

# An Unaccountable Love

## Healing and Sacrifice in Post-Genocide Rwanda

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### Abstract

What does a consideration of the place of grace in the therapeutic relationship have to add to our understanding of the healing process? This article explores the experience of bereavement and healing in the aftermath of loss among members of a Catholic Charismatic community in Rwanda. Considering cases in which divine healing is experienced as either having succeeded or having failed, I argue that the healing process involves acts of sacrifice and gifting, taking place between the mourner, God, and social others, and that the central sacrificial gesture constituting this process is the sacrifice of the self as lived prior to loss. I suggest that in order to understand gifting and sacrifice's therapeutic potential, we must read them as acts anchored in grace or gratuity.

**Keywords:** bereavement, Christianity, grace, healing, loss, love, Rwanda, sacrifice

The anthropology of healing has been largely concerned with the question of whether and how ritual healing worked. Mirroring the breadth of practices grouped under the categories of ritual, religious, symbolic, or indigenous healing, the explanations accounting for healing efficacy and the healing process are equally varied (e.g., Csordas 1994, 2002; Dow 1986; Frank and Frank 1961 [1991]; Hinton and Kirmayer 2017; Kirmayer 1993; Koss-Chioino 2006; Laderman and Roseman 1996; Levi-Strauss 1963; Lyon 1990). Varied as they may be, however, and while some scholars might agree with Arthur Kleinman's (1980; Kleinman and Sung 1979) assertion that ritual healing cannot fail to heal, it would be fair to say that implied by this collective project is the assumption that ritual healing doesn't actually work (Sax 2014), or at least that its efficacy is to be located in different mechanisms to the ones identified by its practitioners (but see Turner 1993). This is an understandable position, considering anthropology's longstanding commitment to methodological atheism (Bialecki 2014), and the fact that indigenous explanations for healing are often based in the operation of spirit or divine beings. Leaving aside the ontological question of healing's ultimate source, I suggest that the indigenous terms through



which healing is conceived can nevertheless offer us important insights into the therapeutic process.

In making this argument, I consider accounts of religious healing of members of a Catholic Charismatic community in Rwanda who suffered acute personal loss during and following the 1994 Rwandan genocide. I draw on two terms central to my interlocutors' conception of their relationship to God—sacrifice and grace—to explicate the healing process. Considering instances where divine healing is experienced as either having been granted or denied, I argue that these accounts underscore elements in the therapeutic process that can be conceived of as gestures of sacrifice and gifting, taking place between the suffering person, the divine, and social others. More specifically, I suggest that the central sacrificial gesture constituting the healing process is the sacrifice of the self as lived prior to loss; and that while this sacrificial exchange is conceived of by my interlocutors as 'vertical', or as being directed towards God, its success is in fact largely dependent on the establishment of 'horizontal' gifting relations with social others.

In making these arguments, I draw on fundamental insights my interlocutors have regarding the process of healing. Namely, that it involves an act of sacrifice on the part of the suffering person and that healing originates in an act of grace or gifting on the part of God. Both sacrifice and grace are understood by my interlocutors in their colloquial sense: sacrifice, as the relinquishing of something to God in hope of receiving his favour, and grace, as the free gift of God. At the same time, my analytic use of both concepts expands on these insights in a manner that also departs from their immediate conceptualisation. Before advancing with the argument, then, a brief clarification on the use of terms is called for.

Within the extensive literary corpus on sacrifice and the gift, two forms of giving sometimes glossed over as 'giving to the gods and giving to men' (Silber 2002: 299), a central debate focuses on the question of whether sacrifice could be considered a sub-type of the gift or vice-versa (See Silber 2002). In suggesting this, scholars note that both sacrifice and gifting follow similar exchange principles, and that within that, sacrifice might be considered a 'vertical and more dramatic, amplifying or intensifying form of the gift' (Silber 2002: 291). As Maya Mayblin and Magnus Course (2013) suggest, however, while sacrifice is often conceived of as dramatic, bloody, and violent, sacrificial gestures may present themselves in far less dramatic forms and outside of the confines of specific ritual structures (see also Mayblin 2013). While they find it untenable to speak of a 'single sacrificial schema or logic' (Mayblin and Course 2013:2), they suggest we might still retain the concept of sacrifice as 'a matrix of possibilities surrounding the central idea that something (or someone) new can be created through the irreversible giving up of something else, most prominently, a life' (Mayblin and Course 2013: 3). The notion of sacrifice, as discussed throughout this text, follows this minimal conceptualisation.

Where my analysis departs to a greater degree from my interlocutors' perspective is in my use of the concept of grace. Drawing on the work of Julian Pitt-Rivers (2017 [1992]), I suggest that in order to understand sacrifice's therapeutic potential, we must view it through the lens of grace. Specifically, by attending to grace's

operation not in the realm of the religious but in its capacity to establish social relations, through its derivatives in the notion of gratuity. While he does not equate the two concepts with each other, it is gratuity, Pitt-Rivers argues, that is the core principle of grace, and so it is in quotidian instances of free giving that he locates grace's operation. Like Marcel Mauss (1990 [1950]; Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1898]), Pitt-Rivers acknowledges that both gift and sacrifice must be defined by their reciprocity, but he does not dismiss the notion of gratuity at their base as a sociological delusion. In this, he underscores the paradoxical nature of gifting and of sacrifice, as acts simultaneously based in both gratuity and reciprocity, and it is this paradox, I argue here, that largely accounts for their therapeutic force.

While the Catholic Rwandan case underscores the operation of both sacrifice and grace as catalysts for healing in a more explicit way, I suggest that insights gleaned from this particular case can contribute to our understanding of ritual healing more broadly, in cases of loss and bereavement and possibly beyond. At the same time, a reading of the healing process through the lens of grace and sacrifice stresses the role therapeutic relationships play in accounting for healing efficacy, while bringing to the fore the broader analytical promise that grace may hold for anthropological theorisation of both paradox and change (see Edwards and McIvor, this volume).

The arguments I make here are based on fieldwork I conducted in France and Rwanda between 2010 and 2014 with the Emmanuel community, a Catholic Charismatic intentional community, and its two humanitarian nongovernmental organisations (NGOs.) The data presented, however, were collected exclusively in Rwanda.<sup>1</sup> The Emmanuel community is part of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, a lay movement within the Catholic Church that has, since its inception in 1967 in the United States, rapidly spread around the world. With respect to theology and practice, the movement can be considered a synthesis between Catholicism and Protestant Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal or Charismatic elements in its ritual practice are exemplified in an emphasis on an experience of the Holy Spirit, the establishment of a close and personal relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, and the practice of Charisms or spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy.

Emmanuel was founded in Paris in 1972, but is currently a transnational entity, with local branches of the community represented in close to sixty countries. The Emmanuel community in Rwanda was founded in 1990 by a Rwandan Tutsi couple, Cyprien and Daphrose Rugamba, who were introduced to it by members of Emmanuel's development NGO. Both Cyprien and Daphrose were killed during the first days of the genocide alongside seven of their children. In 1995 the scattered members of the community who survived the genocide regrouped in the country's capital and began rebuilding. The Rwandan community is today the largest local community of Emmanuel's outside of France. Of note is the fact that although it was founded by a Tutsi couple, the community currently has a mixed membership of both Hutu and Tutsi, as it did prior to the genocide.<sup>2</sup>

## **Graceful Transformations**

Unlike many other charismatic communities (see Csordas 1994), Emmanuel tends to downplay healing as a community Charism, meaning that, with few exceptions, religious healing in its ritualistic form is not regularly practiced by members. Instead, healing is sought through an establishment of a close relationship with Jesus, particularly through specific forms of prayer, such as Eucharistic Adoration. Adoration is a form of contemplative prayer, consisting of sitting silently in front of what Catholics consider to be the real presence of Jesus Christ, incarnate in the Eucharist or bread host through the act of transubstantiation. Adoration is central to Emmanuel's self-definition and is the cornerstone of the community's ritual life. Throughout my fieldwork I had heard many stories about the manners in which Adoration helped my interlocutors overcome various difficulties, although by far one of the most striking of these stories was recounted to me by Father Xavier.

I met Xavier in 2014, twenty years after his forced exile to Tanzania. In April 1994, when the concerted extermination of Rwanda's Tutsi population was underway, Xavier was a newly ordained priest living in a parish near the Tanzanian border. When word of the killings reached him, Xavier, along with a small group of fellow Tutsi, decided to flee the country. Traversing hundreds of kilometres of forest and bush, he finally found refuge in a small town in Tanzania, where he was offered a post as a parish priest. It was there that he received a letter from a friend informing him that his entire family was dead, massacred during the first few days of the genocide.

The news devastated Xavier. Overtaken by grief, he withdrew from his role as priest and spent the next five months in solitude, sitting in silence in front of the tabernacle in the small chapel of the rectory, praying and talking to God. There, Xavier fixed his attention on the name of Jesus inscribed on the tabernacle, silently beseeching him to heal his pain, or else release him from the priesthood. After five months of daily prayer Xavier felt something shift in his body. 'I felt something', he told me. 'Somebody coming to me and taking away the heavy weight in my heart, the bag of stones on my heart'. And as he felt that, he knew that Jesus had healed him. Xavier did not leave the priesthood. After a while, he returned to Rwanda, where he settled and resumed his post as a parish priest.

Xavier's story of divine healing was not the only one of its kind to be shared with me during my time with Emmanuel. During fieldwork I came to know people who survived the loss of close kin, who suffered chronic debilitating illnesses, or who were the parents of severely handicapped children, and whose narrative of healing recounted divine deliverance, often following simple if persistent prayer. In reference to the Rwandan genocide, narratives often ended in reconciliation and forgiveness, typically on the part of Tutsi victims towards Hutu perpetrators. Xavier's experience, while perhaps exceptional in terms of the duration and level of dedication to Adoration displayed, is a good example of how healing might ideally proceed for my interlocutors, as a transformation granted by the grace of

God following prayer. However, prayer did not work for everyone. For some, God's healing touch remained, even twenty years after the genocide, out of reach.

## **When Healing Fails**

It had been twenty years since the genocide, but Alice did not heal. A petite woman, living in a large house on her own, Alice was a regular at the Emmanuel centre. She attended mass at least once a week, and like all members of Emmanuel, prayer was a central part of her life. But when I asked Alice if she felt that prayer or God have helped her heal, she lamented that they had not. She waited for God to heal her, she told me, but God refused: 'Personally, for me, I did not heal... This is the way God works. He works as he likes. And as for me, I did everything. Mass, prayer, everything... but the problem is still the same, for me.'

Alice was unhappy. Before the genocide, she was a married woman, had a prestigious and high-paying job, and a comfortable life. Although she was able to recuperate her home in the genocide's aftermath, she had lost her job and was unable to find another one, and unable to conceive a child, lost her husband to another woman. When I asked her why she thought God would not heal her, she suggested that perhaps the refusal to heal was her own: 'Maybe it's me that is difficult', she said, 'maybe I do not accept that the Lord heals me. So I kept my hurts'. But there was a key to healing, Alice thought, at least in her case, and the key was truth: 'If we don't say the truth, I am going to do my personal healing path, I'm going to do all the reconciliation, but will I heal totally? No. This is what I think. You have to tell the truth.'

Alice knew I would understand, without having to be told directly, what truth she was talking about. She was talking about the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because Alice was not Tutsi, but Hutu, and while she was not persecuted during the genocide, when the forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) began gaining ground, putting an end to the slaughter of Rwanda's Tutsi population and taking control of the country, Alice escaped Kigali to the neighbouring DR Congo, where she spent two years living as a refugee. Witnesses as well as official reports claim that in the aftermath of the genocide, systematic massacres of the Hutu population were carried out, within the territories of Rwanda as well as in the forests of the DR Congo, to which over a million Hutu had escaped (Straus and Waldorf 2011). The current RPF-led Rwandan regime, however, denies that any mass killings of Hutu population were ever perpetrated.

This denial is not a simple case of a preferred state narrative and must be understood in the broader sociopolitical context of contemporary Rwanda if we are to fully appreciate Alice's position and her assertion that she cannot 'tell the truth'. While praised by many for its development and state-building achievements (Clark and Kaufman 2009; Ensign and Bertrand 2009), the current Rwandan regime is also broadly criticised by scholars and human rights activists for suppression of free speech, silencing of political opposition, and stifling of independent civil society (Eltringham 2004; Pottier 2002). Much of this is carried out under the state

imperative to prevent any recurrence of violence due to what the regime terms 'genocide ideology'.

The promotion of genocide ideology is a vaguely defined crime encompassing a broad array of behaviours. For example, any public allegation that mass killings of Hutu were perpetrated may be considered as promoting genocide ideology and incur a heavy punishment. Due to a pervasive fear that government informers are present in public gatherings, Rwandans are mostly careful, guarded, and reluctant to discuss their opinions or experiences during or after the genocide if those do not conform to state-mandated narratives. At the same time, state-run reconciliation and healing initiatives, such as the Gacaca courts (Clark 2010), while demonstrating some success in achieving their goals (Staub et al 2005), also disallow the sharing of accounts that do not conform to state accepted narratives. More recent state-run reconciliation efforts, such as the Ndi Umunyarwanda (I am Rwandan) initiative, seek to achieve healing by altogether effacing the ethnic categories of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, and replacing them with the unifying Rwandan.

These realities, combined with the particularities of the Rwandan genocide as an act of intimate mass violence (Fujii 2011), where perpetrators and victims continue to live side by side, result in lingering social tensions. Adding to this, in the particular case of Emmanuel, is the community's affiliation with the Catholic Church, which is, due to its implication in the genocide, out of favour with the current regime.<sup>3</sup> In light of all this, the community avoids involving itself in politics or expressing any political position, while individuals avoid any talk of politics in public. With respect to its own healing and reconciliation efforts, considering this broader social context, and Emmanuel's charismatic emphasis on establishing a personal relationship with God, much of the community's healing efforts throughout the years were focused on the intimate, one-on-one model of healing, where one is to reconcile one's suffering directly with God. A unique event in the life of the community, however, was about to change all that.

## A Gift of Tears

As part of their attempt to commemorate the twenty-year anniversary of the genocide, Emmanuel's leaders in Rwanda decided to initiate a special themed programme to promote forgiveness and healing, carried out through monthly community weekend gatherings (*weekend communautaire* in French, or WECO). Each weekend featured a combination of prayer, teaching, discussions, and testimonies. It was during the third weekend that a husband and wife, Hutu members of the community, gave a testimony of the horrors they endured in the aftermath of the genocide in the forests of the DR Congo. It was in the middle of the wife's story, as she spoke of walking into a clearing in the forest where dozens of bodies were piled on top of another, that the entire audience erupted in tears around me. This wasn't a loud or expressive display of grief, but in what appeared like a simultaneous collective outburst, nearly every woman and man around me began to softly cry. The programme for the day continued, with testimonies, prayer, Eucharistic Adoration,

and sharing sessions. At the time I was perplexed by the crying. Although I had only begun my fieldwork, by then I had heard many horrifying accounts of unimaginable cruelty. What was so different about that one?

It wasn't just the crying that told me something meaningful and exceptional had happened. The reactions to the weekend, immediately and even weeks after its conclusion were significant. Yvonne, an elderly Hutu woman with whom I spoke a week after the session told me that the Hutu of the community were extremely happy with the programme of the last weekend, as they were not with those of the first two. The previous two gatherings, she said, meetings that were focused primarily on lectures on various themes related to healing and reconciliation were useless: 'Those weekends, they were nothing. It was cheap, nothing but talk, abstract ideas about forgiveness and reconciliation. But there was no personal testimony, no personal stories.' The last weekend on the other hand, was all testimony, was all personal. Others agreed. The sharing of personal stories was a far more powerful act than the lecturing on abstract ideas.

But the impact that the weekend session had did not simply have to do with the fact that it was 'all personal'. Rather, it had to do with who those persons were who were sharing their personal experiences there, on stage, in front of everyone. It had to do with the fact that the couple sharing the experience were Hutu, and that those experiences they were sharing were not supposed to be shared in such a public manner, or at least rarely were. That they did so, I was told by a friend afterwards, was nothing short of revolutionary: 'This is done nowhere else!' my friend Jean Claude explained to me with visible excitement shortly after the event. 'If this was on the radio, it would create unrest.' The testimony given was not in actual contradiction with government guidelines. At no point did husband and wife name who it was that killed the people in the forest. No reference was made to the Rwandan regime, the RPF, or to any events that followed the genocide. But it was just enough of the truth to open, as my friend put it, the deep unhealed wounds in people's hearts.

When I pressed Joseph, a young Hutu friend of mine to explain to me why he thought the weekend was so good, so different, he told me, tearing up, 'But it was fantastic. When Francois talked, when he told of what happened to him in the Congo, I felt that it was me up there on the podium, I felt I was up there, telling my story to everyone. True, they didn't say who killed the people there, that's true, but they said that they were killed.' Joseph had been separated from his parents shortly after the genocide, at the age of ten, and spent harrowing months in the Congo jungles alone, relying on the kindness of strangers to survive. Like Alice, Joseph had never felt himself healed of his genocide experience. It continued to haunt him, but he avoided talking about it and would share it with me only after the community weekend.



## Healing as Sacrifice

What are we to make of the stories of Xavier, Alice, and Joseph, of the fact that some healed, while others did not, and the healing work that an event such as the WECO may have allowed for? The homily given by the priest who presided over mass on that day of the *weekend communautaire* focused on the act of sacrifice. 'Today', he reminded those gathered in the chapel, 'we are offering the greatest sacrifice, offering it for all of humanity'. The priest was speaking, of course, of the sacrifice of the Mass, which is centred, through the consecration and consumption of the Eucharist, on a reenactment of Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross. But on that day, there was more to the priest's proclamation. On that day, he was also speaking to his congregation in anticipation of the coming events, of the very personal sacrifice that each of them could make by living through and offering their pain to God.

My interlocutors often spoke of suffering in sacrificial terms, as something that was to be given to God in hope of an exchange. The notion of offering or sacrificing one's pain to God is not unique to Emmanuel. Jon Bialecki (2008) documents a similar practice among American Evangelicals, where undesirable habits, relationships, jobs, or positions one failed to achieve are offered as sacrifice to God, while Thomas Csordas (1994) notes that charismatic Catholics in the United States tend to offer their problems to God as a means of unburdening themselves or commending their problem into God's care. On the whole, while sacrifice in its bloody and ritualistic incarnation is no longer practiced by Christians worldwide, the notion of sacrifice still persists as a meaningful category orienting the lives of many Christians (see Blanes 2014; Coleman and Eade 2004; Elisha 2011; Mayblin 2013; Mayblin and Course 2013).

In the case of Emmanuel, the offering of one's suffering to God often echoes the theological premise of *Imitatio Christi*, where one aspires (but of course fails) to imitate Christ's ultimate sacrifice, the giving of his life for the redemption of humanity. As the idea was explained to me, by offering one's pain or suffering to God, one aspired to incur God's grace in the form of healing or help, not for oneself, but for others who were suffering elsewhere. Though I understood the basic principle, the notion of offering one's suffering or pain in exchange for God's favour never quite made sense to me. Surely, no matter how we defined sacrifice, it was inconceivable for something as undesirable as constant pain or suffering to be given in exchange for God's grace, even as grace was sought for the benefit of others. To be legible as a sacrificial gesture, after all, what is offered must have some value.

It was after the event of the WECO that I came to understand how the giving of one's pain to God might nevertheless constitute an act of sacrifice. Pain could be gifted to God, I realised, because for some, like Alice and others like her, suffering itself could become a precious thing. The suffering my interlocutors lived, after all, was tied to their story and history, to what they once had and loved and lost. The loss of suffering, then, can also mean the loss of attachments, not only to the self that had lived through the horrors but also to those who were lost to them. Alice had lost to the genocide not only her job, her status, and her husband. She now



also occupied a different place in Rwanda's ethnic and national landscape. Yes, the government had asserted that all were now Rwandans, that the old ethnic categories no longer mattered, but Alice knew better. Alice knew she was not simply Rwandan. She was still Hutu, and Hutu were those who killed, those who were to be forgiven, Hutu were *genocidaires*. True, all that Alice has lost would not return, but in holding on to her suffering, to her grief, some echo of that otherwise, of the world she had lost, was kept nonetheless alive. And so, my friends had it right—they could sacrifice their suffering, their pain to God, because in doing so they were sacrificing not that which they wanted to be rid of but that which tied them to who they were and to those they loved. To give God one's pain and suffering, then, was a sacrifice. It was the sacrifice of the self, or rather, of *a self*—the self that was, and those possible selves (Parish 2008), which never will be.

As such, the act of sacrifice is made here not primarily in supplication or in hope for exchange, but in assent, in the acceptance of God's gift. Although my interlocutors prayed to God for healing, they also implicitly believed, ascribing as they did to the post-Vatican II notion that God was love, that God's healing grace was always already given. As Alice herself admitted, it seemed to her far more likely that God was not refusing to heal her as much as she was refusing his gift. And so, it is not in exchange for God's future grace that Alice was to offer herself as much as that her offering would in itself be act of accepting it. In this sense, the sacrifice of the self is also the sacrifice of one's will to that of God's, even as God might will for humans to go through unimaginable pain. But why, then, were some able to make the sacrifice, while others were not?

If we ask Alice, and those who wept at the *weekend communautaire*, then the answer had to do less with one's relationship with God and more with one's relationship with society. Alice's insistence on the importance of 'telling the truth' or Joseph's exuberance at witnessing a public recognition of an experience similar to his own, locate the locus of healing, or the conditions which might make it possible, not in God, but in the social. After all, what years of direct prayer and communication with God did not seem to achieve, appeared significantly closer after a single event, a public recognition of an unspoken pain. This aspect of the healing process is absent from accounts such as Xavier's, that cast healing as an intimate affair between supplicant and God, but the social remains invisible in such stories exactly because it is already present, and so taken for granted. Xavier's story does not bring to our attention the significance of recognition because, being Tutsi, Xavier's loss is already socially recognised. It is only in its absence, in cases such as Alice's or Joseph's, that its importance becomes evident. But what was it exactly that the event of the WECO had to offer Alice and Joseph that day? What was it about the opportunity to have their pain publicly recognised that made it a healing event or part of a healing process? To try and answer these questions, I turn first to Julian Pitt-Rivers's (2011 [1992]) work on grace.

Pitt-Rivers (2011 [1992]) opens his essay *The Place of Grace in Anthropology* by asking for a systematic ethnographic exploration of the concept of grace. This is not simply because of grace's centrality to Western theology but because of the concept's

derivatives outside of the religious in the notion of gratuity. For the core notion of grace, Pitt-Rivers tells us, is gratuitous giving: 'Grace is a "free" gift, a favor, an expression of esteem, of the desire to please, a product of the arbitrary will, human or divine, an unaccountable love.'

In making this argument, Pitt-Rivers observes that in its quotidian use, grace makes a linguistic appearance exactly in giving interactions where no exchange other than thanks is expected. This is perhaps more evident in such languages as Spanish, French, or Italian, where the word 'thanks' itself invokes the theological world of grace (*gracias*, *merci*, and *grazie*, respectively). Another telling fact in this respect is that the expected acknowledgement of thanks across European languages—for example, the Spanish *de nada*, the French *de rien*, the English 'don't mention it' or 'it was a pleasure'—are expressions that serve to deny that any favour had been extended. This is not a denial of the favour itself, however, as much as an assertion of the gratuitous *intent* behind the gifting act, an insistence that nothing is expected in return.

Anthropology's failure to systematically explore either the notion of grace in its theological use or the notion of gratuity as it expresses itself in social interaction is baffling, considering not only their pervasiveness but the discipline's preoccupation with reciprocity. After all, reciprocity cannot be adequately explained without at least a consideration of the possibility of non-reciprocal relationality. In affording an analytical space for exchange that is anchored not in reciprocal calculation but in a desire to please and give pleasure, Pitt-Rivers calls our attention to the social place of mutuality, enjoyment, and appreciation, to the place in social life played by care, and by love.

Indeed, for Pitt-Rivers it is gratuity and not reciprocity that is the true foundation of human sociality, as it is gratuity and not the establishment of reciprocal obligation that define either gifting or sacrifice. This stands in some contrast to Mauss (1990 [1950]; Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1898]), who conceives of the gift as constituted of three *obligations*: to give, to receive, and to return. Any apparent gratuity which might be proclaimed by the gift giver is considered in Mauss's account a sociological delusion. For Pitt-Rivers, however, the gift entails no true obligation and retains its core as a gratuitous act. After all, 'whether or not to reply to the challenge represented by the potlatch is surely a voluntary decision, a matter of capacities and will, rather than an obligation.... If you refuse the challenge you may, depending upon the circumstances, lose prestige, that's all. But you do not risk losing your life.'

Just as Mauss's formulation risks doing away with those elements of freedom or agency summoned by the notion of grace, so does Pitt-Rivers's position risk downplaying the role that social constraint plays in establishing obligation. While he might overstate his point, however, recognising the element of freedom at the base of the gift, small and constrained as it might actually be, is crucial. This is because underscoring the element of volition and *intention* behind a giving act reminds us of the affective force of the gift, of the fact that it creates relations not through the exchange of things but through the exchange of care.

Acknowledging the gratuity at the base of the gift is crucial to understanding how the *weekend communautaire* served for many as a healing event. As I have already suggested, for my interlocutors, healing is facilitated through sacrifice, or a gift, to God. But what both Alice's refusal and the success of the WECO highlight for us is that for that sacrifice to be made possible, another gift is required. This is the gift offered by social others to the person in pain. It is the gift of recognition: not simply the recognition of one's suffering, but the recognition of one's loss. In acknowledging those who died, and the manner of their death, the dead find their home in society. They no longer live exclusively in the hearts of those who lost them. It is only then, once the dead are saved from oblivion, held by those amongst whom one continues to live, that the self that had otherwise tethered them to the world might be given, sacrificed.

Like the grace of the Christian God, the exchange of gifts between mourner and others must also be gratuitous. Or rather, we must recognise the gratuity at its base for it to be legible as a healing act. In the most immediate sense, this is the case because grace may only be exchanged with grace, and to entrust one's loss to another is an act that demands a similar relinquishing. In the case of the *weekend communautaire*, the gift offered back to the couple sharing their story by those who were present was not simply one of recognition but one of love. At its most visceral, that gift found expression in the form of tears. That the tears were shed in near silence, as well as the fact that the crying appeared to be both sudden and coordinated may have led some to interpret the event as divinely inspired, a collective manifestation of the Charism of Tears. In this case, the tears might be considered themselves a communication or acknowledgement from God, a gift delivered, mediated by those attending the event. Regardless of the tears' ultimate origin, however, their immediate, proximate source were the women and men who were present on that day. And their tears were, in their corporeal presence, more than a message from God or a sign of recognition. They were also an expression of love, given in exchange for the memories of the dead, the objects of love.

But there is more to gratuity in making healing possible. This is because to acknowledge the gratuity at the base of the gift is also to point to the paradox that constitutes it—the true gift must be freely given, but it must also be reciprocated. It is this very same paradox, of disinterest and profit, Pitt-Rivers reminds us, that also constitutes relations of friendship. The key in both cases is intentionality: neither gifts nor friendships can be offered with the explicit intention of provoking a return, yet both are made meaningless in the absence of exchange. Indeed, a gifting gesture that is made with no *hope* of return destroys grace just as a calculated gift does, for this makes it not an act of friendship but a gesture of pity. The paradox at the base of the gift marks it as something 'shot through with ambivalence' (Pitt-Rivers 2017 [1992]: 91), always vulnerable to competing interpretations. In this sense, that the gift is gratuitous not only alludes to it being free but also to it being incomprehensible: 'not answerable to coherent reasoning, unjustifiable, as when an insult is said to be gratuitous, or when a payment is made, over and above that which is due' (Pitt-Rivers 2017 [1992]: 80). Recognising this paradox has led some philosophers

to proclaim the impossibility of 'true' sacrifice or gifting (see Keenan 2005), but it is precisely in this contradicting play on freedom and obligation, in the uncertainty and arbitrariness that is both at the base and is the result of this paradox, that we find grace's constitutive potential, its force in making and affirming relations. This is because it is its uncertainty that makes grace an *unaccountable* love, and it is in its unaccountability that love finds the potential to disrupt life.

## A Disruption of Life

In a brief allusion to the play of grace in the realm of healing, Pitt-Rivers speaks of the Spanish *curanderas* or *sabias*, wise women who are said to possess an individual charisma for healing, granted to them by the saint to which they are devoted. Although their services are highly valued, *sabias* may never accept any payment in money for their curing. This is because the source of their healing power is divine grace, and as such cannot be exchanged for money. Exchanging the gift of God for money would result in the withdrawal of grace and the destruction of the healer's charisma. To avoid this, a *sabia* may receive in return for her cures only other symbols of grace, like blessed candles or sacred oil.

The prohibition on monetary compensation in the case of the charismatic *sabia* is logical, considering the origin of the *sabia's* healing power. But I would suggest that a similar logic of exchange may operate in therapeutic contexts outside those that explicitly deal in the divine. Over the years of working with and documenting the efforts of various healers and therapists, I have often observed healers attempt to establish a separation between the relational exchange of the therapeutic encounter and the monetary exchange that must follow it, one that echoes the prohibition on payment observed by Pitt-Rivers. In fact, curing and paying are to a degree separated in most Western therapeutic or biomedical contexts, in the sense that payment is often processed not directly by the therapist or physician but by a third party. In my experience, when such a structural separation is not possible, healers sometimes experience a degree of unease when having to directly accept money at the end of a meeting. One healer I worked with attempted to alleviate this unease by stating to clients that payment was not made for the healing itself but for the time the healer had to spend to administer it. In this, although the healer still received monetary compensation, a discontinuity was established between the act of healing and the reciprocity of payment.

That the logic of grace might still operate in therapeutic contexts outside of the properly Christian or religious one is significant, at least insofar as it points us to the need to consider the place of grace in the experience and process of healing more broadly. Both grace and sacrifice are concepts that have been highly elaborated upon within the Christian tradition and cannot be assumed to find a straightforward equivalence or to take the same form across cultural contexts. The Rwandan case of healing is also a very particular one. It represents not only an instance where healing is conceived and practiced in overtly Christian terms but also one where victims and perpetrators of intimate mass violence live alongside

each other and where political realities continue to powerfully impinge on people's healing trajectories. The question I wish to close this piece with, then, is whether this very particular account of healing can add something to our understanding of the therapeutic or healing process more generally as well. I would like to suggest that it might, and that the insights we stand to gain from it have to do with the place of the gift and of sacrifice in the process of healing, and as such, the place of love, and of death. In doing so, I aim also to consider how grace, transformed from emic to analytical concept, can find broader theoretical utility outside of the confines of the anthropology of Christianity (see Edwards and McIvor, this volume).

Although anthropological accounts of religious and ritual healing present us with a wealth of possible explanations for how different forms of healing might work, much focus within the literature has been given to explaining therapeutic efficacy as a function of the content or events of specific healing rituals. In other words, it is often the 'technique' itself that is at the centre of anthropological analysis. This focus on ritual procedure often results in what Csordas (1994) terms black-box or nonspecific explanations (e.g., what really heals is 'the placebo effect', 'altered states of consciousness', 'catharsis', etc.). This also often comes at the expense of paying attention to the suffering person's own experience of healing, and as such to the unfolding of the actual therapeutic *process*. Conceiving of healing in terms of gift and sacrificial exchanges, as I have done here, shifts our analytical attention from ritual procedure to the therapeutic *relationship* as the locus of experience and transformation. More than that, the Rwandan case also draws our attention to the fact that in regarding the gradual unfolding of the healing process, the therapeutic relationship itself must be considered in the plural. In other words, that healing does not simply happen in its assigned time and place but unfolds over time and with relation to multiple others—unproclaimed healers, perhaps, but possibly just as important.

The stress on the relational, on the process of gifting and of sacrifice that takes place between mourner, God, and social others also brings to the fore the affective aspect of the therapeutic process, specifically the rhetorical or persuasive force that the expression and experience of love might have in facilitating healing. Within that, the specific focus on grace reveals love's persuasive force as anchored not only in its potential to connect or in the creation of empathic resonance but also in its potential to disrupt.

As I argue elsewhere (Itzhak 2015), owing in large degree to the enduring legacy of Levi-Strauss's (1963) seminal work, healing is oftentimes, whether explicitly or implicitly, understood in anthropological literature as a process of symbolic manipulation, anchored in meaning-making and the bringing into coherence the incomprehensibility of suffering. The analysis of healing as sacrifice, and of sacrifice as an act based in gratuity, brings with it an appreciation of the therapeutic potential inherent in moments of disruption, paradox, and even death. The road to healing for Xavier, Alice, and many others passed through the sacrifice of the self, a

welcoming, in a sense, of a form of death. If we consider healing as fundamentally rhetorical in nature (see Csordas 2021; Frank and Frank 1991), meaning that, to put it simply, one must ultimately be persuaded to heal, then love appeared in the event of the *weekend communautaire* as something that has the potential to persuade one to die. It may be that this element of death, of a leaving behind another way of being-in-the-world-with-others, is particularly evident in the Christian case. But it may nonetheless remind us of something that is true of all instances of healing. Healing, after all, is always a matter of change, and change is always a matter of loss.

For my interlocutors, healing meant an acceptance of loss, just as sacrifice meant not a petition for grace but the willingness to receive it. This is a curious reversal, and it draws our attention to an aspect of the gift that remains in anthropology somewhat undertheorised (but see Robbins 2021). It calls our attention not to the act of giving, or reciprocating, but to that of receiving. Of Mauss's three obligations, receiving seems perhaps the most passive and straightforward, an act that is barely an act. Yet it is the willingness to receive God's gift that is the crux of the matter for my interlocutors. Indeed, the willingness to receive the gift becomes in itself the act of reciprocating it, of exchanging grace for grace. In this, the Rwandan case draws our attention to the broader question of receiving, of what it means to be made a recipient of a gift, even as one might refuse it. In doing so, it also points to the implications that an investigation of grace might have for our theorisation of change and transformation more broadly. It does so by shedding light on the transformative potential that being made the recipient of a gift can have, in and of itself, but it does so also, and just as importantly, by reminding us of the force that graceful gestures have to move us.

## Acknowledgements

The research for this article was made possible by generous funding from the Wenner Gren Foundation, the Robert Lemelson Foundation, the Society for Psychological Anthropology, and the University of California San Diego. During the writing process I was supported by a Beatriu de Pinós fellowship at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili. I am grateful to the Emmanuel community and its members in Rwanda for welcoming me to their midst and sharing with me their pain and joy. I would like to thank Méadhbh Mclvor and Michael Edwards for organising the workshop that made this conversation possible. For comments on previous drafts of this article, I thank Tom Csordas, Diego Malara, and fellow contributors to this volume. Thanks are also due to three anonymous reviewers and to Andrew Sanchez for insightful suggestions during the review process.



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## Notes

1. Fieldwork took place primarily in the capital city of Kigali. Participant observation included daily participation in religious activities, such as mass, praise, and Eucharistic Adoration, as well as day-to-day work alongside volunteers at the NGO centers, alongside periodic participation in pilgrimages, conferences, and volunteer trainings. Throughout fieldwork I resided in a community center that hosted the community's main spiritual events as well as one of its central NGO projects. In addition to participant observation, I conducted open-ended interviews with approximately forty community members, NGO staff, priests, and volunteers.
2. Today, the categories of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa are no longer recognised as valid social or ethnic categories in Rwanda, as they were prior to the genocide.
3. During the genocide, Rwandan church buildings became primary killing grounds, with some massacres led by clergymen against their own parishioners (Longman 2010). During the years immediately preceding the genocide, churches became sites of class conflict, which ultimately contributed to the onset of violence. Since churches played a major role in promoting social ferment but also maintained a close alliance with the Hutu-led Habyarimana regime, upon its eventual victory in July 1994, the RPF regarded churches with suspicion and moved to put them under state control.

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