

Beyond the Status-Quo: Cultivating Peace in Post-Genocide Countries

Nicole Lyon, author

pp. 27-34.

Oshkosh Scholar, Volume I, April 2006

Copyright © 2006 University of Wisconsin Board of Regents

All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form without the permission of University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Office of Grants and Faculty Development
800 Algoma Blvd.
Oshkosh, WI 54901
(920) 424-3215
www.uwosh.edu/grants

Beyond the Status-Quo: Cultivating Peace in Post-Genocide Countries

Nicole Lyon, author

Dr. Druscilla Scribner, Political Science, faculty adviser

Abstract:

This paper asserts that constructively remembering past atrocities is central to the formation of a lasting, multi-faceted peace in post-genocide societies. The Rwandan case-study first illustrates the dynamics of a society affected by genocide, as well as critically analyzes the integrity of its peace. Secondly, the role of collective memory in reconciliation is discussed at length, including the dangers of implying “forgive and forget” principles within a reconstruction context. The final portion of the paper suggests three applications with which to apply the needs of collective memory in reconciliation: 1.) validating track II diplomacy; 2.) supporting the processes of truth commissions; and 3.) shaping reconstruction for reconciliation. In order to work toward a lasting peace, it is essential that Rwanda—as well as other post-genocide societies—remember the past in a way which leads to restoration.

Introduction

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was one of the most concentrated genocides of the 20th century. More than a decade later, Rwanda has been applauded for its progress in reconstructing a post-conflict society. However, the amnesic attitudes of the current government in Rwanda concerning the not-so-distant past undermines a durable peace for the country, and also risks citizens’ basic freedoms. The future of Rwanda—as well as other post-conflict societies—rests not in its ability to forgive and forget, but rather to remember and restore.

In order to understand the restoration process, this paper uses collective memory as a means to critically analyze the Rwandan situation, challenging a status-quo standard of peace after genocide. First, the story of Rwanda is invaluable in illustrating both the wearisome dynamics of genocide, as well as the dangers of imposed-forgetting of past atrocities. Thereafter, the role of collective memory in conflict will be explored at length. After establishing the relationship between collective memory and reconciliation, three practical applications are offered which proceed with the goal of multi-faceted restoration on all levels of society. These applications include: implementing “Track II diplomacy,” truth commissions vs. criminal tribunals, and reconstruction as reconciliation.

Rwanda: “A Legacy of Ethnic Resentment”

When the first visual images of Rwandan killings were broadcast on Western news programs, the unfolding genocide was portrayed as a spontaneous outbreak of violence. Unfortunately, the dynamics of ethnic conflicts were never reducible to terms of spontaneity. Suffice it to say, that the genocide was hardly impulsive—it was a meticulously planned expression of an ethnic rage.

Hostility between Rwanda’s two dominant ethnic tribes, the Hutus and the Tutsis, has its roots in colonial times. According to Bruce D. Jones, colonialists used

the Tutsi tribe to consolidate imperial presence through patrimonial authority, enabling the minority Tutsis to become a dominant elite (2001, 19). This dynamic of legalized discrimination created what *The Economist* terms “a legacy of ethnic resentment” (“The Road Out of Hell”).

In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), comprised of exiled Tutsis, invaded Rwanda and unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the Hutu government, renewing aggression between the two tribes. The Arusha Peace Accord (1993) promised to incorporate representatives of both tribes in the government. The sitting president, Habariyama, seemed to undermine the agreement by introducing anti-Tutsi elements into his government (Staub and Pearlman 2001, 210).

A systematically-planned genocide was already in mobilization stages before Habariyama’s plane was shot down in April 1994: according to *The Economist*, “[the Hutus] recruited and indoctrinated thousands of militiamen, and imported enough machetes to give one to every third adult Hutu male” (“The Road Out of Hell”). What followed Habariyama’s assassination was a highly condensed genocide: statistics estimate that between 800,000 and 1 million people were killed within three months, not to mention the displacement of nearly 4 million refugees. Essentially, it was not mere numbers that differentiated Rwanda as the “greatest humanitarian crisis of this generation” (Jones 2001, 1), but instead the sheer concentration and personal nature of violence. As Ervin Staub and Laurie Anne Pearlmann ascertained while coordinating “*Healing, Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Rwanda*,” there are three unique characteristics of the Rwandan genocide:

1. A very large number of people were killed in a very short time.
2. A great deal of the killing was person to person, rather than impersonal... Machetes, which require close contact between perpetrator and victim, were often used.
3. While military and paramilitary groups... perpetrated much of the killing, substantial killing was also perpetrated by a segment of the population. People were killed by neighbors, even relatives (2001, 211).

Rwanda’s genocide changed the country forever, not only in terms of its population distribution, but also the very fabric of progress and development.

More than a decade has passed since the Rwandan genocide, and the Rwandan Patriotic Front is now in control of the government. *The Economist* reports that incomes are nearly that of pre-genocide levels, many Tutsi refugees have returned, and re-education camps have attempted to teach ex-soldiers how to become “good patriotic citizens” (“The Road Out of Hell”). To those familiar with the Rwandan story, the success of the RPF regime seems miraculous—perhaps suspiciously so.

There is a catch, namely, that the RPF rules its country more strictly than any other government in Africa. According to *The Economist*, there is neither freedom of the press nor freedom of association, for fear of further genocide. Additionally concerning is the enforced lack of political opposition to the current regime, creating conditions of a “thinly-disguised autocracy.” Those with political views differing from those in the government may be threatened, and fearing that diverse opinions will lead to a second genocide. The ruling government even goes so far as to pressure Hutus and Tutsis to address one another as “brothers,” providing few outlets for the silent tension that still exists between the groups. *The Economist* concludes, “given the instability in

the region, and the unresolved frustrations stopped up within the Rwandan hearts, there could be a resumption of violence, and that could take an ethnic turn” (“The Road Out of Hell”). Disdain for the government runs silently, but extensively.

After a harrowing story like Rwanda, notions of peace placate a fragmented country. Although monuments and other initiatives have been pursued by NGO actors, some of the current regime’s attitudes seem less like a durable peace, and more like new hostilities masked behind a façade of tranquility. There is a grave danger when forgetting is imposed upon the people. Forgetting may be less arduous than remembering; however, it is a risk that Rwanda and other post-genocide countries must question seriously. Rwanda’s future rests not in its ability to forgive and forget, but rather to remember and restore—undoubtedly the more difficult task. The key to restoration lies in collective memory. What is collective memory, and how is it connected to restoration in a developing country recovering from genocide?

Collective Memory and Reconciliation

Studies indicate even when state-level peace accords have been signed, more than 50 percent of international initiatives and negotiations have dissolved (Botcharova 2001, 279). Especially troubling are politicized acts of mass-violence committed even at the grass-roots level of society: the prevalence of suicide bombers in the Israel/ Palestine conflict, the exacerbated fighting in Serbia, and of course the intense slaughter of ethnic Tutsis in Rwanda.

It is at this point when the notion of collective memory offers much insight to the developing discipline of conflict resolution. Collective memory suggests that as an individual’s actions are controlled by dominant and recessive memories, a group’s decisions are guided by similarly accumulated memories. Although this is only a generalization of collective memory, there are varied views concerning the relationship between individual and collective memory. In *Genocide and the Politics of Memory*, Herbert Hirsch broadly summarizes the concept and process of collective memory:

Generations pass on their memories, making them part of the historical record, by using language to transmit their particular version of events to the next generation through the process of socialization (1995, 3).

Collective memory—in its broadest sense—recognizes there is a transitive relationship between group and individual memory, and socialization can transfuse past memories into those of future generations.

Including the collective memory concept in discussions of genocide and restoration of democracy greatly illustrates the contextual dynamics facing war-torn countries. Olick points out conflict affects national- and global- memory long after a peace treaty is signed, as demonstrated by the Holocaust: “the trauma of Auschwitz will not disappear with the death of the last survivor... Auschwitz remains a trauma for the narratives of modernity and morality, among others” (1999 345). One effect of conflict on memory mentioned here is trauma, the lifespan of which surpasses the actual conflict. *Oxford English Dictionary* describes trauma as an injury caused by a shock which is “repressed and remains unhealed,” resulting in “behavioral disorder” (2005). Elements of suppression and confused behavior are present in this definition. What does this sort of trauma look like on a societal or national scale?

When groups are faced with a traumatic threat, which remains unresolved or suppressed, what eventually occurs is a “breakdown in the free flow of information” between groups, as well as the “deconstruction of relations” and identities (Hicks 2001, 141). This detachment of groups can affect all sectors of society, including economic and political institutions. The effects of trauma can remain hidden for long periods of time until a trigger event occurs, and the trauma will manifest itself in ways such as aggression or victimization. Trauma is the disease affecting a nation; expressed violence is merely a symptom of a much deeper problem. Although there have been several such events in Rwanda’s history, the trigger for the genocide in Rwanda occurred when president Habariyama was assassinated. The Hutus had already been preparing to execute mass murders of Tutsis, and used the event to initiate the genocide (“The Road Out of Hell”).

On a similar note, the politics of collective memory are crucial to understanding conflicts in the developing world, especially ethnic conflicts. Memory is not independent of the timeless struggle for control; memory is itself a political means: “everything that exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions” (Nietzsche 1956). Just as collective memories can be deeply affected by traumas, elites can manipulate collective memory itself by exploiting trigger-events to suit their own purposes. The Belgians and the Germans both capitalized on Rwandan memory by creating hostilities between the Hutus and Tutsis that were never prominent before (Jones 1995, 19).

Along with creating false memories of threat, states can also “improve, sanitize, gentrify, idealize or sanctify the past; or... discredit, defame, denigrate or even to blot out portions of it” (Hirsch 26). States may choose to ignore or suppress traumas, perhaps attempting to hasten reconstruction or democratization, as in the case of present-day Rwanda. Whatever the case, it must be noted the unintentional suppression of trauma also leads to the same dangerous breakdown mentioned by Hicks.

Clearly understanding collective memory lends insight into the realm of conflicts and peace, but is there any instructive significance to such a lengthy discussion? Recognizing the substantial effects of collective memory should influence the direction of conflict resolution and peace-building. Hicks, and others, point to the word “reconciliation” as explored by David Crocker in “Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework.” Crocker uses the word “reconciliation” to differentiate multi-leveled restoration from mere nonviolent coexistence of opposing parties. A realistic stage of reconciliation is reached when former enemies may continue to disagree, but continue to freely exchange information concerning the past and present, as well as to unite on common goals, such as reconstruction. Whereas this goal is difficult, but realistic, Crocker expounds on an even higher standard for peace, namely reconciliation as, “forgiveness, mercy, a shared comprehensive vision, mutual healing, and harmony” (Crocker 1999). Though this standard is more difficult to defend, Crocker claims that robust reconciliation will help safeguard societies from renewed violence.

Crocker’s standard of reconciliation is admittedly idealistic; however, using it as a vision toward which to assemble comprehensive goals could contribute much to the reconstruction of war-torn countries, including Rwanda. The imperative changes from merely treating symptoms, such as violent outbreaks, to treating the underlying disease, namely trauma. Using the term “reconciliation” in cases of genocide, as

opposed to conflict-resolution or peace-building, also places necessary emphasis on the need to literally reconcile two traumatized groups to one another. It is vital for this process to reach even the individual level—for the individuals, not the officials, must learn to live cooperatively. In the subsequent sections, three concepts are offered that practically apply the notion of reconciliation in transforming collective memories, contributing to a lasting peace and reconstruction.

Validating Track II Diplomacy

Reconciliation requires simultaneous peace-building initiatives at multiple levels of society. This can be especially crucial in the case of ethnic conflicts, because much of the fighting is committed not by governmental officials but rather ordinary citizens, as demonstrated in Rwanda. Therefore, Track I, or top-level, diplomacy is relevant, but alone insufficient in reconciling opposing ethnicities to one another after a genocide. Instead, what is needed: an intentional development of Track II and Track III diplomacy.

These terms were originally coined by James Montville, who differentiated traditional diplomatic initiatives from “unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversarial groups with goals of: developing strategies, influencing public opinions and organizing resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict” (Chigas 2003). As traditional diplomacy aims at negotiations between high-ranking officials, track II diplomacy focuses on progress between citizens in positions of influence. Track II activities can embody short-term or long-term programs, such as riot control, rebuilding clinics, dispensing school lessons on ethnic tolerance, and conflict mediation, according to Botcharova. Another technique involves joint-facilitated workshops, which unite community representatives of opposing groups and target both “relational transformation as well as societal integration” (2001, 285).

Some, including Diana Chigas, have even distinguished a third avenue of diplomacy termed Track III, which works with villagers and localities to rebuild trust and social cohesion from the bottom up (2003, *Beyond Intractability*). The purpose of Track II and Track III is not to replace traditional diplomacy but rather to create space and freedom for politicians to “take risks for peace” (Botcharova 2001, 284).

Unfortunately, the international community has failed to support Track II and III strategies as a vital force for peace (2001, 284). These diplomatic avenues are essential in order for conflict-resolution to reach all levels of post-genocide society, thus creating an environment conducive to the various levels of reconciliation mentioned by Crocker.

Supporting the Purposes of Truth Commissions

While a country and its memory heal from the aftermath of genocide, there is a very real tension between the need to remember and forget—there is actually a time for both. Acknowledging that there are limits in remembering, survivors of conflict—both victim and perpetrator—often express a deep necessity for transparency, honesty, and justice regarding past atrocities (Staub and Pearlman 217).

Two common methods used internationally to restore truth include truth commissions and international criminal tribunals. Both avenues provide spaces within the rule of law wherein justice can be attained. While there are strengths and limitations of

both approaches, the use of truth commissions is in many ways a more effective means of determining and expressing truth after an ethnic conflict. Criminal tribunals embody trials with the aim of prosecuting human rights violations, while truth commissions undertake the task of providing a full account of the conflict through a process of sifting and drafting that is absent during a tribunal (Minow 61).

For a variety of reasons, truth commissions are ideal in addressing the role of collective memory after genocide, especially in a developing country. Audrey Chapman clarifies that reconciliation requires acknowledgement and grieving past atrocities, but in a way that will propel the country toward a renewed political culture and shared future (258). Due to the vast amounts of criminals involved in ethnic conflicts, prosecuting all criminals in a tribunal would affect a major segment of national population and could undermine the process of reconciliation and reconstruction (258). When combined with principles of Track II diplomacy, truth commissions have the propensity to validate individual experiences (Staub and Pearlman 2001, 217), including “forgotten victims in forgotten places” overlooked by tribunals (Minow 1998, 60). More importantly, effective truth commissions play an instrumental role in rewriting “the history of what happened” (Minow 1998, 60). After extensive information gathering, truth commissions provide written reports that provide holistic accounts of violence from both victims and perpetrators (Minow 1998, 60). The fact that these reports are written is significant, because it allows the report to remain the same for future generations—thus providing a certain amount of insurance against the future exploitation of memory by elites. Unfortunately truth commissions often lack the time and resources to produce reports that adequately serve that purpose, which is crucial, Minow argues, to increase the effectiveness of truth commissions (1998, 61).

Truth commissions may be pivotal instruments in reconciliation, not only addressing the needs of collective memory, but also protecting national memory against the possibility of future manipulation. The final suggestion for reconciliation applications bears in mind the financial constraints of both Track II diplomacy initiatives and truth commissions in the unique context of development.

Shaping Reconstruction for Reconciliation

Thus far this paper has addressed the implementation of peace as a means toward attaining reconstruction. While peace is foundational in cultivating a stable and extensive restoration of democracy, the argument can be made that just as reconciliation aids reconstruction, so reconstruction can also fuel reconciliation.

One essential step in reconciliation is for both parties to move beyond mere nonviolent coexistence. It is vital to unite former adversaries in a common purpose, cultivating cooperation for a mutually desired cause outside of the resolution process itself. The reconstruction process often meets such criteria, and presents both parties with the vital need to engage one another. Staub and Pearlman visualize forms that reconstruction takes on the road to reconciliation:

Governments, organizations... and community groups can all promote such deep engagements. These can involve shared ceremonies and memorials, as discussed above, or building new institutions of society. It can involve joint projects in any realm, from agriculture to business enterprise, to building new houses (2001, 225).

The applications mentioned by Staub and Pearlman are projects initiated at the micro-level of society—just as genocide often occurs on personal terms, so projects must also be implemented at more intimate levels. Projects whose aim is to protect and provide for children are especially useful, since children's needs are often a universal interest among groups (2001, 225).

Perhaps the biggest argument in favor of using reconstruction as a means to reconciliation consists of fundamental economics. Exclusive projects that target peace-building efforts cost considerable amounts of domestic incomes and foreign aid—money that will thus be unavailable for funding infrastructure or institutional reform (Crocker). This is extremely significant, since most genocide-affected countries often lack sufficient resources even without the strains of conflict.

Along the same lines, organizations share natural responsibility in promoting reconstruction activities in healing countries. Organizations such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as other development agencies, can act as third-parties by offering incentives for both parties to join in development projects shaped to meet the unique goals of reconciliation (Staub and Pearlman 225).

Conclusion

The ancient Greek word for truth is *alētheia*, which is literally translated as “the unforgotten.” The opposite of truth is not inaccuracy, but rather the forgotten (Booker 2001, 781). In order to restore truth after genocide—without which the basic foundations of a judicial system and sociopolitical culture would be lacking—it is necessary to create space for remembering. Validating Track II diplomacy, strengthening truth commissions, and shaping reconstruction for reconciliation are three significant avenues to work toward Crocker's view of reconciliation as mutual healing. The uniquely intimate, vicious nature of genocide creates a trauma in the collective memories for generations, carrying the propensity to sabotage reconciliation and also reconstruction. In order to ensure a lasting peace, the international community must recognize the significance of collective memory and initiate multi-faceted approaches that reconcile opposing groups on all levels of society.

References

- Booth, James W. 2001. "The Unforgotten: Memories of Justice." *American Political Science Review*, 95, 4: 777-791.
- Botcharova, Olga. 2001. "Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy." In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raymond G. Helmick, S.J. and Rodney L. Petersen. Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Chigas, Diana. 2003. "Track II (Citizen) Diplomacy." *Beyond Intractability*, www.beyondintractability.org: <21. October 2005>.
- Crocker, David A. 1999. "Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework." *Ethics and International Affairs*, 13: 43-64.
- Chapman, Audrey R. 2001. "Truth Commissions as Instruments of Reconciliation." In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raymond G. Helmick, S.J. and Rodney L. Petersen. Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Hirsch, Herbert. 1995. *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Jones, Bruce D. 2001 by the International Peace Academy. *Peacemaking in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- Minow, Martha. 1998. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Nietzsche, Friederich. 1956. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Double Day.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. 1999. "Collective Memory: the Two Cultures." *Sociological Theory*, 17, 3: 333-348.
- "The Road Out of Hell." *The Economist Newspaper, Ltd.*, 25. March 2004.
- Staub, Ervin and Laurie Ann Pearlman. 2001. "Healing, Reconciliation, and Forgiving after Genocide and Other Collective Violence." In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raymond G. Helmick, S.J. and Rodney L. Petersen. Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.