Rethinking Reconciliation

Concepts, Methods, and an Empirical Study of Truth Telling and Psychological Health in Rwanda

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Abstract
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This dissertation combines psychology with peace and conflict research in a cross-disciplinary approach to reconciliation processes after intrastate armed conflict. Two overarching contributions are made to the field of reconciliation research. The first is conceptual and methodological. The vague concept of reconciliation is defined and operationalized (Paper I), and a method is proposed for how reconciliation may be studied systematically at the national level (Paper II). By discussing what reconciliation is and how we should measure it, comparative research on reconciliation is facilitated which is imperative if we wish to learn of its promises and pitfalls in post-conflict peacebuilding. The second contribution is empirical. There has been an assumption that truth telling is healing and thereby will lead to reconciliation; healing is the assumed link between truth and reconciliation. This assumption was investigated in two studies in Rwanda in 2006. A multistage, stratified cluster random survey of 1,200 adults was conducted to assess whether witnessing in the gacaca, the Rwandan village tribunals for truth and reconciliation, was beneficial for psychological health; thereby investigating the claim that truth telling is healing (Paper III). The results of the survey are disconcerting. Witnesses in the gacaca suffered from significantly higher levels of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder than non-witnesses also when controlling for important predictors for psychological ill-health such as gender or trauma exposure. To acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of witnessing in the gacaca, in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 women genocide survivors who had witnessed in the gacaca (Paper IV). The results of this study challenge the claim that truth telling is healing, suggesting instead that there are risks for the individuals on whom truth-telling processes depend. Traumatization, ill-health, isolation, and insecurity dominate the lives of the testifying women. Insecurity as a result of the truth-telling process emerged as one of the most crucial issues at stake. This dissertation presents a novel understanding of the complexity of reconciliation in post-conflict peacebuilding, demonstrating that truth and reconciliation processes may entail more risks than were previously known. The results of this dissertation can be used to improve the study and the design of truth and reconciliation processes after civil war and genocide.

Keywords: reconciliation, truth commissions, truth telling, peacebuilding, internal conflict, security, witnessing, psychological health, Rwanda

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List of Papers

I: Brounéus, Karen (2003). Reconciliation – Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation. *Stockholm: The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.*

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Contents

Introduction

Preventing the recurrence of armed conflict in a country devastated by war is one of the most important issues on the international agenda. The costs of war are enormous: whether counted in casualties, in economic and environmental resources, in security risks within the country as well as for neighboring countries, or seen in the immense human suffering it entails. In the last decade, reconciliation processes have become viewed as an essential part of peacebuilding. Since 1989, one-third of all peace agreements have included the concept of reconciliation, nearly half of which were signed in the 21st century (UCDP 2007). This budding trend of reconciliation is global; countries from the Ivory Coast to Papua New Guinea to Guatemala refer to reconciliation in their search for sustainable peace. One reason for the increased focus on reconciliation is that nearly all conflicts today are fought within countries.[1] After peace settlements in civil wars, former enemies, perpetrators and victims, must return to living side-by-side just as before the atrocities were committed. However, attitudes and behaviors do not change from genocidal to collegial at the moment of a declaration of peace. Since coexistence is necessary, the need for reconciliation is profound.

In this dissertation, I investigate reconciliation conceptually, methodologically and empirically. Writing from a background in clinical psychology, I combine peace and conflict research with psychology in a cross-disciplinary approach to reconciliation processes after intrastate armed conflict. The dissertation consists of four studies.

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[1] In 2006, 32 intrastate armed conflicts were recorded in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program while no interstate armed conflicts were active (Harbom 2007). During the years 1989–2006, the number of annual intrastate armed conflicts ranged from 25 to 50 per year, whereas interstate armed conflicts varied only from zero to two.

In the first two studies, *Reconciliation – Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation* (Paper I) and *Analyzing Reconciliation: A Structured Method for Measuring National Reconciliation Initiatives* (Paper II), I examine reconciliation conceptually and methodologically in an attempt to contribute to straightening out some of the conceptual confusion in the field, and also to underline the importance of methodological rigor if we wish to learn more of the potential of reconciliation processes. These two papers make up the first part of the dissertation, focusing on reconciliation.

When working with Paper I, the urgent need of research on the many different aspects of reconciliation became clear. In particular, I became interested in whether recent findings in psychological research may apply to assumptions made in the peacebuilding literature of truth telling and reconciliation, and if lessons of importance may be learned for peacebuilding. The second and more empirical part of this dissertation (Papers III and IV) therefore concentrates on truth telling, which is one of the most important methods used in the search for reconciliation. The underlying assumption in the literature and among policymakers is that truth telling is cathartic or healing for individuals and society and thereby will advance reconciliation. Healing is the presumed link between truth telling and reconciliation. However, very little has been known of the advantages, risks, and obstacles connected with different types of reconciliation and truth-telling efforts in societies emerging from conflict.

In the last two studies, one survey and one in-depth interview study, I empirically examine the assumption that truth telling leads to healing: *The Trauma of Truth Telling: Implications of Witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts on PTSD and Depression* (Paper III) and *Truth Telling as Talking Cure? Insecurity and Retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts* (Paper IV). This second part of the dissertation thus focuses on truth telling.

The dissertation thereby moves through different levels of reconciliation, going deeper and deeper into the process. From a general conceptual discussion of reconciliation (Paper I), it proceeds with methodological development of reconciliation initiatives at a national level (Paper II), and then focuses upon truth telling – one of the most important components of reconciliation – and psychological health: first, in a survey at the societal level (Paper III), and finally, in in-depth interviews at the individual level (Paper IV).

By analyzing reconciliation from different levels and perspectives, the aim of this dissertation is to contribute to a broader yet sharper understanding of the promises and pitfalls of reconciliation as a peacebuilding and conflict-preventive measure in countries after war and genocide. The two focal points of this dissertation will now be described, first reconciliation then truth telling. The papers that belong to each part are summarized. I conclude by presenting the findings of this dissertation as a whole, deriving policy implications on the basis of these findings, and making suggestions for future research.

Reconciliation

After the groundbreaking work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in the mid-1990s, reconciliation initiatives – through truth commissions, official apologies, memorials, etc. – have become an almost routine element of post-conflict peacebuilding theory and practice. Peru, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Timor Leste, Liberia and Rwanda, are only a few examples of countries that have embarked upon processes of reconciliation in the new millennium. Reconciliation has become a high-level concern for countries emerging from intrastate armed conflict as well as for international development assistance in post-conflict societies, and the scholarly literature on reconciliation has burgeoned.

Seen from an academic point of view, however, reconciliation has been anything but a conceptualized tool for peacebuilding, or an operationalized term for post-conflict analysis. Few empirical studies have been conducted in the field of reconciliation and the gap between theory and practice is vast. We know little of the effect of reconciliation efforts in post-conflict societies. Claims made of the beneficial relationships between truth, justice, healing, reconciliation, and peace are yet to be studied empirically. Considering that the risk of relapse into war in the immediate post-conflict period is high, increased knowledge is needed in order to determine when, where and how a society and its people have the capacity to bear the challenges of truth, justice and reconciliation, without breaking up again. If there are risks involved, these must be taken into account when designing processes of re-

conciliation, so that such initiatives for peace do not contribute to a back-
lash and renewed violence.

The first two papers of this dissertation focus on reconciliation, concep-
tually and methodologically. They seek to structure the analysis of recon-
ciliation in a way that facilitates systematic research. As reconciliation is a
complex process and one that has been under-researched, we must first
discuss what it consists of, operationalize it, and decide how it may be ana-
lyzed. This is done in Paper I. In Paper II, a method for studying reconcilia-
tion at the national level is presented. Methodology has been largely ignored
within the field of reconciliation research but is important for compiling
comparative data. Summaries of these two papers will now follow.

Paper I: Reconciliation – Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation

The primary aim of this report was to disentangle some of the conceptual
confusion concerning reconciliation. Reconciliation, as all phenomena we
are interested in studying in the social sciences, is not exact and constant but
a quite vague and elusive process. To enable scientific study we need to
define reconciliation in a way that holds for scientific investigation. On the
basis of previous research, the following definition is derived in this report:

> Reconciliation is a societal process involving mutual acknowledgment of
> past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behavior
> into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace.

This definition points to the critical building blocks of post-conflict recon-
ciliation: it involves changes in *emotion* (mutual acknowledgment of suffer-
ing), *attitude*, and *behavior*. The definition emphasizes that reconciliation is a
societal process after armed conflict, and thus involves changes within and
between former enemy groups after the war has ended. Finally, it underlines
that reconciliation is a *process*, not a specific state at a particular moment in
time. This definition is in line with others that see reconciliation as a prag-
matic process in which relations are rebuilt to enable coexistence and sus-
tainable peace (Bloomfield 2006; Staub 2006; van der Merwe 1999).

Another aim of this study, which was commissioned by the Swedish In-
ternational Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), was to identify the
role of development cooperation regarding reconciliation in post-conflict

societies. A structure for the analysis of reconciliation is suggested, in which essential aspects and levels of reconciliation are identified. By having a clear framework of the key aspects that make up the complex process of reconciliation, and at what level the process is taking place, it is easier to decide where and how development cooperation may come in. Additionally, and most importantly for the current context, an analytical structure facilitates comparative research on reconciliation. The report ends with recommendations for how development cooperation may work to strengthen and support national initiatives for reconciliation in societies after civil war.

Paper I provides the basis for the subsequent papers in this dissertation. Reconciliation is set in a practical and societal perspective. It does not mean avoiding accountability for the sake of truth, neither does it entail collective amnesia to avoid the dangers of truth telling, nor does it require interpersonal forgiveness. Reconciliation means finding a way to balance truth and justice so that a gradual change of behaviors, attitudes and emotions can take place between former enemies. It is the pragmatic work of building relationships and confidence that will hold for the pressures on peace.

In the process of working with this report, I became aware of two overarching research gaps in the field of reconciliation. First, the lack of conceptual and methodological clarity became apparent. The conceptual confusion is addressed in Paper I; methodology is the focus of Paper II, which we will now turn to. The second research gap that emerged concerned the lack of empirical research on one of the most widely used methods to reach reconciliation: truth telling. Truth telling is the focus of Papers III and IV, discussed in the succeeding section below.

Paper II: Analyzing Reconciliation: A Structured Method for Measuring National Reconciliation Initiatives

This paper focuses on reconciliation as well, this time concentrating on methodology. In 2003, the first systematic investigation of national reconciliation events had been published by Long and Brecke (Long and Brecke 2003). This study gave interesting suggestions to the role of post-conflict reconciliation. Yet, some reservations could be made concerning the authors' operationalization of reconciliation. 'Reconciliation events' are used in the study by Long and Brecke as a *proxy for* reconciliation (p. 7). However, one possibility is that because peace is frail, reconciliation *events* will be fre-

quent – but *reconciliation* may still be distant. More reconciliation events could actually be an indication of less reconciliation. The question also arose whether their definition in fact captured events of reconciliation or not.

I develop, in Paper II, a systematic method for accumulating comparative data on reconciliation initiatives at the national level. This paper is a contribution to the development of methodology for making comparative studies on reconciliation processes at a national level. Methodological rigor is essential for compiling comparative knowledge in order to learn more of the impact of reconciliation initiatives on peace in countries emerging from conflict. Both of the problems that seemed to emerge in Long and Brecke's study were addressed, the first by distinguishing between *reconciliation initiatives* and *reconciliation* throughout the study, the second by defining reconciliation initiatives in a more robust manner.

The method for studying national reconciliation initiatives presented in Paper II focuses on the visible statements and behaviors of those in power. Symbolic acts by political leaders to promote reconciliation play a significant role in today's world politics. However, we know little of their effects. The tensions that may arise between reconciliation needs on the one hand and development ambitions and politics on the other are evident. Post-conflict societies are most often in the beginning of a democratization process and the state is quite weak. Politics is steered by terms of office and the support of the population, all the more difficult in the brittle state of post-conflict. Large focus on structural and economic development in post-conflict nationbuilding is needed for reasons of both well-being and politics; issues of reconciliation may at times be paid lip service to conform to requests from the international community. Reconciliation initiatives may be signals more to the international community than to the population.

The analytical framework that is developed in this paper, built on Galtung's well-known conflict triangle (consisting of the three corners A: conflict attitudes, B: conflict behavior and C: the conflict issue itself, the incompatibility, Galtung 1969), is applied to Rwanda and Mozambique as a test of usefulness, and proves to be fruitful for structuring the analysis of reconciliation at this level. Data collection is made in line with the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Two sources are used for collecting and coding the data: Africa Research Bulletin and Regional Surveys of the World. As a result of these analyses, three hypotheses on reconciliation evolve which provide an interesting basis for further research. The method

presented in this paper would eventually allow comparison of post-conflict countries involved in reconciliation processes, and enable researchers and practitioners to identify when reconciliation strategies promote peace and if – and in that case when – there may be risks involved.

Truth Telling

While it is essential to study reconciliation conceptually and methodologically to provide a solid basis for further study, it is also imperative to conduct empirical research in the field of reconciliation. From a psychological point of view, one aspect of reconciliation stood out as essential for investigation: the assumption that truth telling is healing and thereby will lead to reconciliation. Truth telling has come to play a pivotal role in reconciliation processes around the world. It is hoped that truth commissions will provide a judicial balance for post-conflict societies and they have become a fundamental part of peacebuilding. There is a rich theoretical literature on the significance of truth telling for reconciliation. The underlying assumption is often that truth telling is cathartic or healing for individuals and society and thereby will advance reconciliation. Truth-telling mechanisms have been described as contributing to "any of the following…truth, assisting victims, reconciliation, healing, interracial unity, reconstruction, public deliberation, rule of law, justice, accountability, and institutional reform" (Borer 2006).

   In contrast to this assumption, three recent findings within psychological research would suggest that there may be risks involved in truth-telling procedures. First, there were reports in South Africa indicating a risk of retraumatization when giving testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC (Byrne 2004; de Ridder 1997). Second, the recommendation that early psychological intervention after trauma, so called *one-session debriefing*, should cease as it may increase the risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Rose et al. 2002). One-session debriefing and witnessing in a TRC both involve short and intensive trauma exposure, an important common denominator. If there are risks involved in one-session debriefing this may also be the case for giving testimony in a TRC. Third, there are novel theoretical explanations in cognitive behavioral therapy

(CBT) and neuro-psychology for why short trauma exposure may lead to retraumatization (Rose, Bisson, and Wessely 2003; van Emmerik et al. 2002; Brewin 2001; Paunovic and Öst 2001).

Interestingly the beneficial effects of truth telling have also been questioned in recent peacebuilding literature. Brahm states that these claims are based on moral conviction, Borer that they arise from oft-repeated aspirational statements (Brahm 2007; Borer 2006). Borer writes that "[t]his particular linking of two concepts – truth and reconciliation – has been reiterated so often that it has achieved the status of a truism" (Borer 2006). Similarly, Mendeloff argues that the beneficial claims made in the literature of truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms on reconciliation and peace have been based on flawed assumptions and faith rather than on empirical evidence (Mendeloff 2004). DeLaet states that "scholars and practitioners of transitional justice must give greater attention to individual psychological processes [in truth commissions] if they genuinely believe healing and reconciliation are integral to promoting peace and justice in the long term" (DeLaet 2006).

Truth telling may serve a crucial function for peacebuilding in creating a space for a national conversation after which no-one can say '*I did not know*', or deny the realities of what took place (Villa-Vicencio 2007). One study has demonstrated that perhaps the process of truth telling has a greater importance for those who did not know, by giving them a deeper understanding of the past, than for those who were directly involved and targeted by the violence (Gibson 2004). In this study, no effect on reconciliation was seen as a result of truth telling in victims; in contrast however, those not directly involved in the conflict showed more reconciliatory attitudes after hearing testimonies (Gibson 2004). If this is the case, truth commissions may play a vital role at the national and societal level of reconciliation even though they may not affect attitudes in those who were directly involved in the conflict.

However, the beneficial effects of truth telling may also well depend on the liberty of being able to speak freely, and having a sense of belonging in the process (Villa-Vicencio 2007). Kostic has demonstrated that externally-imposed peacebuilding from the international community has sustained polarization and tension between ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kostic 2007). If the truth-telling process is experienced as imposed, perhaps this will have negative effects, even if the imposition is from a governmental level. This would imply that the locus of where truth-telling initia-

tives are taken will have more importance for the outcome of the process than previously recognized. The same may be true for security. Two recent studies describe stigmatization and fear in witnesses when returning to their home communities after having given testimony in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY, (Stover 2004) and in the South African TRC (Backer 2007). Yet, insecurity has not been discussed as a potential consequence of truth and reconciliation processes previously.

The final papers of this dissertation – Papers III & IV – focus on truth telling. In these two papers, the experiences and psychological health of those who have witnessed in a process of truth telling are reported. They are based on fieldwork I conducted in 2006 in Rwanda, where the largest officially driven truth and reconciliation process in the world today is taking place. However, before going into the results of Papers III and IV, I will give a brief account of the background to Rwanda's reconciliation process, describe how truth telling and healing was operationalized for the present study, and why Rwanda was chosen for the empirical study of this dissertation.

Truth Telling and the Case of the Rwandan Gacaca Process

During three months – from April to July 1994 – an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in one of the most extensive genocides of our time (Melvern 2000; Prunier 1995). The genocide in Rwanda was the culmination of a century of ethnic discrimination and violence, and four years of civil war. Neighbors murdered neighbors, family members murdered family members. Sexual violence was used systematically against Tutsi women and girls as a method of war by the Hutu extremists, not only to inflict pain and humiliation but also to spread HIV – and ensure the end of the Tutsi people.[2]

After the genocide, the new Rwandan government was faced with the task of making peace, in every village on every hill. In 2001, 130,000 people were in prison in Rwanda for crimes of genocide; with the judicial system shattered, it would have taken more than a century to finish the trials (Uvin 2003). In 2002, the *gacaca* process was initiated by the government, in order to speed up the trials and promote truth, unity and reconciliation following

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[2] See Appendix for more information and literature on Rwanda's history.

several years of renewed violence and organized armed conflict.[3] The gacaca, the traditional village tribunals which previously had dealt with minor crimes such as theft, were now given the task of dealing with major crimes of genocide.[4]

The gacaca process involves the entire country, every village or neighborhood having its own gacaca court with locally elected judges and mandatory participation by the villagers – over 20,000 gacaca courts are underway. On the day of gacaca, scheduled once every week, the 9 selected judges, the villagers, the accused and the witnesses assemble for the trial. The witness gives testimony, the accused gives his or her account, and the audience also has the right to speak. The judges ask and listen. They determine the verdict of the accused.

The study of reconciliation at any level inevitably involves a simplification of reality, "[o]ne of the first and most difficult tasks of research in the social sciences" (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). However, in order to generate more general knowledge, this is necessary. Reconciliation is an extremely complex process made up of particulars that will differ in every country but the attempt must be – as in all social science research – "to go beyond these particulars to more general knowledge" and find "key features….from a mass of facts" (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). Accordingly, despite differences with other contexts some decisive similarities exist between the gacaca and other truth-telling processes. Witnesses describe their experiences in front of a panel of judges, experiences of deep grief and trauma. In the gacaca, as in most truth commissions, witnessing takes place in public. Very rarely in recent truth commissions, are the proceedings performed behind closed doors or the witnesses' identity kept confidential. Thus, the gacaca courts are a traditionally based *functional equivalent* to a truth and reconciliation commission.

For scientific purposes, the assumption that *truth telling is healing* must be made researchable, operationalized. In the gacaca, witnesses give testimony,

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[3] The Uppsala Conflict Data Program has recorded armed conflict in Rwanda for the years 1997–2002 (Harbom 2007).

[4] Pronounced "gatchatcha". The crimes of the genocide were divided into three categories, Category 1: instigators and leaders of the genocide and sexual violence; Category 2: killings and serious attacks that may or may not have caused death; Category 3: offences against property. The accused in Category 1 are tried in the Rwandan national courts or the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Categories 2 and 3 are treated in the gacaca courts in their home communities.

tell their truths, from their experiences during the genocide. The gacaca is extraordinarily well-coordinated; it was set-up in certain pilot communities in 2002 to test the proceedings and subsequently launched in the entire country in 2005. This made Rwanda particularly interesting for the scientific study of reconciliation; some communities had longer experience of the gacaca than others, some of the participants are witnesses and some are not, enabling comparisons between pilot (2002) and non-pilot (2005) communities and between witnesses and non-witnesses in order to see if there were differences concerning *healing*. In this study, healing was operationalized as psychological health, measured as depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In choosing Rwanda, a first step would also be taken in generating more comparative knowledge on the impact of truth on those participating, as systematic research outside of the South African context is virtually nonexistent (Brahm 2007).

Paper III: The Trauma of Truth Telling: Implications of Witnessing in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts on PTSD and Depression

The primary aim of Paper III was to assess whether witnessing in the gacaca, the Rwandan village tribunals for truth and reconciliation, was beneficial for psychological health; thereby investigating the claim that truth telling is healing. A secondary purpose was to study the prevalence of depression and PTSD among Rwandans, 12 years after the genocide. For these purposes, a multistage, stratified cluster random survey of 1,200 adults was conducted in 4 provinces in Rwanda in March 2006. Symptom criteria for PTSD were measured using the PTSD Checklist–Civilian Version (PCL–C). For depression, the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL) was used. In addition, a measure of trauma exposure during the genocide was used, developed by Pham, Weinstein, and Longman in 2002.

The results demonstrate that among the respondents in this survey 27% met symptom criteria for PTSD and 38% for depression; among genocide survivors, the prevalence of PTSD and depression was exceedingly high: 51% met symptom criteria for PTSD and 60% for depression. The relative risk of having depression was heightened with more than 50% in gacaca witnesses compared to non-witnesses, and the risk of having PTSD was almost doubled (p<.001). Multivariate logistic regression analysis demon-

strated that even when controlling for important predictors for psychological ill-health, such as gender or cumulative trauma exposure, the relationship between witnessing in the gacaca and higher levels of depression and PTSD persisted (p<.001). Women were exposed to more traumatic events during the genocide than men (p<.05), and also demonstrated higher levels of depression and PTSD than men (p<.05).[5]

The results of the survey are deeply disconcerting. Witnesses in the gacaca suffered from significantly higher levels of depression and PTSD than non-witnesses also when controlling for important predictors for psychological ill-health. The results of this study strongly challenge the claim that truth telling is healing, suggesting instead that there are risks for the individuals on whom truth-telling processes depend.

Paper IV: Truth Telling as Talking Cure? Insecurity and Retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts

In order to try to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of witnessing in the gacaca, I conducted in-depth interviews with 16 women genocide survivors who had witnessed in the gacaca. These interviews are described in Paper IV. The aim of the interviews was to learn more of how testifying in the gacaca affects psychological health: do the women find this experience healing or retraumatizing? Are there other effects involved? As stated, healing has been a central concept in the general reconciliation literature and in political rhetoric around truth commissions. There has been an assumption that testifying in truth and reconciliation commissions is a healing experience for survivors. However, the findings of this study are alarming.

Traumatization, ill-health, isolation, and insecurity dominate the lives of the testifying women. For all of the women, giving testimony involved in-

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[5] More men were killed in the Rwandan genocide than women (Jones 2002), more women were subjected to non-lethal forms of violence such as mass rape than men (Human Rights Watch 2004). Thus, higher levels of trauma may be expected in women. This fact seems to have been unrecognized in previous research on psychological health after war. Differences between men and women are often explained by gendered constructions in reporting – women are assumed to over-report, and men to under-report psychological ill-health – and cut-off scores have been adjusted accordingly in previous research.

tense psychological suffering. Five could not complete their testimonies in the gacaca due to severe psychological ill-health. Several re-experienced their traumas of the genocide so strongly that they thought it was happening again. They saw the machetes, heard the noises, smelt the smells. Even though we do not know the long-term effects, at this stage none of the women regarded giving testimony as a healing experience. The accounts provide a richer understanding of the experience of witnessing and confirm the results of Paper III, now at the individual level. The basic assumption of truth telling as healing is thus fundamentally challenged also by this study.

Furthermore, insecurity as a result of the truth-telling process emerged as one of the most crucial issues at stake. Interviewed witnesses were threatened before the gacaca to deter them from giving testimony, during the hearings to quiet them, and after, as punishment. This study points to the complexity of reconciliation at the grassroots level and raises questions about the relationship between truth commissions and security. If the security of witnesses is threatened, this may lead to a number of outcomes: physical injury, psychological anxiety and ill-health, an increase of violence in order to silence the truth, acts of revenge from either group, or skewed testimonies leading to a distorted picture of the past which may lay the grounds for renewed conflict. In designing reconciliation processes for a nation, the individual participants must be taken into account. It is at this level, between former enemies, where the cycles of violence risk being renewed – which ultimately has consequences for the prospects of building lasting peace.

Conclusions and Outlook

Two overarching contributions are made to the field of reconciliation research in this dissertation. The first contribution is conceptual and methodological. The vague concept of reconciliation is defined and operationalized, and a method is proposed for how reconciliation may be studied systematically at the national level. Methodology has been largely ignored within the field of reconciliation. However, by discussing what reconciliation is and how we should measure it, comparative research on reconciliation is facilitated which is imperative if we wish to learn of its promises and pitfalls. The second contribution is empirical. There has been an assumption that truth telling is healing and thereby will lead to reconciliation; healing is the assumed link between truth and reconciliation. In two studies, one survey and one in-depth interview study, this assumption was investigated in Rwanda. The results of these studies strongly challenge the claim that truth telling is healing, suggesting instead that there may be risks for the individuals on whom truth-telling processes depend.

The papers in this dissertation give rise to some pertinent questions for future research. Concerning reconciliation, three areas are identified that would benefit from further study. To begin with, what is the relationship between reconciliation initiatives and reconciliation? My research suggests that more initiatives for reconciliation at the national level may not necessarily be better for reconciliation and peace. While reconciliation initiatives may be regarded favourably by the international community and other peacebuilders, they may mean little to the population if regarded as fake or empty – or may even risk being counterproductive. Furthermore, are informal and local reconciliation initiatives more effective for reconciliation than formal and national initiatives? One hypothesis that emerges from this dissertation is that where the process of reconciliation is initiated and the extent to which people feel that they belong in the process, may be more important than previously recognised. It seems plausible that increased ownership would be beneficial to the process. Finally, do reconciliation processes differ depending on conflict-ending and if this is the case, how? If the conflict ended in victory or by a negotiated peace agreement, will likely affect to what extent the former enemy must be taken into account in initiatives for reconciliation. This may affect factors such as the character and the genuineness of the reconciliation initiative, which in turn may influence how the

reconciliation initiative is perceived by the people – and ultimately how it will affect reconciliation. More research is needed to clarify these issues.

Regarding truth telling, three important implications can be made for future research as well as for policymaking.

First, the fieldwork from Rwanda suggests that assumptions on truth telling are based more on theoretical thinking than on reality. Neither the survey data nor the in-depth interviews support the claim that truth telling is healing, on the contrary, psychological ill-health was considerable among witnesses, significantly more so than among non-witnesses in the survey material. The importance of conducting further empirical research on truth-telling and reconciliation procedures in order to enable well-grounded theory and policymaking becomes clear.

Second, the importance of security for a process of reconciliation emerged strongly in the in-depth interviews with women genocide survivors. For the women who chose to witness in the gacaca, insecurity was a result of the truth-telling process. If security is not provided, the process may risk contributing to a backlash either in increased violence or in suppression of truth. Here, international development assistance has the possibility to play a crucial role. As the survey was conducted before the in-depth interviews in Rwanda, and the issue of security was not part of my expected results, I did not have a question on security in the survey questionnaire. This would have been of great value and I would recommend including it in future research on reconciliation in Rwanda and elsewhere. Furthermore, while the empirical focus in this dissertation was on witnesses, security implications for the accused in reconciliation processes would also be essential to address.

Third, my research underlines that the massive and systematic use of sexual violence in war and the vulnerability this entails in the context of truth telling due to stigmatization should be brought to the focal point of truth-telling research. This also needs to be central to policy deliberations, taking cultural and gendered constructions of issues such as shame into account. Failing to provide security in truth-telling processes for women and men who have been subjected to sexual war crimes will counteract the attempt to uncover the truth and build peace. In addition, men and women are struck differently by war and by peace after war (Olsson 2007). Truth-telling processes are likely to have quite different implications for women

and men, thus, the importance of studying the effects of truth-telling and reconciliation processes on both women and men is crucial.

This is the first study to date to test the assumption that truth telling is healing. Despite many differences, important similarities exist between Rwanda and other post-conflict countries. More research is urgently needed to determine what can be generalized from the results seen here. In the meantime however, we should be cautious in stating that truth telling is healing. No support was found regarding this claim in the two empirical studies of this dissertation. Yet, truth telling may well hold a critical role in the aftermath of violent conflict by creating a space for a national conversation (Villa-Vicencio 2007). The risks that have been demonstrated here for individual psychological health and security lead to one important conclusion however: truth telling should not be seen as a panacea for peace, nor should it be used indiscriminately.

This dissertation presents a novel understanding of the complexity of reconciliation in post-conflict peacebuilding. Truth and reconciliation processes may entail more risks than were previously known. The results of this dissertation should be used to improve the study and the design of truth and reconciliation processes after civil war and genocide.

Appendix: Rwanda – A Brief Background

During three months – from April to July 1994 – an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in one of the most extensive genocides of our time (Melvern 2000; Prunier 1995).[6] The genocide in Rwanda was the culmination of a century of ethnic discrimination and violence, and four years of civil war. Neighbors murdered neighbors, family members murdered family members. Sexual violence was used systematically towards Tutsi women and girls as a method of war by the Hutu extremists, not only to inflict pain and humiliation but also to spread HIV – and ensure the end of the Tutsi people.

Ethnicity played a crucial role in the Rwandan genocide. Since pre-colonial times, Rwanda has been the home of three ethnic groups: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.[7] The Tutsi, by tradition cattle herders, were the small elite, holding political power, privileges, and higher social status than the vast Hutu majority, who were peasants. The Twa, a pygmy group, were very few and greatly discriminated against by both Hutu and Tutsi. These social roles have pertained through history and were gravely accentuated by the Belgian colonists during the first half of the 20th century. After Rwanda's independence in 1962, radical Hutus led by Gregoire Kayibanda took power in Rwanda. The monarchy was abolished and Rwanda's First Republic proclaimed. Severe discrimination against Tutsi began. Tutsi were excluded from all official posts, executed at random, deported to unfertile regions of the country, or forced to flee. Waves of violence, massacres and pogroms followed in the decades to come. Had the monarchy been a racial dictatorship against Hutu, it had now been replaced by the racial dictatorship against Tutsi (Melvern 2000).

This severe maltreatment of Tutsi notwithstanding, Hutu extremists from northern Rwanda were unsatisfied with Kayibanda, demanding fiercer politics. After a coup d'état in 1973, Juvénal Habyarimana, Kayibanda's

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[6] The aim of this short description of Rwanda's history, civil war and genocide is to put the aftermath – the current reconciliation process – into context. For more detailed accounts of Rwanda's history and the genocide, please see in particular Dallaire 2003; Des Forges 1999; Melvern 2000; Prunier 1995. Other important readings include: Mamdani 2001; Reyntjens and Vandeginste 2005; Straus 2006; Uvin 1998, 2001; Lemarchand 1970.

[7] Estimates of the population composition are: Hutu 85%, Tutsi 14%, Twa 1%. These estimates are made for both pre-independence and post-genocide Rwanda; see Kumar et al. 1996 and CIA: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rw.html. Accessed August 8, 2007.

defence minister, took power. Political opponents to Habyarimana were arrested and tortured, and thousands of Tutsi were killed. Rwanda's Second Republic had now begun, and would last until the genocide ended in 1994. During the Second Republic, Rwanda opened toward the world, set up diplomatic posts abroad, saw economic growth, modernization, and urbanization. Simultaneously, ethnic violence intensified with massacres and pogroms against Tutsi. Many Tutsi fled to neighboring countries and abroad, leading to a large exile diaspora, claiming their right to live in Rwanda.

In the 1980s, Rwanda's economy plummeted. Prices for coffee, Rwanda's most important export product, dropped on the international market and none of the financial assistance from the ongoing structural adjustment program reached the people. In 1989, the country was struck with draught and famine. The government was weakened. At the same time, half of Rwanda's Tutsi population now lived in exile and had for years organized themselves to return. On October 1, 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi-led armed force consisting of exile Rwandans, invaded Rwanda from Uganda in the north and the civil war began. The first invasion was a disaster for the RPF and they had to rapidly withdraw. The world was in shock; Rwanda had been seen as an example of success in Africa due to its developments. In the next three years, until the outbreak of the genocide, Rwanda became – quite secretly – the third-largest weapon importer in Africa, after Nigeria and Angola (Melvern 2000); in hindsight, an indication of what was to come. The RPF quickly regrouped after the defeat in October 1990 and formed a strong paramilitary force under the leadership of Paul Kagame – Rwanda's current president – attacking Rwanda repeatedly in the years to come. Importantly, the RPF managed to transform into a legitimate political participant in the internationally-led peace process during these years of civil war, a peace process that began in Arusha, Tanzania, in the summer of 1992, and resulted in a peace agreement thirteen months later. Soon after which, the genocide began.

Hutu extremism and government-led agitation against Tutsi intensified during the civil war. Thousands of people fled from their homes, were arrested, tortured, and killed. The *Interahamwe*, 'those who work together', the militia of Habyarimana's party Hutu Power, organised throughout the country and killed relentlessly – on the basis of ethnicity, political opposition, or, for nothing. No legal action followed the killings; murder was sanctioned by the government.

Hutu extremism thrived on subjugation, poverty, and fear. On April 6, 1994, the airplane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down when landing at Kigali airport, by whom is still unknown. This event unleashed an unforeseen 100 days of horror, for Tutsi but also for many moderate Hutu. Men, boys and male babies were among the first to be killed in the genocide. Women and girls were subjected to massive sexual violence; many of those who were killed, were first raped (Baines 2003). Corpses were left unburied in the sun and dumped into latrines. '[K]illings came to be referred to as *umuganda* (communal work), chopping up men as "bush clearing" and slaughtering women and children as "pulling out the roots of the bad weeds"' (Mamdani 2001). The genocide affected everyone. It ended in July, when the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front took hold of Kigali. Millions of refugees – now Hutu – fled the country. The country was in ruins.

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