had once been division. If the sociotherapy period of 15 weeks was a liminal phase where they are transitioning from a state of trauma and suffering to a state of healing and recovery, then the incorporation of religious symbols and practices, as shown with Muteteli, was a way of navigating this liminal period and create a sense of stability and belonging within the group.

Overall, the incorporation of religion into the trauma healing process highlights the importance of cultural values and practices in facilitating healing and transformation in the context of development. It showcases how “community participation” as an approach in can allow for this to happen.

4.3 The Limitations of Community Participation and Rethinking Development as a Political Endeavor

In this part, I aim to discuss the limitations of community participation in driving comprehensive societal transformation and addressing issues such as poverty, ultimately answering the research question. The limitations are discussed in relation to the development paradigm, aligning with a post-development theoretical perspective, in which development is carried out following an “apolitical” narrative that reinforces the status quo. Primarily in reference with the viewpoints of James Ferguson, I place the BSHI-project, Ntareho and the informants’ experiences within the wider landscape of the development sector. The analysis is based on the participants’ experiences during the period after the conclusion of the BSHI project, when Resilife stopped their operations of sociotherapy in Ntareho.

The BSHI project came to an end after 15 weeks of sociotherapy, but Daniel and the others recognized the need to continue meeting. They had come close to each other and had formed a tight-knit community. As he recalls, "We didn't want it to end. We wanted to keep talking, keep healing." During one of these meetings, the group discussed their desire for economic stability and came up with the idea of starting a collective fund, in which everyone contributed what they could. This collective fund, a few weeks later, led to the creation of a rice farming business. This was an initiative aimed at providing economic opportunities. In short, they bought seeds with the money from the collective fund, used their land to plant it, and sold the harvested crops to companies.

However, it was not only the economic incentives of the rice-farming business that was important for the participants. It also strengthened their sense of agency and collective power. After having benefited from the trauma healing and creating strong trusting bonds, they utilized that opportunity in addressing poverty as the main issue of the community, and then tried to do something concrete about it. Daniel recalls this as a moment of great pride for their community. He said, "We had the power to make a change." This collective effort was a clear indication of how the community had taken charge of their own development, not as part of an initiative or project, but on their own terms, to address the problems of their community and fight it.

One day when we were out on the rice-field I decided that I wanted to learn more about what comes now. I had asked Daniel whether, following the end of the project 6 months ago, he had seen a difference in income for him. He told me that it was too early to tell, and the season will determine a big part of it. As we continued to discuss, and he told me about the income based on each month which he had labelled as "good" or "bad" months, we touched upon a subject which might just be determinant of whether him and his fellow rice-farmers would be able to break the cycle of poverty. It became apparent that even though the participants in the sociotherapy sessions had undergone significant trauma healing and personal growth, expanding their capabilities and creating a business, they were still facing major structural and systemic issues that kept them in poverty. The most significant barrier was the limited market access for their agricultural products.

One of the talks amongst the beneficiaries that occurred during one of the meetings that I attended resembled with this. After a day of working on the rice-farm, the participants were discussing ways to increase their profits in which one man said, "I think that they [the companies] give us too low prices". Another man chimed in, "But what can we do? [...], I think that we should just sell it. We have to make money somehow." Daniel, who had become the head of the rice-farming business, jumped into the conversation "I understand everyone's frustration", he said. "But we must have patience. We cannot give up hope. Better times will come [...], look how far we have made it already." Daniels way of referring to "hope" is once again closely aligned to that of the interlocutors of Harvey and Knox's ethnography of roads being built in Peru. The potential of the road being built was expected and interpreted for the Peruvian people to create new economic opportunities (Harvey and Knox 2015, 43). There

was a hope that the trauma healing which had been a transformative process for these 15 individuals could now lead to a greater economic situation, something that was also mentioned by Resilife as a possible benefit. Daniel is referring to hope by connecting it to how far they have made it due to the trauma healing and is now looking into the future with the rice-farming business as a reference-point into how they will make more money.

Turning to James Ferguson, and framing this in a post-development framework, it becomes clear that if the root issue of the poverty-problem in Ntareho is power imbalances in terms of limited market access, and the BSHI project does not address this then, no matter how “participatory” and “empowering” the project is, one cannot expect poverty alleviation. In order to connect the dots, one can use Appadurai’s (1996) concept of “scapes” to understand how global and local forces are interconnected and shape the economic and political structures that perpetuate poverty and inequality. The concept of “scapes” emphasizes that global forces such as neoliberal economic policies, colonial legacies, and multinational corporations have a significant impact on local economic systems and access to markets (Appadurai 1996). Based on this, the small-scale rise farmers and the issues of limited market access can be seen as in relation to broader political structures. However, the problem for Resilife to address this seems to be, as Ferguson (1994, 256) argues, that the “development” industry does not allow its role to be formulated as a political one, which means that these broader political structures will be left unaltered. As Escobar (1995, 52) explains, development “experts” tend to adhere to pre-existing models of society, rather than challenging them.

Resilife means that as a way to approach other issues of Bugesera, such as poverty, the trauma stemming from the Genocide needs to be addressed. While this is true, following the many research studies that Resilife drew their project upon, the issue of poverty as a political problem have still not been approached. Development in this case, as in many other cases, fails to address the structural factors that contribute to poverty and inequality, such as political structures and global economic systems (Ferguson 1994). This argument is particularly salient if the economic systems of the contemporary world is based on uneven resource distribution where the wealthy is exploiting the less privileged (Hornborg 2012).

This discussion is inherently Marxist, in which an exploration of the capitalist mode of production sheds light on how power imbalances are related to economic exploitation (Marx

1876). In a capitalist system, those who control the means of production hold a disproportionate amount of power over the labor force (ibid.). This power is not just held by individuals, but also embedded in social institutions and practices (Foucault 1980, 90). Therefore, in the case of the small-scale rice farmers in Ntareho and the limited market access, one can understand how such power relations aligned with the political structures of the society are at play and are impacting the villagers. These structures perpetuate a system in which corporations and large-scale agribusinesses have greater access to markets. In turn, it leaves small-scale producers with limited options, as shown in the example of when this was discussed by the rice-farmers in a meeting. When these power dynamics and political structures are ignored, development initiatives like the BSHI project are overlooking the root causes of poverty, and doing precisely what Escobar (1995, 52) explained: trying to fit pre-existing models.

This is not to say that the BSHI project did not *successfully* address a root problem, trauma, as an obstacle to “development”. It would be foolish to think that this trauma healing did not help many people to come to peace with themselves and with others, creating resilience and peaceful coexistence. Many accounts from my time in the field proves this, and many of the beneficiaries talk about pre-BSHI project as a dark and angry time and post-BSHI as a more joyful and confident time. These approaches to “developing” a post-conflict society prioritizing mental health is an important step. The point being made is that if other political issues are being treated as non-political or ignored, broader social change cannot be expected (Ferguson 1994, 256).

Overall, on a local and individual level, the trauma healing as a liminal phase, guided through their faith in Christianity, and motivated by a hope for the future, was immensely important. They were, in simple terms, happier. The high levels of community participation allowed for important trauma healing; this cannot be ignored. What community participation did not do, however, was address other structural issues that are keeping the villagers in poverty. Trauma may be an obstacle to poverty alleviation, but other political structures are very much so too. This is what this section has attempted to showcase. If Resilife scale up and reach more individuals, a psychologically better well-being Rwanda may be on the horizon. Nevertheless, it seems that in order to treat issues of poverty, other areas, specifically political ones, need to be addressed as well for comprehensive societal change to occur.

5. Conclusion

Considering the width of the concept “development”, I would like to turn back to the quote of Arturo Escobar,

Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition [...] these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a pre-existing model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity. (Escobar 1995, 52).

It has been argued for how the importance in catering to the local population's needs and understanding their local beliefs and culture in order for them to be in charge of their own development is essential. This can be done through the approach of “community participation”, just as the BSHI-project did in allowing the beneficiaries to lead the process for their benefits. It was recognized, by Resilife, that trauma from the genocide is a major problem for many of the people in Rwanda, which is a first step in recognizing the issues of a particular society. In treating the trauma through sociotherapy, while allowing the beneficiaries to tap into their own cultural beliefs, they went through significant transformation during the 15 weeks of sociotherapy. This was showcased through the application of Victor Turner's theories of liminality, where the villagers of Ntareho found themselves in a liminal phase during these 15 weeks, as well as shorter significant liminal phases for different participants that they found as important for their process. At the same time, the willingness to go through these 15 weeks were facilitated through hope for the future, as shown with Harvey and Knox. By referencing the future as a time of economic possibilities motivated the villagers to participate in the first place as well as to continue.

Following the end of the BSHI project six months prior to when I met Daniel and the other participants, the beneficiaries had themselves taken the initiative to keep on meeting. This led to the creation of the rice-farming business, in which they addressed and acted on the problem of poverty, hoping to use their new perspectives of life in Rwanda to their benefits and enter the market. It has been shown that on a broader scale, such a hope for the future might be out of reach for both the villagers as well as Resilife and the BSHI-project. In this, it has been argued that the tendency of the development sector to view itself as separate from a political entity is a major problem and obstacle to address the root issues of poverty, in this case the

limited market access for the villagers. Ferguson's post-development theories specifically showcases this. So, to address the research question "To what extent do participatory approaches to development empower impoverished communities in order to facilitate lasting change?" it seems that the answer lies in the relationships between the local, national, and international spheres. Participatory approaches, in the case of Ntareho, did indeed empower the community as they went through the transformative process in healing from the trauma. On a local level, this was immensely important for the individuals. On a broader scale however, both national and international, community participation does not necessarily facilitate comprehensive societal transformation.

In this sense, it seems that addressing political structures requires a more radical approach which challenges the status quo and the interests of those in power. This approach may not be appealing to organizations like Resilife that work within the existing political and economic systems. Perhaps because of their interests in attracting outside stakeholders and actors (Mosse 2004). This is not to undermine the work of Resilife, as they certainly approached an essential issue in Bugesera in terms of trauma and laid the foundation for addressing poverty. The collective fund and rice farming business was a positive step towards economic stability. However, this does not take away the fact that Daniel and the other participants still faced structural issues once entering the market. In this, this thesis shows that Resilife, as many other organizations as well, keep within the frames of pre-existing models that fit the current structures of society. A clear weakness within, not Resilife per se, but of the development sector.

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