Berghof Foundation

Transforming
War-Related Identities

Individual and Social Approaches to Healing and Dealing with the Past

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About the Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series:

The Dialogue Series is an offshoot of the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation. Each topic in the series is chosen because it is particularly relevant to societies in conflict and the practice of conflict transformation, and because it raises important issues at the present time. In each Dialogue, practitioners and scholars critically engage and debate in light of their experience.

Typically, a Dialogue includes one lead article from key experts, and several commentaries from practitioners and others. Rather than presenting a single analysis, these practitioner-scholar encounters stimulate debate, integrating different perspectives, challenging prevailing views and comparing research findings with experiences and insights on the ground. Importantly, Dialogues, as works of broad relevance, are distributed in print version as well as online.

We invite readers to respond to the papers (as to all articles). Interesting and original contributions can be added to the web version of the Dialogue.

Up to 2016, the editors have initiated eleven Dialogues:

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Introduction

Martina Fischer and Beatrix Austin

In memory of Dan Bar-On

This Handbook Dialogue is dedicated to *Dan Bar-On,* who spent most of his life reflecting on practical approaches for dealing with the past and exploring how people whose lives and identities have been shattered by violence come to live a decent life again. Dan Bar-On worked as a clinical and social psychologist and university lecturer and was Co-Director of the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME, located in Beit Jala) together with his Palestinian colleague Sami Adwan. Bar-On engaged in personal encounters, intergroup dialogue and developing oral history projects in a variety of sensitive areas. He contributed substantially to re-establishing relations between individuals from Germany and Israel, bringing children of Holocaust victims and survivors together with children of Nazi perpetrators. The empirical knowledge that he gained in this context led him to search for new forms of exchange and rapprochement in another sensitive and demanding political context: he initiated and facilitated dialogues between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians (Bar-On 1995; 2006). As a scholar and peace practitioner, he also explored methods of story-telling with people from many other regions and war-torn societies. During his stay as a guest researcher at the Berghof Center in Berlin (2008), for example, he led a workshop with practitioners from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia and Macedonia and supported them in finding new perspectives on their own context by drawing comparisons with the conflict in Israel-Palestine.[1]

What we could see from Dan Bar-On's studies from Germany and the Middle East, and from our partners in other war-torn societies, is that coming to terms with the past is a long-term process that lasts for generations rather than decades. Furthermore, we realised that war and mass atrocities have intergenerational effects on the descendants of victims and victimisers alike (Bar-On 1999, 126). We have also learnt that dealing with the past processes do not progress in a linear way. Individuals and collectives do not proceed from painful memories and hatred to healing and reconciliation in a straightforward way: usually, such processes move in loops marked by progress and backlashes in a very flexible dynamic. Dan Bar-On also strongly underlined that in societies affected by ethnopolitical violence, processes of healing

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1   See http://www.berghof-foundation.org/programmes/southeast-europe/reconciliation-in-practice/. See also Dudouet, Fischer and Schmelzle 2008.

and relationship-building need to take place both on the interpersonal and on the intergroup level. As violent conflicts "destroy the confidence in a social contract that a society achieved earlier", this means "that even within the same families (...) family bonds were destroyed due to the conflict [...]. Therefore, the process of reconciliation has to address and try to rebuild trust and confidence" (ibid., 71).

Furthermore, as we learned from Dan Bar-On, silencing the past and building a wall of silence around what he calls the "Undescribable" and "Undiscussable"[2] can be a necessary step and method for individuals and collectives to survive the horror and pain. However, although societies often go through a period of silence after having experienced mass atrocities and oppression, there will follow a time when people start to speak out, a period when they start to tell their stories, to share their experience, and to ask questions. In such periods, people often discover that different "truths" exist. This is particularly the case in societies exposed to ethnopolitical conflicts. In accepting that different interpretations of the past exist, and in seeking to understand the different versions and perspectives, societies can forge new identities and – at best – find empathy for the others' views (Adwan/Bar-On 2012). Given that organised violence has complex psychosocial impacts on both individuals and collectives, relationships change fundamentally and trust is almost lost in war-torn communities. In order to rebuild trust and relationships, acknowledgement and respect for the suffering of the victims are prerequisites. Giving victims a voice, "story-telling" is therefore an important element of coping with painful memories.

In preparing for this Dialogue issue, we were able to draw on a significant body of work. Scholars in clinical and social psychology began to systematically investigate the consequences of war and atrocities in the second half of the 20th century. In the 1980s, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was conceptualised as a formal psychiatric disorder ,first among Holocaust survivors and their families, later among Vietnam veterans. But although today we know more about what was earlier silenced, the unavoidable question for peace researchers and practitioners remains: Can we do anything about it?

There is still much research to be done on developing practical approaches, as, once again, Dan Bar-On pointed out: "We know, since Freud, that what you know and cannot handle or control, you tend to repress anew, thereby bringing it back to its undiscussable form. How can we relate to all this new awareness, except to repress it again? What can we do about these severe impediments, especially as we hardly acknowledge what has happened and recognize its massive after-effects? Can we do something, so that these patterns of doing-thinking-talking will not be simply perpetuated and multiply again and again? (...) Where can we locate, within ourselves, within others, between 'us' and 'them' the hidden 'bad-seeds' of past violence? If we can identify them, can we do something to reduce their destructive power without losing our own power or vitality altogether?" (Bar-On 1999, 127).

There is no way of simply developing "techniques" or "blueprints" for individuals or groups for coming to terms with the past and dealing with painful memories. Bar-On insisted that any reconciliatory process needs to be based on a psychosocial component as well as a legal one, since within a reconciliatory process, several issues have to be addressed simultaneously: specifically, the unresolved issues regarding perpetrators and victims. Story-telling may take an important role in this, but must be accompanied by punishment of the perpetrators, compensation for victims, formal agreements between the parties and economic and educational initiatives to change the status quo in asymmetric contexts (ibid., 72, with reference to Maoz 2004). Dan Bar-On also warned against having overly high expectations:

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[2] In his book "The Indescribable and the Undiscussable. Reconstructing Human Discourse after Trauma", Dan Bar-On (1999) addressed the difficulties in making sense of each other's feelings, behaviour and discourse both in everyday life and after traumatic experiences. Acknowledging and working through these difficulties is the subject of the book. Based on a review of the relevant psychological and philosophical literature, he identifies two categories of obstacles and challenges: first, the "indescribable", as it appears when individuals try to understand and integrate threatening and painful experiences into their lives; second, the "undiscussable", as it appears in the transmission, from generation to generation, of traumatic experiences (e.g. the transmission of experiences in families of Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators). Dan Bar-On shows how descendants can work through the burden of the past by confronting themselves and each other through a group encounter. Furthermore, he proposes a new theoretical psychological framework for understanding the dynamic of such processes.

"*The concept of reconciliation suggests that the enemies of yesterday will give up and let go of their hatred, animosity or wish for revenge, as well as their identity that had been constructed around the conflict. One expects that a new identity construction will develop together with a new relationship between former enemies that will address the roots of the conflict, not only its unfortunate outcomes. But how can we create such a deep process of change in people who have been committed to the conflict, in some places for generations, in others for a substantial part of their lives? Are these expectations realistic or is it wishful thinking and talking that has little substance in intractable conflicts?*" (ibid., 67).

However, Bar-On's work was carried and deeply inspired by what he called a "moral imagination" and a strong belief that it would contribute to recovery from a violent past and help to create a peaceful future, an imagination "of what it means to care for one another, to respond to pain, to speak in the right tone to someone vulnerable, to touch softly without words when another person needs it, to imagine good action, virtuous conduct, acting well in this messy and specific situation here and now without general rules to go by" (Bar-On 1999, 218).

By dedicating this Handbook Dialogue to Dan Bar-On, we want to express our deep respect for his important work, which continues to inspire our thinking. His commitment to nonviolent conflict transformation and finding appropriate ways of healing the wounds of the past was unique and irreplaceable. In our recollections and in our daily work, he is still with us, encouraging us to follow his gently-spoken, yet deep-reaching quest to come to terms with a violent past in a way which serves justice and at the same time is open to a different and peaceful future.

What is this Dialogue about and whom does it address?

In all the post-war regions in which we engaged – together with a variety of partners – over the past two decades, we faced the crucial question of how to deal with traumatic experiences, painful memories and war-related identities. In many societies emerging from war, people are constantly dealing with the past in one way or another, although with diverging and often even opposing purposes. Transitional justice strategies have become an important element of post-war reconstruction programmes established by international organisations and donors. Recommendations for these programmes tend to include war crimes prosecution by international, hybrid or domestic courts, truth commissions, lustration of state administrations, symbolic reparations or material compensation, as well as psychosocial support for those affected by the wars, incentives for societal dialogue, or initiatives that provide space for "working through" or alternative views on history. However, there is still a lack of knowledge of how the different transitional justice approaches impact on societies affected by violence, on groups as well as individuals.

The experience that in many places transitional justice has been conceptualised too much in a legal sense and that the needs of the victims have often been ignored (Lekha Sriram et al. 2013) has also helped to sensitise international actors, scholars and practitioners and encouraged them to think about more victim-centred approaches. International organisations (such as the *World Health Organization*), private foundations and aid agencies (e.g. the *War Trauma Foundation, World Vision,* and the *World Council of Churches* together with the *Eastern Mennonite University*) have in the meantime come to the conclusion that psychological aid is a must for programmes aiming to assist societies recovering from war (see World Health Organization et al. 2011). However, studies that focus on the psychosocial legacies of war and on war-related identities from an interdisciplinary perspective are still rare.[3]

The question of how individuals and collectives can come to terms with war-related memories or trauma after mass atrocities is crucial for framing post-war relationships. This topic is related to a set of

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3   As a positive example and exception see, for instance, various contributions applying an "identity lens" in Paige (2014) and in Fischer and Simić (2016).

other questions: How do the processes of coping on the individual and collective level match each other, and how do the diverse dimensions of identity formation relate to each other? How should we deal with trans-generational legacies of violence? How can the needs of the victims be served in an appropriate way, and how should "cultures of victimhood" that stem from past violence be addressed? Scholars as well as practitioners who are working on the transformation of violent conflict and peacebuilding face these questions on a daily basis. We therefore think that experts from both research and practice can benefit from the discussion presented in this Dialogue.

One of the reasons why we decided to publish a Handbook Dialogue on "*Transforming War-related Identities*" is that although much has been written and said about the psychological and psychosocial impact of war-related violence and dealing with trauma and PTSD – and the Berghof Foundation has also supported research on these issues4 - some research gaps continue to exist. In particular, we see a need to better understand the complex relationship between individual coping strategies and processes of healing at the collective level. Furthermore, we want to explore how the processes at different levels relate to each other. Another reason was to learn from examples in different regions and cultural contexts. Finally, we want to provide space for scholars and practitioners to discuss questions related to dealing with the past, healing and identity formation from different academic disciplines and perspectives.

The questions mentioned above are discussed in our Dialogue by scholars and practitioners, peace activists, psychologists and social scientists. Brandon Hamber's lead article analyses diverse approaches for dealing with painful memories and discusses how different dimensions (interpersonal and intergroup relations, individual and collective memories and identities) relate to one another. The essay builds on experiences from South Africa, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Northern Ireland, where Hamber chairs the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) at Ulster University. Scholar-practitioners from other contexts comment on his thoughts and suggestions. Olivera Simić (Griffith University, Brisbane) and David Becker (Sigmund Freud University, Berlin) focus on working with trauma and reflect on experiences in coping with painful memories in the Balkans. Andrea Zemskov-Züge (Berghof Foundation) brings in examples from the Caucasus (Georgia/Abkhazia) and Undine Whande's text makes reference to South Africa and to experiences from Germany in dealing with the legacies of the Second World War.

Contributions to this Dialogue

Brandon Hamber's lead article ("Dealing with Painful Memories and Violent Pasts. Towards a Framework for Contextual Understanding") begins with an analysis of the impact of mass atrocities on societies, which includes a destruction of trust, relationships and belonging. In this context, the author outlines critical thoughts on the scholarly discussion on stages and timelines of conflict and activities for conflict transformation. Categories such "post-conflict", "post-agreement" or "society in transition" are problematic, in Hamber's view, given that after mass violence: "A world is created where nowhere is seen as safe and where the line between death and extreme suffering on the one hand and ordinary living on the other is obliterated. Not only does extreme political violence tell victims something about their place in society, but it also dehumanises them through words", for instance via hate speech. As a consequence: "Individual victims can become estranged from their families, communities and wider society. This undermines their sense of belonging to society" (Hamber in this volume, 3). Therefore Hamber speaks of an "extreme political traumatisation", consisting of structural and direct forms of violence, discursive distortion, and destruction of social ties, "not only between victims and their place in society (their country or citizenship), but also between individuals, groups and communities in that society" (ibid., 4). Hamber analyses different types of intervention, ranging from *psychosocial initiatives* to *people-to-people peacebuilding,* looking at various examples (Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Northern Ireland) and various experiences with successful or less successful peace processes. He shows that individual processes

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4   See, for instance, Bloomfield 2003; Enns 2007; Kühner 2003.

in coping with painful memories and war-related experiences and what is happening at the collective level are integrally linked but also sometimes out of step with each other. In order to explain what this means in practice, and how macro processes impact on individuals and society more broadly, he looks at frameworks of meaning, conditional factors, and forms of community mobilisation. He also discusses the problematic consequences of amnesties and impunity in coming to terms with mass crimes, which leads him to conclude that one has to promote a rights-based approach in transitional justice, to make sure that individuals and societies can recover from mass violence, trauma and destruction and achieve a degree of healing that enables them to build a common future.

Olivera Simić builds her reflections on the lead article on deeply personal experiences and approaches in her native country of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). In her comment ("Dealing with Painful Memories. Walking the (thin) Line between War and its Aftermath"), she retraces the violent escalation in BiH in the 1990s, arguing that the war that has torn apart the Bosnian society really is not over yet but only fought with other means. This continuation of confrontation makes it indispensable for a small number of activists to engage in dealing with the past even though they themselves have often been deeply traumatised by the past violence, and the work, although core to their identity, is deeply draining for them. Examining the present, the author states that there is, on the one hand, little interest in continuing to deal with the past, especially among the young, but that, at the same time, those who do continue to commemorate often do so from within their own feelings of victimhood, which leaves little room for shared understanding: "In BiH, so many different interpretations of the past exist that it is hard to imagine the establishment of any shared narrative in the near future" (Simić in this volume, 28). Considering this, Simić remains sceptical of some of the strategies suggested by Hamber. As far as Bosnia is concerned, she proposes to start with the small steps of making different stories heard and focusing not only on the negative experiences but also on the stories of rescuers and acts of solidarity: "In BiH there are countless people who during the war put themselves in grave danger to help others regardless of their ethnic background, and their stories should be acknowledged and documented" (ibid., 29).

David Becker, our second respondent, focuses his response ("Working on the Psychosocial Gap. Challenges, Hopes, Perspectives") on the seemingly impossible task of bringing both the personal-individual and social-collective perspective together: "'Psychosocial'", he writes, "does not represent an actual relationship. It merely implies an intention, a wish, at best perhaps a process" (Becker in this volume, 34). He proceeds to examine three propositions of the lead article in detail. First is the discussion of trauma, stressing that "trauma in the context of mass violence is not a one-off event, a single breakdown, nor does it have a clear pathology. It is a long and complex process, one that is sometimes more and sometimes less pathological. It is characterised by a difficult dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective. Our trauma language must try to reflect this as adequately as possible" (ibid., 36). Second, he focuses on the proposition of a sequence of intervention steps, critically stressing that "dealing with trauma cannot be considered part of 'specialised services' but needs to be understood as an element of every social interaction" (ibid., 38). Third, he underlines the necessity to remain open for a multitude of meaning, also reflecting back on the work of Dan Bar-On and Sami Adwan. Trauma, he concludes, is an experience that needs to be addressed in its specific context over and over again, in a political space that does not avoid conflict but attempts to transform it.

The third comment, by *Undine Whande*, is set in South Africa, where the German-born author has been working for many years ("Recalling South Africa. Memory Work across Time and Space"). She focuses on the sometimes obscured inter-generational dynamics of dealing with a violent past against experiences from her own family and from South Africa. Taking her stepping stone from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, she observes in present-day South Africa patterns of violence and "othering" that appear to be inherited from the days of apartheid. At the same time, issues of injustice are only now being tackled by a new generation. The interwovenness of generations and the legacies of the past are hardly straightforward: "The current parent and grandparent generations experienced apartheid violence and exclusion in ways that their children may not even be able to imagine from the perspective of their own lives. Yet even those

South African children privileged to now live lives sheltered from violence and poverty inherit something akin to 'emotional residues'; they absorb the unspoken and unprocessed past fears and sufferings of their parents" (Whande in this volume, 43). Whande traces such "emotional residues" across space – describing that sometimes, dealing with the past requires geographic distance – and time. They need attention as and when they surface, and the spaces for dealing with them need to become much more creative and inspired.

The fourth comment in the Dialogue takes us to the Caucasus and comes from *Andrea Zemskov-Züge* ("Dealing with the Past in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict. The Power of Narratives, Spaces and Rituals"). The author has been developing inter-generational dialogue formats in the conflict region over several years and reflects on the specific conditions of dealing with the past in settings marked by a physical separation of the ethnopolitical parties. She also ponders whether the role of insiders and outsiders does differ fundamentally. She proposes that, regardless of the setting, rituals and the sharing of personal stories have an important role to play: "(…) three elements – balanced history interpretations with clear moral markers, pluralistic spaces for remembering and discussing the past and suitable rituals of commemoration – are (…) crucial for enabling a society to deal with its violent past" (Zemskov-Züge in this volume, 58).

The contributions to this Dialogue offer a rich collection of material for reflecting on different approaches to dealing with painful memories and shed light on the obstacles that such processes necessarily face. However, considering the insights, evidence and reflections put forward in the lead article and comments, it is difficult to draw clear-cut conclusions and formulate policy recommendations. As *Brandon Hamber* states in his concluding chapter, after reflecting on all responses, the concept of "psychosocial" is helpful as it extends the boundaries of theory and practice beyond the individual but does not cover all relevant dimensions of human experience. The problem is that the material and social cannot be separated out. Therefore interventions that "focus on one side of the "psycho" or "social" equation or the other (…), or models that imply the "psycho" or "social" affects the other in a linear or even dynamic way, do not conceptually grasp how people live their lives and how their sense of well-being is constructed. That said, to find the words to capture this composite reality, or to outline what this means in practice for societies emerging from conflict, is not easy" (Hamber in this volume, 64). Furthermore he points to the phenomenon that "for many experiencing extreme political violence (…) violence is not a one-off or isolated event, and social problems are not merely variables affecting mental health that come and go with governments. Rather, life is a series of daily stressors of different kinds and magnitudes that cannot be disentangled easily or experienced in some sort of isolated way; they also generally persist long into the future" (ibid.). Such experiences cannot be captured by or fully represented by a series of projects or programmes, or one-dimensional models, as Hamber concludes, "as coming to terms with the past and human rights violations is essentially a personal lifelong project requiring different approaches and social practices at different moments that will shift and change with time" (ibid., 65).

Several open questions remain with regard to the connection between the individual and interpersonal processes of working through the legacies of past violence and concerning the collective processes. Furthermore, open questions will be left for further research on the timeframes and broader frameworks that integrate "remembered history". More research and practical reflection will be needed to explore how traumas involving whole communities and ethnic or religious identities emerge and how they are sustained. As John Paul Lederach outlined, such an exploration requires more than personal healing, and addressing generational trauma must "renegotiate" both history and identity.[5] "Deeper collective group trauma goes beyond counseling or dealing with a form of post-traumatic stress syndrome. While involving individuals, this arena of trauma healing must be understood and developed in collective and communal forms" (Lederach 2005, 145). It is important to explore not only the implications and challenges of healing at the level of individuals, but also to analyse how responses to trauma and healing can be conceptualised as wider social processes. "Renegotiating history and identity" therefore "attends to the ways that historic trauma connected with specific violent events forms and shapes the identity of individuals and of whole

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5   Lederach 2005, 145, with reference to personal correspondence with Jarem Sawatsky 2003.

communities, and how those events can be channeled toward constructive engagement that responds to individual needs but seeks to shape the wider public and even national ethos" (ibid.). According to Lederach, there is a need to hold together the past and the future, "not as separate entities or as separate phases on a linear chart of change", but to face the challenge of "restorying", which continuously requires a creative engagement: "To restory is not to repeat the past, attempt to recreate it exactly as it was, nor act as if it did not exist. (...) To live between memory and potentiality is to live permanently in a creative space, pregnant with the unexpected. But it is also to live in the permanency of risk, for the journey between what lies behind and what lies ahead is never fully comprehended nor ever controlled. Such a space, however, is the womb of constructive change, the continuous birthplace of the past that lies before us" (ibid, 149).

The contributions to this Dialogue made it clear that the identities of individuals, and the identity narratives of collectives and societies, remain fluid in the aftermath of violence and traumatic experiences. Working through the legacy of violence and the effects of pain and injustice takes an inter-generational path and manifests itself in surprising places and forms, starting with individual and interpersonal encounters and group dialogues, but also including encounters in music, literature and arts. The task of peacebuilders and conflict transformers must therefore be to continue to keep a keen eye on the state of a post-war society and its citizens, conflict stakeholders, victims and perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers. Transforming identities shaped by war and violence needs a long-term commitment, a creative repertoire, an ever open space for discussion, re-examination and silence, simultaneously and consecutively granted. More than anything, it takes the humility to accept that identities shaped by war and violence have the capacity to change only if they are allowed to be part of the experience, but never the only part.

Martina Fischer & Beatrix Austin, Berlin, March 2016

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Dealing with Painful Memories and Violent Pasts

Towards a Framework for Contextual Understanding

Brandon Hamber

Content

The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering (Ben Okri).

1 Introduction

Some 20 years ago, in late 1994, shortly after completing my training as a clinical psychologist in South Africa, I met a friend and colleague for coffee. I recall asking him, as he worked at the time for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) in Johannesburg, if there were any interesting political or social developments on the horizon. He responded that within the Department of Justice of the newly elected South African government an idea had surfaced for a truth commission. I had never heard of a truth commission. I questioned him on the proposal and he gave a brief outline of the idea. I recall thinking it was foolish. Investigating the truth about the apartheid past as if such a thing existed, at least theoretically, was going to be impossible – the idea, I felt, was ambitious and ill founded.

Having said that, I was fascinated and began to read about other truth commissions, particularly about victim experiences, mainly in Latin America. From there, one event led to another, and soon I found myself working for CSVR with victims testifying before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) (see Hamber 2009). At the time, I had little concept of how significant the truth commission process in South Africa was to become. Over the coming years, I was immersed in the debates, developments and processes surrounding the commission, and over time my work moved to other countries. As it has developed over the years, one of my primary foci has become the relationship between how individual (largely victim) processes of coming to terms with mass atrocity (a micro perspective) relates to the collective or political process of finding ways of dealing with the past (a macro perspective).

This is precisely the question I have been asked to reflect on in this volume. To put it another way: what is the role of different approaches for dealing with painful memories and violent pasts, and how do the different dimensions – interpersonal and intergroup relations, memories and identities at the individual and collective level – relate to one another? Can one constructively address victim identities and cultures of victimhood that may stem from painful or traumatic experiences? It is not easy to answer these questions, and I have written many thousands of words trying to do just that. Here I can only offer a modest contribution to this complex issue.

Before trying to answer the questions directly, I would like to contextualise the issues. I will first outline a way of understanding the impact of large-scale political violence and the needs this creates in *Section Two*. The different methods used to address the needs will then be discussed in *Section Three*. I will provide a framing comment to the debates that follow in *Section Four*. The essay will then highlight four approaches that can narrow the gap between individual healing processes and collective strategies (*Section Five*). In conclusion, I will return to the story above and briefly discuss the issue of managing complexity (*Section Six*).

2 The impact of mass violence: destruction of trust, relationships and belonging

Although I am increasingly uncomfortable with trying to categorise different contexts ("post-conflict", "post-agreement", "society in transition"), the assumption behind this essay is that we are talking about a certain type of context. While all contexts differ, this essay reflects on cases in which large-scale armed conflict has taken place that has seen not only the loss of life and a range of other human rights violations (for example, torture) but also the destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods. In short, the context can be described as one of extreme political traumatisation (Becker 2004). Although normally applied to inter-state conflict, most of the remarks made in this essay concern intra-state conflict. Typically these conflicts result in the breakdown of inter-community relationships and social connections on top of other destructive impacts.

A world is created where nowhere is seen as safe and where the line between death and extreme suffering on the one hand and ordinary living on the other is obliterated. Not only does extreme political violence tell victims something about their place in society, but it also dehumanises them through words (for example through the labelling of Tutsis as "cockroaches" during the Rwandan genocide). Individual victims can become estranged from their families, communities and wider society. This undermines their sense of belonging to society (Hamber 2009; Becker 2004, 2006), and the estrangement is often exacerbated by social conditions such as poverty, racism, gender discrimination and exclusion.

The social fabric, structures and institutions are also damaged, and norms, values and principles are undercut (Summerfield 1996; Lykes/Mersky 2006). The extreme nature of the violence alters individual and social meaning systems, as well as social relations and ways of life (Martín-Baró 1996). This has been described as a process whereby the habitual (normative) order of a society is overturned, and social relations and meaning systems are profoundly altered (Humphrey 2002). At a social level, trust and a sense of connection between groups, normally a key part of well-being, are destroyed, and the concept of the negative "other" emerges or hardens (Beneduce et al. 2006; Williamson/Robinson 2006; Staub 2006).

These types of conflicts, at least on some levels, defy classification. Michael Humphrey (2002) argues that such contexts best match the post-modern disposition, in which notions of rupture, discontinuity and disconnection are commonplace. Dori Laub (2000, cited in Hamber 2009) talks about massive trauma of this kind as amorphous, ahistorical, not delimited by place, time or agency; it precludes its knowing, and not knowing is part of the cycle of destruction. The idea of extreme traumatisation has also been used to describe such contexts, that is, social contexts characterised by individual and collective processes where authorities have the power to violate human rights regularly, causing successive and cumulative injuries (Becker 1995; Kornfeld 1995; Becker et al. 1989).

Thus, what one could call "extreme political traumatisation" is essentially made up of five elements (see Hamber 2009, 22ff. for a full discussion):

1.   structural violence cut through by race, gender, age and class;
2.   direct violence inflicted through physical harm that is laden with social meaning;
3.   psychological destruction and alteration of individual and community meaning systems through extreme violence and through dislocating ("uncanny") acts such as targeting civilians, torture, killings or disappearance, among other things;

4.   discursive distortion marked by a rhetoric of dehumanisation, deceptive public discourse and lies; exclusionary language aimed at creating a lack of social belonging and in some cases inflaming direct violence; and

5.   destruction of social ties and relationships, not only between victims and their place in society (their country or citizenship), but also between individuals, groups and communities in that society.

3 Types of intervention: psychosocial initiatives and people-to-people peacebuilding

The impact of mass atrocity and armed conflict is extreme; it moves beyond the physical and psychological arguably into the existential, overlapping and interlinking with the social environment (for example, through poverty and poor infrastructure). What is happening at the social level, such as the destruction of social ties, is integrally connected to individual well-being, and vice versa.

There are attempts to categorise the impact of violence as a set of standard psychological responses. Some specific responses to direct (political) violence include self-blame, vivid re-experiencing of the event, relationship difficulties, anxiety, nightmares, feelings of helplessness, hypervigilance, depression, feelings of social disconnectedness, fear and even substance-abuse related difficulties. These are often grouped under the overarching term of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

That said, the diagnostic category of PTSD has been critiqued in terms of its scientific validity (Bracken/ Petty 1998). My objection to the concept is simpler. PTSD and the word "trauma" have become shorthand that tells us little about the context of violence, its cultural specificities, and how dealing with violence is linked with the socio-economic, political and cultural context. The concept pathologises a social phenomenon (political violence), and "trauma" has begun to change the language of suffering. Victims end up expressing themselves in medical language ("I am suffering from PTSD", "I am traumatised"), masking the detail of the full nature of interlocking suffering where direct harm from violence intersects with class (generally poverty and inequality) and other forms of social exclusion that are interconnected with gender, age or race, among other factors. Focusing on alleviating symptoms can also undermine resilience,[1] as well as local mechanisms and strategies for recovery.

As a concept, trauma, and PTSD specifically, drives thinking towards homogeneity, as if all experiences of violence have the same outcome or need the same treatment, whether caused by domestic violence, political acts or natural disasters. This strips away the meaning individuals attach to violence in different contexts. To one individual a nightmare might be immaterial, to another it might be a reason to seek medical help, and to yet another it might be the ancestors passing on a message or sign of spiritual discord (Palmary et al. 2014; Summerfield 1996). Much distress among communities of migrants in South Africa,

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[1]   Resilience has been defined in many diverse ways in a range of contexts and fields of study. A detailed discussion of the term is beyond the scope of this essay. However, the definition given by Norris et al. (2008, 130) is one of the clearest and most adaptable. Resilience is, in their words, "a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance". Adaptive capacities are resources with dynamic attributes, and Norris et al. believe that the specific elements of their definition can be operationalised differently for individuals, grassroots groups, larger human communities or entire ecologies. Importantly, resilience is not equated with the outcome but rather with the process linking resources (adaptive capacities) to outcomes (adaptation).

for example, has been found to emanate from their material existence with its poverty and joblessness, as well as ongoing forms of violence embedded in the community and home, and from the way this existence is interpreted through the metaphysical realm (e.g., as the result of ancestors, community disruption or the consequences of sin) (Palmary et al. 2014).

Extreme levels of political violence, therefore, disrupt meaning systems, ways of life and everyday existence. Different violent and political incidents have distinctive political, social and cultural meanings and, thus, specific impacts. Understanding the attributed meanings is integral to recovery (Hamber 2009).

At a practical level, four broad categories or types of interventions that could improve the psychosocial well-being of those in the midst of humanitarian and political emergencies have been identified. These can be thought of as a pyramid (see *Figure 1*). Needs listed at the bottom of the pyramid require the most intervention, and those identified thereafter need progressively less, although all layers are important and require implementation concurrently (IASC 2007). The most extensive task, according to the *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings,* is to (re)establish security, adequate governance and services that address basic physical needs (food, water, basic health care, control of communicable diseases, etc.). Secondly, help needs to be offered in accessing key community and family support (family tracing and reunification, assisted mourning and communal healing ceremonies, etc.). Thirdly, non-specialised supports (these can include emotional and livelihood support) for the still smaller number of people who additionally require more focused individual, family or group interventions by trained and supervised workers should be ensured. Finally, the specialised services of psychologists, psychiatrists or other trained individuals should be offered to people with severe mental disorders whenever their needs exceed the capacities of existing primary/general health services (IASC 2007).

Figure 1: Intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies (IASC 2007, 12).

There are many different types of intervention implicit in the four levels outlined above. Less clinical and community-driven approaches include activities such as group sharing of problems, community dialogue, traditional healing rituals, art projects, theatre initiatives, interpersonal skills development, training on issues such as human rights and mediation, engagement in livelihood projects. The umbrella category of psychosocial interventions is often used to describe such approaches, although what specifically constitutes a psychosocial project is not always clear (Galappatti 2003). There is also a connection between

these types of psychosocial initiatives and what is called people-to-people peacebuilding, which involves, for instance, the promotion of co-operation, prejudice-reduction work, dialogue, and participation in common activities such as art and theatre (Gawerc 2006). These activities can help build relationships (Lederach 1997); they also provide valuable forums for reconstituting meaning and addressing the impact of extensive violence.

That said, there are debates about the efficacy of different approaches (Psychosocial Working Group 2003). For example, are individual interventions such as counselling effective in a context where structural injustice remains, or can group interventions that may be judged valuable by individuals (such as a drama programme with victims of violence) have a scalable impact on wider society? There are also difficulties concerning who drives such programmes, for example, "outsiders", local NGOs and/or global NGOs. The psychosocial method also approaches well-being largely from the perspective of the individual and only minimally considers the impact of psychosocial approaches on peacebuilding and social change more broadly (Hamber/Gallagher 2014). More recently the term "psychosocial practices" has been used to capture strategies driven locally and within society that contribute to well-being, such as the use of rituals, religious ceremonies, mourning practices, processes that mix trauma language with different approaches (as in some religious counselling), familial support, and the support of friends and peer networks, among many other methods (ibid.). These are, in fact, the main ways individuals seek support, yet they receive little focus in the peacebuilding and psychosocial fields (Hamber/Gallagher 2014; Palmary et al. 2014).

Notwithstanding these debates, what is evident in the type of approaches outlined above is that the individual (psycho-) and collective (social) dimensions of well-being are clearly seen as important and interrelated. Some scholars argue they are not only interrelated but also indistinguishable (Williamson/ Robinson 2006). In other words, a key relationship exists between individual healing processes and collective strategies. This is where macro interventions (such as truth commissions or trials) and the individual impacts of conflict interface. Truth commissions, for example, are no longer seen as narrow legal instruments, and it is now commonplace to consider their social and psychological utility (Hayner 2010). This does not mean we should think of truth commissions as a therapy but rather consider their potential for contributing to the psychological healing of victims and repairing social relationships.

Truth commissions are only one macro strategy. Although every context is different, we see some convergence between different so-called macro strategies designed to deal with a legacy of political violence. These can include the prosecution of perpetrators of human rights violations; the establishment of inquiries into specific atrocities; the undertaking of a truth commission to investigate patterns of abuse; the vetting of the major actors from a previous regime, or their dismissal; the use of hybrid processes such as the *gacaca* in Rwanda or the *Fambul Tok* process in Sierra Leone to mend community relationships (see *Box 1* and *Box 2* overleaf); and the development of reparations and compensation programmes to assist victims. Other processes, such as implementing security sector reform, transforming police and military institutions, addressing the issue of ex-combatants, memorialisation, opening archives, building museums, rewriting official histories, offering apologies and building the interrelationship between transitional justice and development, are all now considered part of the wider field of transitional justice (and what I consider collective or macro strategies and processes). The UN Security Council (2004) argues that transitional justice strategies must be holistic and incorporate an eclectic range of mechanisms in an integrated way. Implicit to such an approach is the assumption that transitional justice processes can be useful to society or the collective, as well as meeting some of the needs of victims, e.g. the need for acknowledgement, truth and justice.

Box 1: Gacaca – Rwanda

The genocide in Rwanda saw the death of some 800,000 Tutsi. As a result around 120,000 people suspected of sympathising with or supporting the *génocidaires*, most of them Hutu, were jailed in overcrowded, squalid conditions. To address this post-conflict justice problem, the community-based courts process of *gacaca* emerged, running from 2002 to 2012. *Gacaca*, which in Kinyarwanda translates as "grass", refers to the system of 11,000 community-based courts that prosecuted hundreds of thousands of genocide cases in Rwanda. Initially, *gacaca* prosecuted only low-level cases, but over time its mandate expanded to include those of senior political and military suspects. It drew partly on a traditional conflict resolution system used since the precolonial period to resolve low-level disputes but was modified substantially and codified under the 2001 Gacaca Law to deal with genocide cases. Key features of *gacaca* included the hearing of cases by locally elected judges in open spaces such as courtyards and marketplaces, the widespread participation by local citizens as witnesses and observers, the barring of professionally trained lawyers and judges from the process, and the use of a plea-bargaining scheme that stressed community service as a key sentencing mechanism (Clark 2010). The process had both serious shortcomings and positive outcomes (for a full review of these see Clark 2010, 2012; Haberstock 2014).

Box 2: Fambul Tok – Sierra Leone

According to the website of the *Fambul Tok* (Krio for "family talk") project, "*Fambul Tok* emerged in Sierra Leone as a face-to-face community-owned programme bringing together perpetrators and victims of the violence in Sierra Leone's eleven-year civil war through ceremonies rooted in the local traditions of war-torn villages. It provides Sierra Leonean citizens with an opportunity to come to terms with what happened during the war, to talk, to heal, and to chart a new path forward, together. *Fambul Tok* is built upon Sierra Leone's 'family talk' tradition of discussing and resolving issues within the security of a family circle. The program works at the village level to help communities organize ceremonies that include truth-telling bonfires and traditional cleansing ceremonies – practices that many communities have not employed since before the war. Through drawing on age-old traditions of confession, apology and forgiveness, *Fambul Tok* has revived Sierra Leoneans' rightful pride in their culture." A range of resources, including a film and teaching guides, are available at www.fambultok.com and more detail on the initiative at www.fambultok.org. Academic analysis and independent evaluation of the process is still emerging (see, for example, Cole 2012; Graybill 2010; Hoffman 2008 and Iliff 2012).

4 Framing comments and concepts

Before outlining how macro processes can impact on individuals and society, and in order to frame the debate in the rest of this essay, I would like to make some introductory points about the limits of various methods of dealing with the past and the political contexts in which they are employed.

Melanie Klein, the psychoanalytic theorist, says harm inflicted can never be *completely* "made good". We need to accept that we cannot repair the irreparable (bring back those who were killed) and that the future is always going to be an ambiguous place haunted by the ghosts of the past, while we try to move forward. Coming to terms with the past, especially with relation to mass atrocity, is a life-long process that is context-dependent and changes over time.

For some individuals, for example, a peace process might start to open the collective space in which their individual needs can be met, but for others, new challenges might follow. During the conflict the explanatory and meaning systems for your suffering may have been fairly straightforward ("They are an

evil enemy", "They are inhumane"), but after an armed conflict, as peace is made, these systems can be called into question by discourses that run counter to them ("We need to work with the enemy", "They have their reasons for their actions"), creating a new set of psychological tensions and challenges.

Healing, therefore, is learning to live with situations of extreme suffering and integrating them into one's life so that one can build relationships and engage productively, ensuring that loss does not dominate everyday experiences. We can think of healing as existing on a continuum (or perhaps as a pendulum), meaning that "living with" the suffering of the past will continually change relative to the social and political situation.

One way to think of this is to consider the individual's process of coming to terms with the past as "moving" at a different pace from what might be happening at a political level. There will always be the juxtaposition of one and the other. In South Africa, individuals (mainly widows) were often treated as the social embodiment of "the nation" during the SATRC process, rather than as individuals who were still trying to come to terms with their suffering (Hamber/Wilson 2002). They were at times expected to advance psychologically at the same pace as the state institutions, even if these were pursuing a national political agenda (e.g. reconciliation) rather than an individual healing agenda that could be "out of step" with what victims might desire (revenge, justice in courts) (ibid.*)*. Equally, I have seen the opposite, where victims can be exasperated by the fact that politicians want to keep fighting battles of the past in their name, when they want to attempt to reconcile with others.

But such phenomena are not only restricted to the level of national discourses. Without knowing it, some human rights groups can also "pressurise" victims into recasting their experience and suffering into the unfamiliar language of rights and violations. NGOs and psychosocial projects, too, can uncritically push the idea that "speaking out" and sharing stories is beneficial to victims. However, individuals might not feel they want to, or are ready to, do this (Palmary et al. 2014).

Separating out victims' needs as if unrelated to the political context is another way of twisting the individual and collective relationship. Hiving off so-called victims' needs as something that could be addressed like a set of symptoms through a series of interventions (e.g. counselling) would be an example of this. It is easy and tempting to latch uncritically onto supporting treatment methods that are multiple and diverse, ranging from cognitive behaviour therapy to various techniques such as eye movement therapy, to address the impact of political conflict. Those who "sell" such approaches offer them as curative, time-limited and cost-effective interventions and argue that they will apply to a range of population groups from refugees, victims of natural disasters to grieving mothers. Such techniques might help some individuals, but therapy for war-related trauma is a very small piece of what needs to be done and is at best complementary to other approaches.

Perhaps the area where we see the biggest imposition of an external desire to move processes forward at a different pace to that of how individuals might address their needs is in the language of "closure". The words of a victim of the conflict in Northern Ireland capture this dilemma better than I could ever explain it:

> *What's closure? What, you don't talk about it anymore? No there's no such thing as closure. Closure is a nice way of society saying, "for fuck sake dry your eyes and go on", that's what closure is. Closure is not about you, closure is about everybody else; that's what closure is about. For you it's about learning to live with a new situation and dreaming about the past. Closure is definitely someone else's agenda because how can you close on something that's in your head. How can you ever forget your brother or your mother or father or your sister? You can never forget about them and they will always be who they were and they will always be them…that's not closure it's learning to live with it and learning to live in a manner that's good for your health rather than being unhealthy, always being depressed about what happened* (cited in Lundy/McGovern 2005, 33).

The quote emphasises the pressure exerted through the "closure" agenda, but it also highlights a realistic view of healing as "learning to live" with what has happened, and that the past cannot *completely* be

"made good". Yet in public bodies such as truth commissions and prosecution processes, and sometimes in the words of politicians and the general public, closure is advocated.

My own experience in South Africa revealed that victims who testified to the SATRC often felt that there was an expectation to forgive the perpetrators, even if this was not articulated. When one thinks about reconciliation in the political context, there is always the danger of what Michael Ignatieff calls "false reconciliation" (Ignatieff 1996). He defines this as where different groups "indulge in the illusion that they had put the past behind them", with the party responsible for injustice trying to impose a "forgive and forget" mentality (Ignatieff 1996, 110). But "closure" is not going to be reached, and "forgetting" in an absolute sense is not possible.

Nonetheless, when concepts such as "closure" are introduced into public discourse or, for that matter, other tropes ("We need to turn the page but not close the book", "We should forgive but not forget", "We should prioritise the living victims not the dead ones"), we need to be aware that these are intertwined, depending on who is advocating them, with social and political power. In other words, there is often a struggle over who frames the debate about the past. This has ramifications for how we understand or assess what may or may not be going on for individuals. So when we ask how the individual processes of coming to terms with armed conflict and political violence relate to the collective process, we cannot analyse this outside of the macro framework in which it is being asked. The discourses of those in power can define the relationship between any individual process and a collective one.

So in theory we might say, as indeed my own work has done at times, that victims want truth, or justice is beneficial to mental health, but the reality of the delivery of these processes is always contested, incomplete, being negotiated and re-negotiated over long periods of time and through different political contexts. An example here would be Chile since the dictatorship, where the approach to justice has changed over time, moving from blanket amnesties to trials.

In other words, to properly answer the question of how dimensions such as interpersonal and intergroup relations, and memories and identities, relate to one another at the individual and collective level, we need to begin with two key issues in mind.

Firstly, we can never design a collective process or processes that can fully meet all individual needs because needs are psychologically complex (including discursive and psychological needs as well as direct impacts, as outlined above). Moreover, meeting all of them often requires profound social change such as in housing and employment, and the provision of livelihood, not to mention changing other embedded power structures such as gender relations and violent masculinities (Hamber 2007). The psychological impact of extreme human rights violations can therefore never be totally alleviated, and harm done cannot be reversed. Before we can meaningfully address the past, we need to acknowledge this reality, as to some degree it shapes all that follows and the different strategies we might need to adopt.

Secondly, when we discuss any strategy for dealing with the past, we are delving into the worlds of power, not only at the national level but also within and between groups. This is inevitable because we are talking about contexts of extreme suffering, which has a political dimension, but such situations can never be explained one-dimensionally. We are constrained by our language, our own assumptions and the context. An example in this essay is the term "victim". It is a limiting term that conveys passivity when, in fact, many victims are very active in their environments and have transcended victimhood. The thin line between victims and perpetrators in some contexts can add an additional challenge. People also hold more than one identity.[2] Being a "victim" might be only one of the ways someone defines themselves.

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2   Identity is a very challenging concept to define. In its simplest form identity refers to a person's chosen (and often ascribed) membership of a social group (Arthur 2011, 4). Identity groups can be thought of as large-scale groups (e.g. based on gender, ethnicity or religion) or as subgroups within groups (e.g. professional women, disabled men, Catholic nationalists). Such identity groups are infinite (Arthur 2011). Those that feel they belong to, or are thought to belong to, such groups are assumed to have a common set of characteristics, beliefs, values, practices, narratives and experiences (Brown forthcoming, who also draws on a range of sources and develops these ideas more fully). An individual can hold several identities, although some are more salient than others (Brewer 2001, cited in Brown forthcoming).

In this essay I do use the term "victim" (with all the caveats above), mainly because it communicates to the reader a position of diminished social power – a situation many of the arguments I put forward in this essay are trying to alter. I have chosen not to use the term "survivor", although it is more positive; it can also be a politically correct way of trying to circumvent difficult debates. I seldom hear individuals refer to themselves as survivors. I hear professionals use it all the time.

Therefore, we need to spend time thinking about our own assumptions and language, not just for ourselves, but more importantly within the social and political space. We also need to problematise the power relationships at all levels of the debates about dealing with the past, not to mention the power dynamics and incentives implicit in championing different approaches ("reconciliation", "justice", "forgiveness", "forgetting").

5 Linking the levels: processes at the micro and the macro level

In this essay, I have tried to establish that individual processes and what is happening at the collective or political level are integrally linked. But what does this mean in practice? Below I identify *only* four broad approaches that can narrow the gap between the individual and the collective, but I also show how macro processes can impact on individuals and society more broadly.

5.1 Frameworks of meaning

It was argued above that creating a sense of meaning of what happened is a critical part of coming to terms with a legacy of political violence. This is both an individual and a social task. Mechanisms that seek to uncover what happened in the past by developing a coherent (though not necessarily agreed) set of narratives and processes that create a cognitive meaning of an event or events for victims and wider society can be useful. Methods of doing this are multiple. The most well-known is a truth commission, but, arguably, trials could serve this process, as could investigative processes carried out by NGOs. The establishment of collections in museums and archives, as well as the sharing of stories about the past in the form of testimony, books and films, are further methods. The shared strand in all these approaches is the desire to provide some context to what has happened. Often this needs to be an officially sanctioned context. In some countries this may be impossible, but it is why victims often have the desire for the court to validate their experience or for official bodies like truth commissions to investigate and document what happened.

To this end, for example, an officially authorised truth commission could provide a framework in which victims could begin to understand, integrate and create new meanings for themselves and the society. In the same vein, other collective strategies could have the same impact. Apology could enforce the idea that certain acts were wrong, indirectly providing those who suffered with a scaffold for understanding the context of their suffering. Collective mechanisms can provide rationalisations for their loss; these can be internalised and help answer the question, "Why did this happen?". Making sense of the seemingly meaningless, and integrating what has happened into a collective life narrative, is critically important to victims and their recovery from mass atrocity (Sveaass/Castillo 2000).

But this is not an easy process because the "why" seldom has a straightforward answer or an answer that is free from different moral interpretations of violence ("It was a war"; "I had no choice but to resort

to violence, as all peaceful means were exhausted"; "You were collateral damage for the greater good"). Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect truth commissions, as just one example, to provide anything other than a new public space in which debate and discussion about the past can be "narrowed" rather than collectively agreed upon (Ignatieff 1996, 113). A framework for discussion can be anchored with new facts and information, but the differences in the interpretation of events will remain, possibly changing over time.

We cannot expect any process that seeks to understand the past to have miraculous powers of social transformation. The "never again" discourse is a case in point, with its tendency to imply a rather linear relationship between uncovering what happened and the lessons that might be learned from delving into the past. Just as the "truths" about the past require discussion and (re-)interpretation, perhaps endlessly, so too does what we learn from such investigations. We always interpret the past through the present, and although lessons may be learned (as the phrase goes), that does not mean we will apply them in the present. We seem to have a proclivity to perceive the present as a very different moral, social and political universe from the past. For example, in South Africa there is a tendency to disassociate police brutality against criminals and foreigners (a current problem) from police brutality against political dissidents in the past.

Expecting the full truth about the past to emerge is, therefore, overly optimistic, and even more unlikely is the hope that there will be collective acceptance of a shared narrative. That said, it does not preclude efforts to create, in whatever way is chosen, some framework of meaning at the collective level. The last two decades have seen a reliance on truth commissions as a primary vehicle for doing this. But I would maintain that a range of approaches create the landscape of meaning for societies emerging from conflict. In terms of transitional justice, prosecutions remain a key component and the preferred option of most victims (Shuman/McCall Smith 2000), but a range of other interconnecting processes are also now being used.

Recently we have seen the emergence of mixed and hybrid approaches to dealing with the past for practical, political and strategic reasons. Typically we see trials (to prosecute those most responsible), truth commissions (to uncover a wider truth about the past, sometimes with an amnesty), and so-called tradition-based approaches such as *gacaca* or community-based rituals. A combination of mechanisms (e.g. trials and amnesties; trials; truth commissions and amnesties) have been shown, using cross-country datasets, to be positive for democracy and human rights, something amnesties or trials cannot do on their own (Olsen et al. 2010). Justice, peace and democracy are now also seen as complementary objectives in societies coming out of conflict rather than being mutually exclusive (UN Security Council 2004). However, longitudinal studies of the relative effectiveness of different approaches, not just in terms of macro outcomes, but at the individual and group level as well, have not been conducted.

I am, therefore, not sure if a combination of mechanisms would show better results – in terms of creating social and individual frameworks of meaning – than one mechanism. But if we accept that there are multiple narratives and interpretations, and that creating meaning is an ongoing, messy process of negotiation and re-negotiation between the individual and society, it follows that multiple ways of delving into the past and trying to understand it will be necessary.

Outside of formal transitional justice, individuals and communities of individuals can also seek to create meaning in various spaces that are often more aligned with the everyday impact of political violence. They can do this, for example, by using museums (local and national) and archives; creating new history texts; writing books and memoirs; artistic endeavours; community storytelling and sharing; theatre, music and song; and cinema. Opening up these spaces is as important as thinking about the formal mechanisms of meaning-making.

It is common to hear people in Derry-Londonderry say that the two films released in 2002 on the thirtieth anniversary of the Bloody Sunday killings in Northern Ireland of 14 individuals by British paratroopers created a better framework for understanding and discussion within the society than the £190-million-pound Commission of Inquiry that began work in 1998 and reported in 2010. That said, if you speak with

many victims whose family members were vindicated by the commission as not being gunmen in the 1972 shooting, and taking into account the apology by the British Prime Minister, they will say that no price can be put on the truth.

5.2 Conditional factors

The official Bloody Sunday Inquiry is a good example of what I call a conditional factor in the process of trying to link individual processes with the collective. It is not merely the symbolic value of engaging in processes to understand the past or understanding it better (as through opening an archive or providing a memorial) that is important, but also the concrete outcomes that can flow from different approaches. In the case of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, this is a new, officially sanctioned truth and apology.

In other words, conditional factors are the elements that contribute to individual healing through such processes as attaining the truth, administering justice in courts, receiving an apology, and granting reparations and compensation. I use the word "conditional" because victims of political conflict are unlikely to divorce the questions of truth, justice, responsibility for violations, compensation and official acknowledgement of what happened to them from their healing process in the complicated way outlined above.

The discovery of the bodies of "the disappeared", such as through a truth commission or an ad hoc commission, is an example of this conditionality. In the case of disappearances the presence of a body allows rights to be respected and a proper burial – a key part of the grieving process – to take place. It potentially prompts the move toward healing. This could in some cases be complemented by psychosocial interventions (for instance, group sharing experiences and ways of documenting one's story, from art through to video testimony), as well as individual work such as therapy or traditional healing rituals aimed at addressing the deep intra-psychic process of dealing with the extreme loss experienced by some. From the psychological perspective of victims the healing potential can also be bolstered by wider macro processes that might provide an explanatory framework for how and why the disappearance took place, and assurance that it will not re-occur. These processes would need to take place within a context in which basic security needs were met, social justice adequately guaranteed and inequality dealt with in a real material sense.

Reparations (including material and nominal measures such as compensation and memorials) are another example of a conditional process. If made in a timely fashion, reparations can more closely align political or national attempts to repair the past with the individual process of healing. Symbolic reparations, such as memorials and apology, can assist in bridging the gaps between the internal psychological world and the social world for victims and individuals in the society. Reparations, whether symbolic or monetary, send messages to the victims at a deep psychological level about their personal value and sense of belonging in society, which is very important, given how I defined the impact of violence earlier in this essay. In this way, reparations can lead to increased levels of civic trust (de Greiff 2006).

The process is important as well as the object (e.g. the amount of compensation, because money has a real meaning in society, or the type of memorial – whether it recognises individual and collective loss). The context in which reparations are granted needs to be one that demonstrates adequate levels of recognition, responsibility, social change and acknowledgement. Participation in such processes by those most affected, and those in the wider community who feel some affinity with the wrongs committed, is also critical.

For example, offering reparations without acknowledging the truth about a certain event or doing justice will inevitably result in the accusation that it is "blood money". Instead of helping to convince victims and the communities they may represent that the society is a safe and caring place in which the victims have a part, reparations (money without justice) and those who supported their implementation can be experienced as persecutory in a psychological sense. There has to be, argues Pablo de Greiff (2006), external coherence in granting reparations; that is, reparations programmes need to have a close

relationship with other transitional-justice mechanisms and processes, such as criminal justice, truth-telling and institutional reform, to be effective. I would stretch the idea of external coherence further and say that offering anything in contexts where poverty and social problems persist will decrease the validity and usefulness of the process dramatically.

The language or discourse around the delivery is also important. For example, in South Africa the offering of (meagre) reparations was coupled with a speech by the then President Mbeki essentially reminding victims that "the struggle" was not about money, indirectly implying this is why victims had campaigned for reparations – which immediately resulted in many victims feeling insulted by the process and being given the impression that they had no place in society.

Apologies have the same challenge. The words are important. Questions that affect how apologies are received include: are victims portrayed as blameless? Does an apology fully grasp the harms caused? Is it partial? Does it come across as authentic, or does it indirectly provide a justification for the action? For example, the Japanese government has apologised repeatedly for the use of sex slaves during the Second World War, but this has not satisfied some victims because the wording in the apologies fails to signify the acceptance of full responsibility or acknowledgement of the specific harm and the wider context of the violations (imperialism).

Arguably, a range of approaches can have elements of the examples provided above. If any collective process (from a truth commission to a trial process; from reparations to establishing a museum about the past) is to have any meaning at the individual and inter-group level, it needs to be set up with what is seen at some level as the right intentions. This is important because as mentioned above, such processes tell victims about their value and place in society, which is the very thing extreme violence disrupts.

Like most of what is written above, this highlights how difficult achieving healing can be, or how hard it is to narrow the gap between the collective macro processes and the micro demands of individual healing. It is conditional on many factors. In short, most approaches will be *necessary* (e.g. truth recovery processes) to promote the psychological potential for the healing of victims, but they will seldom be *sufficient* to deal with all the needs of individuals or even groups of individuals. It is no wonder that my work has routinely shown that victims are ambivalent about the psychological outcomes of their participation in truth commissions and other transitional justice processes (see Hamber 2009).

5.3 Community mobilisation

One of the most difficult aspects of dealing with a legacy of mass atrocity and a politically violent past is not only managing individual and social needs as discussed above but also managing these in the public space. It is common, for example, for victims to use the public space to begin putting their demands for justice or accountability on the table. Examples of this abound around the world, the most well-known being the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. In my work, perhaps controversially, I have argued that such public displays and engagement with the political arena *can* be beneficial for victims and society and are the inevitable outcome of violations caused in the political space.

Providing a sense of purpose and meaning following humanitarian crises of different types can be a powerful source of psychosocial support, and promoting community mobilisation processes is key to this (Psychosocial Working Group 2003). Social action and civic participation promote solidarity among victims, increasing their levels of empowerment and mastery over the environment. The meaning of a personal tragedy can be transformed by engaging in the wider world, helping to transcend suffering (Herman 1992).

Judith Herman, however, feels such actions are one of the later stages of trauma recovery (Herman 1992). The work I have done suggests that resolving trauma does not fit into a staged approach (Hamber 2009). For many victims of political violence, social action is the door they first open into the world of psychological recovery. My experience leads me to believe that those engaging in social action processes move up and down the healing continuum relative to what is happening in society. Practitioners, peacebuilders and

politicians need to ensure that they do not stymie social action by seeing it as either the outcome of a successful therapy process or a later stage in the evolution of coming to terms with distress.

This is not to say that the use of social action as a form of individual transformation is straightforward. Some individuals might choose other routes to address their suffering, such as therapy, traditional practices or local and community support. However, what have been termed "survivor missions" (Herman 1992) can also become diversionary tactics in a psychological sense; that is, ways of not dealing with unresolved grief or suffering by becoming overly involved in social action such as lobbying for compensation or social justice. In addition, if we accept that reconnection is one of the important components that engaging in social processes can bring, we also need to guard against victim support groups primarily becoming about reconnection with each other and not the wider society. I do not believe that contact with perpetrators is the pinnacle or principle aim of reconnection work for victims, but the danger always exists that victim groups become narrow interest groups in which their disconnection from society (their victimhood) is continually reinforced rather than overcome.

In summary, civic participation is one way in which victims can attempt to narrow the gap between the tempo of the individual healing process and the unfolding political context, or at least influence the pace of the political process to some degree. Victims as active and vocal citizens with a legitimate and ongoing social "voice" can also educate policymakers and the society at large about their real needs and the impact of extreme political traumatisation; perhaps they can even highlight what might be necessary to prevent future violence. They can also become connectors between previously estranged groups and communities.

5.4 The justice gap: the problematic consequences of amnesties and impunity

Mark Freeman (2006) has written that in contexts of mass abuse and violence there is a virtual guarantee of incomplete justice. This can be the product of many factors, such as there being too many cases to process, lack of evidence, corruption, destruction of evidence, a weak criminal justice system, and fear of coming forward (Freeman 2006). Often societies facing the past also have to make difficult decisions. For example, although there has been a global move towards preventing amnesties for war crimes and genocide, we also know that amnesties have not decreased over the last few decades, and they are used routinely in transition processes (Mallinder 2007). Between 1945 and 2011, 530 amnesties were enacted (The Belfast Guidelines on Amnesty and Accountability 2013).

Sometimes amnesties are enacted to avoid responsibility for violations, but at other times they can be used for strategic reasons (ibid.). For example, it is becoming common for truth commissions to be used for "lower level" perpetrators, while trials are used for the architects of mass violence or those seen as "most responsible" (Mallinder 2007; Robinson 2003). In Sierra Leone, for example, a truth commission that could offer amnesty for "lesser" crimes, and a special court process for trying war crimes and genocide ran alongside community-based initiatives.

Whatever approach is taken, incomplete justice can be the result, at least from some victims' perspective. This highlights the difference between macro and micro understandings of justice (Lillie/ Janoff-Bulman 2007). Victims or the general population might feel that a certain action (e.g. amnesty) may be justified for the greater good (macro), but this does not mean that they feel it is fair to them personally (micro). Thus, we can talk of a gap between the micro imperatives to do justice and the macro inevitability of incomplete justice in transitional societies.

Roy Baumeister (1997) talks of a "magnitude gap", arguing that what the perpetrator gains by violence is always less than what the victim loses in value; for example, what a perpetrator gains from a murder can never equate with what the victim loses. Besides this, however, if we accept that most people see the denial of retributive or judicial justice to victims as unfair and that this is how victims experience it, the

micro–macro gap is characterised by an ethical gap; that is, a challenge to how we understand what is politically necessary and what is morally right or obligated. So how can this ethical gap be narrowed?

Firstly, the issue of victims' rights needs to become more central to transition processes. Most texts on transitional justice begin with a discussion of how to deal with the past from the question of constraint (for example, inadequate resources to prosecute or the threat of prosecutions to stability), rather than starting from a rights-based position. Notwithstanding the complexities and inconsistencies in legal debate about the right to truth and justice (see Freeman 2006; McEvoy 2006; Orentlicher 2005), victims' rights still need to be anchored in the transitional justice debate, despite the rhetoric that at times surrounds this. A rights-based approach to the needs of victims remains underdeveloped – morally, ethically, legally and, more critically, in practice. A paradigm shift is needed in which victims' rights start to determine the transitional justice agenda rather than victims' rights being seen as an obstacle to pragmatic political change.

Secondly, we need to see the denial of complete justice, no matter what the cause, as ethically and morally challenging. Wilhelm Verwoerd makes a sophisticated defence of amnesty in South Africa as he grapples with the existential meaning of amnesty beyond stock phrases such as "Amnesty was needed for peace". He questions the victim–perpetrator dichotomy, beckons us to all recognise "the little perpetrator" in each of us, and calls for attempts to recognise the humanity of perpetrators without downplaying the horrific and without undermining the vindication of victims (Verwoerd 2007).

I share his perspective that creating a nuanced picture of the past, along with concepts such as amnesty in certain circumstances, does not necessarily run counter to fostering a common humanity and establishing a basic set of moral principles concerning human rights violations. Dealing with the past in complex ways that entail compromises does not automatically equate with foregoing accountability and justice, and such processes can take us to the core of complicated and intricate discussions about how we try to define who we see as perpetrators and who we see as victims, in a way that other approaches (such as trials and, of course, avoidance) might not.

I have been criticised for calling amnesty in South Africa "an evil compromise" (Graybill 2002, 178). I believe that my choice of words was perhaps not ideal because the word "evil" can limit a sense of the complexity of the issue. However, despite my support for the South African amnesty process at the time, I still believe it was a hugely problematic compromise, and that if not "evil" it was damaging and flawed in multiple ways. Amnesty in South Africa has been reshaped as a national founding myth, a morally correct decision, and those wanting justice are largely seen as anti-reconciliation. This has resulted in the closing down of parts of the debate around amnesty and how we do justice for past wrongs. There should have been a continuous process of exploring the ethical complexity of amnesty rather than a social and political process that tried to put it beyond question.

Thirdly, it is not the responsibility of victims to quietly accept peace processes, agree to political compromises or deliver the answer to the dilemmas of the ethical gap, as I called it. Victims should argue for a principled approach to justice, if justice is what they want. It is politicians and those in positions of power who have to find a way to build peace while delivering justice and dealing with the multifaceted demands of victims. Social space has to be created for anger to be expressed by victims (and the wider society for that matter) rather than individuals who oppose processes such as amnesty being expected to fall in line with so-called national priorities of peace. A peace fashioned out of short-term expediency could become a negative peace that fails to deal with the underlying causes of conflict and lays the ground for its re-emergence later on.

Finally, the ethical gap outlined above can be best narrowed by ensuring that there is accountability and that justice is continually sought to the highest possible degree. Attaining justice is not merely about meeting victims' needs; it is also about asking what the perpetrator or society owes (Bennett 2007). This requires perpetrators to acknowledge their wrongdoing (or at the very least, the consequences of their actions) and take responsibility for its effects. It also entails a rigorous and systematic pursuit of reparations and restitution. A minimalist view is that perpetrators should not benefit from their actions (Hamber 2009). An additional caveat, however, is that we also need to consider what we mean by "perpetrator", as often it

is the beneficiaries of political systems, and not merely those who directly engaged in violence, who need to be part of the process of redress.

In addition, accountability and justice need to be framed as a wide and long-term process. Justice should be framed as a continuous process, not as a once-off endeavour defined or constrained by a specific historical moment. Diane Orentlicher (2007) uses the examples of Argentina and Chile, which show that although it was difficult to mount prosecutions or sustain them following transition in the 1980s and early 1990s respectively, since then greater political space and the passage of time have meant that new trials have begun.

In conclusion, none of the directions I outline above will entirely address the issue of the ethical gap between political necessity and moral obligation. But a more meticulous and multifaceted way of thinking about justice is needed, one that moves beyond reducing it to the limits of pragmatic politics. At a psychological level, victims need to feel their plight is taken seriously and that the society is not attempting to curb their desire for retributive justice for expedient reasons. Thus, any society grappling with mass injustice should seek to open as much social and psychological space as possible and set down as many clear moral markers as achievable. It is only through doing this that an adequate context can be created in which victims can undertake the difficult intra-psychic work of coming to terms with the injustices they suffered.

6 Conclusion: promoting a rights-based approach in transitional justice

It is difficult to believe that the conversation I related at the start of this essay took place 20 years ago. It is also somewhat awkward in retrospect to think that when we started the work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa we thought, in our naivety, that we could find a mechanism that could address the past in a relatively short and compressed period. In fact, the process is still unfolding and has been collapsed into, overridden by, mixed with, changed and re-shaped by a range of different factors over the last two decades.

Since then I have extensively investigated how such macro bodies can assist victims or at least be set up to maximise their potential for contributing to healing and positive social change. But if I am honest, after years of reflection I feel that the scepticism of my much younger self still has value. I would also extend these early concerns beyond the notion of a truth commission to other processes of reckoning with a violent past. However, I have also learned that doubt and uncertainty can propel learning; they should not stymie action but rather encourage us to try to overcome our misgivings and learn from our insufficiencies. I struggle to understand the process of dealing with painful memories and violent pasts now more than ever, and I can never find the words to fully capture its complexity.

I have used the word "complexity" routinely in this essay. There is a part of me that dislikes the term, although reading this you might think the opposite. Using the word "complexity" can, particularly in the political realm, be a way of avoiding problems ("Dealing with the past is complex. We have to satisfy multiple needs, and that is why we are not having a truth commission"; or: "We will never satisfy the complex needs of victims, so why bother?"). But if we are to try and reconcile the gap between individual and social needs

and address decades, and sometimes centuries, of injustice, this is going to be an incredibly complex task, in the true meaning of the word. However, it is difficult to find the language to convey this.

For example, I have outlined in this essay the different approaches to addressing the past as if they were distinct, unconnected objects (truth commissions, traditional processes, etc.) and as if individuals engaged with these in isolated ways, meaning that we can delineate impact. In any society, processes will overlap and unfold. Binaries between, for example, what even in this essay have been labelled "traditional" and "mainstream" approaches will be shown to be indicative at best, rather than to exist as discrete entities. The same could be said about concepts such as political violence, which in reality is often indistinguishable from other structural forms of violence and ongoing, embedded violence and power imbalances in the home, the community and society.

Despite the fact that at some points in this essay my structural thinking dominates, my understanding is actually more closely aligned with a concept such as hybridity,[3] to the degree that it offers a framework for a conceptual shift toward more fluid conceptualisations that defy fixed and rigid categorisation. It also challenges essentialism, inviting us to explore creative and liminal spaces (Law et al. 2014). These spaces are similar, at least to a degree, to what I understand John Paul Lederach (2010) means by the moral imagination, a place where we can simultaneously understand problems rooted in the real world but think of solutions that lie in a space that does not yet exist. To get there we need to engage a range of creative faculties.

The healing that victims of extreme violence need exists in an ambivalent space. Victims have to manage their everyday lives and try to recover, whilst recognising the irreparable loss they have to live with, continually re-negotiating it within the present, though the present will inevitably not fully meet their needs and will throw up new social challenges. And all the while they will need to simultaneously re-imagine a better future. Victims (as many other citizens), too, are invariably torn, as societies in transition are, between wanting to let go and wanting to remember simultaneously, dwelling in the past and dreaming of an unfettered future. This is a backward-looking and forward-looking space, a space that despite its challenges (and depressing realities) tends to bend towards hope, healing, reconstruction, survival, creativity and resilience.

To this end, we have to find the language and policy to – here I risk throwing in more jargon – "own" these ambivalent spaces and maximise the potential for recovery that exists within them. This is what is often asked of victims: that they live with ambivalence in a productive way. Similarly, societies emerging from conflict need to find collective social and political ways of living with the ambivalences of the past.

This type of thinking is difficult to reconcile with the approach of governments and policymakers, as it is hard to imagine how one can create policy for long-term (perhaps never-ending) processes for which there is no quick fix. Furthermore, we need to be acutely aware of the "(at times subtle) imbalances and inequality in power relations" (Mac Ginty/Sanghera 2012, 4) that exist between so-called top-down and bottom-up processes. For example, it is often in the interests of those in power to silence the voices of those whose rights have been violated in the past, both overtly (such as robbing victims of a social space to speak out by preventing an inquiry into the past or denying that violations even took place), but also

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3 Although the concept of hybridity is used here, the intention is not to engage in a wider discussion about hybridity theory in terms of how it is used in different fields, e.g. post-structural cultural theories or theories of state-building – but rather to highlight it as a lens through which we might see processes for dealing with the past unfolding. In other words, "the picture that should emerge from considering hybridity is a messy, awkward one far removed from the neat silos one often finds in charts of the linkages between governments, donors and international NGOs. Instead, it is useful to conceptualise hybridity as a complex and constantly moving drama in which no actor is able to maintain a unilateral course. Actors are not necessarily consistent in their actions, and may be compliant and cooperative on one issue but offer resistance on another" (Mac Ginty/Sanghera 2012, 4). Although Mac Ginty and Sanghera's conceptualisation has, broadly speaking, state-building at its core, I would like to add that this "messy" environment not only exists at the collective and political level but for individual victims too as they negotiate the past at an intra-psychic, spiritual, familial and community level. In other words, the "messy" lens I am applying relates to what could be termed the psychosocial (see Hamber/Gallagher 2014) as much as the political, albeit that such concepts are in themselves indistinguishable and simplifications of the real world, and by using them one becomes trapped in the very conceptual binaries and boundaries I wish to escape.

more subtly by using discourses such as the one surrounding reconciliation to force premature "closure", as argued above.

It is challenging to think of crafting policy in such contexts, or specific policies aimed at uncertain outcomes (some victims might be helped by the establishment of a truth recovery process, some might not). One policy approach to the past might also lead to another: if we begin by investigating disappearances, this might lead to wider questions about torture. Multiple approaches, which will only ever partially address needs, will also have to run concurrently (e.g. urgent short-term reparations, truth commissions, long-term reparations, social reconstruction and poverty reduction). This will require an ongoing commitment at a political level to continuing to develop and work with the past and its individual and political demands far into the future.

This means that genuinely dealing with the past is as much about a principled governmental and institutional commitment as about practically offering a range of services and support mechanisms at the individual and social level over a protracted period of time. For illustrative purposes, perhaps the easiest way to understand this principled and practical approach is to think of the necessary ongoing commitments the German government must practically make (e.g. reparations, memorialisation) for their actions in World War II, as well as how this must be complemented continually by the public highlighting of accountability for the past. In 2013, for instance, Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke of an "everlasting responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism, for the victims of World War II and, above all, for the Holocaust" (cited in Buergin 2013).

But, of course, no matter how principled or long-term the approach, given the enormous challenges of issues such as truth, justice and reparations following mass violations, not every victim or every need can ever be fully satisfied, as noted above. The psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1971) uses the term "good enough" in relation to parenting, arguing that parents need not be perfect but simply good enough, and that the parent/s need to treat a child with a primary maternal *(sic)* preoccupation and create a holding environment. To this end, and given that what has been lost can never be fully replaced, psychological and social remedies for political violence – whether in the form of counselling, reparations, justice or other measures – can at best only ever be psychologically "good enough"; that is, the victim feels subjectively satisfied that sufficient actions have been taken to make amends for their suffering, and some emotional resolution concerning the past is reached.

This type of "good enough" resolution is closest to what we need to seek when developing collective mechanisms to address large-scale violation. However, given the complexity of the individual psychological healing process, the degree to which processes such as truth commissions or any macro political strategy to deal with the past can fully (or even should) converge with individual processes is always going to be ambiguous.

This all demands a reframing of what we think we are doing in societies that are emerging from politically violent pasts. Adopting a "good enough" approach is not a partial response to problems. On the contrary: like a parent who keeps on trying their best, irrespective of the challenges they face, to meet the multiple and sometimes impossible needs of their child, so too does a society emerging from a dark past need to keep striving – with positive, principled intent and language, with a healthy preoccupation and via a range of different mechanisms and actions (investigations into the past, psychosocial support, reparations, apology, memorialisation, development) – to address the numerous needs of victims and society as they arise, unfold and change. Healing and social reconstruction comes not just through what is done but also through the process and the authenticity (often evident in discourse and action) with which we try to address problems. In engaging constructively in the messy business of the past, the overriding task is therefore to create a holding or conducive environment that opens rather than closes social and political space so that different and often divergent voices and approaches to restoration can emerge.

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Berghof Foundation

Dealing with
Painful Memories

Walking the (Thin) Line between War and its Aftermath

Olivera Simić

Content

The choice that we have is not between remembering and forgetting: because forgetting can't be done by an act of will, it is not something we can choose to do. The choice is between different ways of remembering ... Memories do not always bear fruit and may even lead us astray ... (Todorov 2003, 311)

1 Introduction

As I cannot do justice in this short paper to every point Hamber makes in his engaging and thoughtful article I have chosen to discuss a few points, drawing on my personal experiences of war in my homeland Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). First, I will provide an overview of the war in BiH and its nexus with trauma. I will question the transition process, reflecting on the blurred line between "conflict" and so-called "post-conflict", and argue that war in BiH is not over yet; it is just being fought with other means. In the second part of the paper, I will discuss competing victimhood(s), ethnic identities and the parallel narratives that are a feature of the BiH transitional processes and that present obstacles to any attempts at reconciliation. Finally, I will suggest that in order to build a shared narrative of war it is important to intertwine the experiences of *all* victims and to draw on positive stories of courage and sacrifice in the midst of war, to restore the faith of Bosnian people in humanity and coexistence.

2 Painful past

In March 1992, I was nineteen years old. Although the war in BiH was looming, I was oblivious to it and firmly believed that my long-held teenage ambition to study law in Sarajevo would come to fruition. I finished high school in May 1991 and did not believe my father, who said: "Next year at this time Sarajevo will burn". I thought that he did not know what he was talking about; that he had been 'brainwashed' by local media that were spreading news about forthcoming war. Eventually an armed conflict did ensue, preventing me from fulfilling my dream of studying in the capital. I could never imagine that I would instead end up studying law in a refugee camp far from my family. I will be the third generation in my family to survive war.[1] Ever since the armed conflict in BiH ended, in 1995, I have been driven to learn why *my* people waged war against each other. But it was only in 2005 that I started to work professionally on issues related to war. I needed a space of ten years to work on my own mental wellbeing before I could turn my attention to other people's painful stories. My experience is not in any way exceptional; many young activists in the former Yugoslavia have been survivors of war.

The majority of us who work on "dealing with the past" (or should I say "minority", as we are still few in number) are indeed on "survivor missions" (Herman 1992) that have become one of our (un)conscious "diversionary tactics" (Hamber in this volume, 14) for not dealing with our own grief. It is painful to go through personal grief alone, more painful than going through it with others or through the grief of others. As Hamber argues, for many victims of political violence the first step into the "world of psychosocial recovery" is to engage in some form of social justice activity (ibid., 13). Some of the well-known local organisations across former Yugoslavia have been led by ex-combatants and survivors of wartime rape and other atrocities, a path to help their "posttraumatic growth" (Tedeschi/Calhoun 1995). It is common to see the same people holding on to these highly draining and psychologically demanding positions for more

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1   My grandparents survived WWI; my parents survived WWII and the war in BiH in the early 1990s.

than twenty years. Their work has become not only their identity but also an attractive survival strategy in a country that has almost 50 per cent unemployment.[2]

Still, while the former Yugoslavia has many civil society organisations working on social justice issues, very few focus their attention on programmes designed to "deal with the past". As Dušan Jovanović, a representative of OSCE, recently noted:

> (...) *the other challenge [in dealing with past] is lack of interest. Very few people care about dealing with the past in the former Yugoslavia* (...) *no one pays attention...we are not an organised force* (...) *nobody listens to us, nobody wants to deal with these issues anymore* (...) *it's been more than ten years since all those wars ended and now politicians and international community, everyone is switching their focus to something else* (...). (Youtube Video, 16 December 2013)

In a complex political environment, a small community of like-minded people have been tirelessly working for two decades to keep memory alive of the past atrocities and to seek truth and justice. But there is a real danger of "burning out", and I wonder how much longer activists will be able to immerse themselves in traumatic stories and materials, constantly re-traumatising themselves. Many probably suffer from "vicarious trauma" (Brady et al, 1999), but I doubt that this will prevent them from continuing their important work. Last year, I had coffee with a long-term activist and friend in one of the most powerful civil society organisations in Serbia, which marks anniversaries of war crimes, visits graveyards and meets with survivors on a regular basis. My friend told me how exhausted he was:

> (...) *I cannot do this anymore ... but there are only few of us in [the] organisation and we all have problems ... I cannot sleep. You know, someone interviewed me recently for some research and asked me how can I stay normal working all the time on dea[th], genocide, killings* (...) *she was right* (...) *I really think I am not normal anymore.*

After almost fifteen years of activism and struggling to survive abject poverty, my friend has no time or money for counselling. Even if he did have, counselling is not something that people necessarily think of as a solution to mental hardship, since great stigma is still attached to mental health issues. Despite these daily struggles, my friend will continue to protest on the streets and call for accountability for, and truth about, the past wartime crimes.

At the time that I was invited to respond to Hamber's paper, I was immersed in literature questioning the capability of courts to address mass human violations in an appropriate way. I was also reading about the latest indictments, on-going trials and prosecutions of war crimes that were being investigated and prosecuted by the courts in BiH. Personally, I have started to question the purpose of publishing gruesome details of war crimes that occurred more than twenty years ago in local media on almost a daily basis. What effect will these stories have on generations who are trying to "move on" (Eastmond/Selimović 2012) from a violent past, hopefully towards a more promising future? According to some scholars, young people do not want to dwell on the violent past and its memories for one simple reason: they have had enough of the narratives of violence that happened between 1992 and 1995, and also of the conflict ongoing since 1995, fought not with guns but with *hearts and minds.*

Many young people find solace in "silence" rather than "telling the truth". Indeed, silence may be a vital strategy deployed to make a shared life possible (Eastmond/Selimović 2012). Also, some Bosnian people think it is "too early to tell the truth". But is there a right time to tell the truth? Do we need to talk about the past, and if so, how and why? Can BiH make a *pacto del olvido* ("the pact of forgetting") in the name of "the greater good" and escape its traumatic memory, as it did once before? In Spain, *el pacto*

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del olvido not only silenced and suppressed violent memories but also prevented legal action to punish those responsible for human rights atrocities and to repair and rehabilitate victims (Hadzelek 2012). Yet, memories can only be suppressed temporarily and will erupt sooner or later. Over the past decade, Spain has seen such eruptions and "unexpected emergences of the belated 'memory politics'" (Davis 2005, 862; Aguilar Fernández 1996; Graham 2004).

The people of the former Yugoslavia experienced collective social and historical amnesia between 1945 and 1990, during Tito's time, and many would argue that the policy of "pushing memories under the carpet" was one of the factors that contributed to the country's dissolution. Under the mantra of "brotherhood and unity", Yugoslav people were banned from speaking publically about the atrocities that had been committed against each other during WWII. Still, our elders whispered to us some of the forbidden stories – of murders, beheadings, concentration camps and rapes – stories that since this recent war have been talked about publically and widely. These stories, buried deep in the memories of several generations, have been reclaimed and appropriated, reinterpreted, and connected to the recent war narratives.

There is a sense of urgency and a greater willingness to record and tell the stories than ever before. There is a need to document and save stories before key protagonists – the survivors – pass away. Many have died already, several of these from ill health rather than age. In BiH, locals and foreign researchers are on a mission to save these stories from being extinguished. Together with the survivors, academia contributes to mounting volumes of literature based on grief and mourning: narratives of lament that operate as a mode of transitional justice.[3]

3 Painful present

So far the prominent transitional justice mechanisms set up in BiH have been domestic and international trials. I do not suggest that BiH ought to turn away from these traditional mechanisms of criminal justice, but it must acknowledge that these are insufficient because they do not focus on the victims (Mutua 2015). 2015 marks two decades since the armed conflict ended, but it is still hard to see any indication from the government that a "holistic" and "transformative" (Gready/Robins 2014; Fischer 2013) understanding of transitional justice processes will be used in the near future: truth commissions or other forms of truth seeking, development of a holistic reparation and compensation processes, or hybrid processes such as *gacaca* "to mend community relationships" (6). Other mechanisms, such as official public apologies, memorials or the rewriting of official histories, have been highly contested.

Each ethnic group builds memorials to remember their own victims and rewrite history as it fits their "truth", which is that their group is the main or exclusive victim, and that is not relevant to acknowledge crimes committed by their own group. This is common to all three major groups in BiH, the state which has become recently defined as a "victim state" (Ristić 2014) and a "pathological depressive patient" (Ivanov 2015). Ethnic identity constructions are related to the political structure: Bosnians are identified only as members of ethnic tribes, and legally, Bosnians do not have individual human rights, only collective rights, since political rights are based on ethnic proportional representation (Živanović 2015). This political configuration was introduced with the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. The absurdity of such policies is apparent in the fact that only now, twenty-two years after BiH became an independent state, has the country recognised the first Bosnian citizen by birth. In 2015, nine months after Faruk Salaka was born, his parents became the first to register their son's nationality as "Bosnian" (Jukić 2015), not as a Bosniak, Croat, or Serb. Faruk's parents were the first to defeat a system that insists on strict ethnic definitions and differences that had become "a major axis" of any analysis (Helms 2015).

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3 For more on lament and transitional justice, see Galchinsky 2014.

It is of no surprise, then, that remembrance is also marked by ethnic definitions and differences. All three ethnic groups in BiH try to maximise the tally of their "own" victims and minimise the number of victims of the other ethnic groups. They all engage in a "victimization Olympics" (Novick 1999) or "competitive martyrdom" (Rosenbaum 1996, 2). Some blame academia for producing the narratives that politicians use in their battle for power: "… it is intellectuals who manufacture these narratives; not politicians. Politicians are just using these narratives for their own political game in manipulation but it is not them who came up with narratives…" (Jovanović/Subotić 2013, Youtube video).

As Hamber notices, some victims cling desperately to their victimhood as a sanctuary and moral grounding. They are not passive, I agree. On the contrary, they often either actively encourage or oppose reconciliation. Many victims seem reluctant to transcend their victimhood or be perceived as having transcended it (Hamber in this volume, 12). The role of a victim is much more convenient: as a victim one can claim benefits – social and economic privileges not accessible to a "survivor". This exposes the fallacy of the broad perception that a victim is inherently less powerful than a survivor. The trouble with the term "survivor" is that it shifts the focus from the victims' devastating experiences to their agency and resilience and strips them of victimhood. In her book *On Innocence and Victimhood*, Elissa Helms carefully problematises the issue of victimhood. She discusses a public statement given by the former Leader of the Bosnian party SDA (Party of Democratic Action in Bosnia-Herzegovina), Tihić, who called upon Bosniak people to set aside the "passive position of victim and take up the active position and responsibility of a relevant political factor" (cited in Helms 2013, 225). His plea backfired, and the representatives of victims' groups denounced him as a "traitor to national interest" who was "forcing victims to get used to the results of [war] crimes!" (Helms 2013, 225-226).

Victims are often pressured to speak up (Hamber in this volume, 10), with few or no incentives but often politically motivated expectations. Some victims are not willing to speak publicly (and some are not asked to speak)[4], but others have become more pragmatic and demand to be properly compensated for sharing their experiences. They have had enough of foreigners "writing books on them", as one female survivor of rape told me, while receiving nothing in return. Others have reported of being instructed on how to speak on public speaking occasions by their governmental or nongovernmental leaders. One long-term feminist activist told me she has recently attended a small gathering of female victims of wartime rape in BiH. Women were sitting around the table, looking down, looking serious, and oblivious to the people around them. The female facilitator began the meeting by saying that "these women do not dance and laugh", since they are "too traumatised" to do so. Once they started speaking, the women did so with flat intonation and no apparent emotions, and it became obvious to everyone that they had told the same story many times before.

These victims may have become "professional victims" (Smyth 2003), assuming a monopoly on suffering and a power of veto on reconciliation, but they are often manipulated into this status by political elites. For such victims there is a real danger that they become connected only to those who approve of their victimhood (i.e. members of the same ethnic group) and disconnected from the broader community and social reality. If "victim groups become narrow interest groups" (Hamber in this volume, 14), this serves to reinforce their sense of victimhood. It becomes a justification to pursue only their specific victims' interests, which are often not aligned to reconciliation.

While I agree with Hamber that "making sense of the seemingly meaningless" (Hamber in this volume, 10) is vital for victims' recovery, I wonder whether validating "any sense" may be dangerous. The majority of victims try to make sense of what happened to them, but the process of "making sense", and the assumptions shaping their logic, may be oppositional to any constructive contribution to building peace. It is hard to be positive in a country in which perpetrators still live next door to victims. In the backlog of BiH war crimes cases, there are an estimated 1,300 cases, involving 8,000 suspects, where the identity of the

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4   Those who are not 'ideal' victims; those who belong to the perceived perpetrator nation.

alleged perpetrator is known (OSCE, n.d.). There are several thousand more crimes for which the suspect is still unidentified (Wigemark 2014) and it is thought that many of the suspects still live in the country. BiH has a long way to go with the prosecutions. In February 2015 former Bosnian Serb Army soldier Dragan Šekarić was sentenced to 14 years in prison for rape and murder committed in the village of Kosovo Polje in the Višegrad municipality in 1992. Šekarić had been living near his victims and could rely on close supporters during the previous 20 years. In other places too, war crimes prosecutions are spanning generations. In Argentina, former dictator General Jorge Videla was convicted in 2010 in El Tribunal Oral Federal No.1 de Cordoba, found guilty of 29 counts of murder and 32 counts of torture. Ruti Teitel, in her response to the Videla judgement, asks: "What can such a verdict mean so many years after the restoration of democracy in Argentina?" Her answer was simple:

> (...) *not giving up on accountability, despite the passage of time, sends an important message about human rights, and the distinctive nature of these offenses as 'crimes against humanity'. Years later, what's at stake is not just punishment, but also political truth* (...) *That lesson, handed down along with the judgment against Videla, vindicates efforts to establish a global rule of law. Tyrants everywhere – and more than a few democrats – would do well to take note.* (Teitel 2010)

However, those who are not sentenced to life but to a shorter prison term may return to their communities and re-encounter their victims. Nusreta Sivac, who testified in the Omarska case[5], reported that she had met a guard who was released from the prison after serving two-thirds of his seven-year sentence. Sivac met him on the street in the town that was the original site of the crime and in which both of them now live again. She reported, "We glared at each other (...). He was the first to bow his head" (Cerkez 2013).

In BiH, so many different interpretations of the past exist that it is hard to imagine the establishment of any shared narrative in the near future. Each ethnic group maintains a specific version of past conflict(s), and these versions compete. These "parallel narratives" also shape the discourse of political leaders in the country and represent a challenge to transitional justice processes (Guzina/Marijan 2013). I agree with Hamber that there should be an effort to create "some framework of meaning at the collective level" (Hamber in this volume, 11), but the framework of meaning developed at a collective level in BiH is one of victimhood and denial. Many Bosnians do not engage in a dialogue that aims at reconciliation but in an antagonistic, politically motivated struggle over collective memory (Morrow 2012, 71) and an exercise in "collective victimhood" (Čehajić/Brown 2010, 192). In order to overcome these divisions they would need a more positive narrative that would include *all* victims' experiences.

4 Positive future?

As Hamber argues, we "cannot repair the irreparable" (in this volume, 7) and the "harm done cannot be reversed" (ibid. 9), but "we need to acknowledge this reality" (ibid. 9), the fact that coming to terms with the past is a lifelong process. "There was never going to be justice for [the] Holocaust, or a reckoning with its enormity", says Elisabeth Kolbert (2015), whose grandmother died in Auschwitz. I think it is important to accept this as fact. The law's capacity to address past human rights abuses is limited, but we still struggle to deploy other means to acknowledge past losses in a constructive way. After the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed by the governments of the countries involved in the BiH war, international actors put immediate

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5 Omarska camp was a death camp run by Bosnian Serb forces in the mining town of Omarska, near Prijedor in northern BiH, set up for Bosniak and Croat men and women in 1992. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) found several individuals guilty of crimes against humanity perpetrated in Omarska. For more see Prosecutor v Miroslav Kvocka et al, Case No IT-98-30/1-T, Judgment, 2 November 2001.

pressure on people in the region to reconcile. People were still finding their footing after four years of war yet were swept into externally funded and imposed reconciliation projects. These projects were seen to demonstrate ignorance and were framed by many Bosnians as their needing "to work with the enemy" (Hamber in this volume, 8). As such, they created a new set of challenges and provoked resistance, and resentment towards the concept of "reconciliation". This concept was and still is largely misunderstood in BiH as meaning forgiveness alone. I often heard victims saying "I haven't quarrelled with anyone, so there is no need for me to reconcile".

Furthermore, many victims from various ethnic groups do not want to come together. They do not trust each other. "[C]ommunity mobilisation" (ibid., 13), as suggested by Hamber, is difficult to achieve where narratives are deeply divided. A holistic approach towards transitional justice needs to embrace *all* victims: not just those who are considered innocent, but also those whose stories have been suppressed under the enormity of mass crimes such as genocide. People's stories may be a stimulus for exploring what prevents positive peace from flourishing and unfolding alternative answers to the difficult questions arising from the relationship between justice, peace and reconciliation (Porter 2015).

In BiH there are countless people who during the war put themselves in grave danger to help others regardless of their ethnic background, and their stories should be acknowledged and documented. In *Good People in an Evil Time* (2004), Svetlana Broz refutes the stereotype of inevitable natural enmities in the Balkans. She reveals the stories of ordinary people who resisted ethnic divisions under the most terrible historical circumstances. The tragic story of a young Bosnian Serb soldier, Srđan Aleksić, who was brutally killed in 1993 by his own peers, has become a symbol of courage and humanity to young people in BiH. After he saw his neighbour, an ethnic Bosniak, being harassed by a group of Serb soldiers, Aleksić tried to stop soldiers from beating him. However, the soldiers turned on Aleksić, beating him with their rifle butts until he fell into a coma. He died a week later in hospital. His story has been used by a number of local social justice organisations to inspire young generations, and a few local organisations have run essay competitions about "moral courage" and reconciliation in Aleksić's name.

Recently, the Post-Conflict Research Center in BiH received an award for a multimedia educational project called *Obični Heroji* (Ordinary Heroes) that utilises stories of rescue and moral courage to promote tolerance, reconciliation and interethnic cooperation. According to the Center, "the rescuers' narratives" represent all ethnic groups and highlight people's humanities regardless of their ethnic background, while questioning the all-too-prevalent dichotomy between perpetrators and victims. I can only hope that such narratives will prevail and that in the future BiH will be less preoccupied with recounting memories of violence and despair, and more focused upon sharing stories of humanity that shone through those clouded years.

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Working on the Psychosocial Gap

Challenges, Hopes, Perspectives

David Becker

Content

1   Introduction

In his scholarly article, "Dealing with painful memories and violent pasts", Brandon Hamber explains and reflects on "the relationship between how individual (largely victim) processes of coming to terms with mass atrocity (a micro perspective) relate to the collective or political process of finding ways of dealing with the past (a macro perspective)" (Hamber in this volume, 2). In any discussion of war, mass atrocities, political repression and their impact, one is unavoidably forced to think about this relationship and deal with it – to confront the challenge of having to talk about both perspectives without being able to fully integrate them or grasp their linkage in all its complexity. Hamber does a masterful job in confronting this inherent problem but inevitably succumbs, at least in part, to the impossibility of the task. The reason for this might be what I call "the psychosocial gap", and I believe this needs closer examination.

The word "psychosocial" conjures up an illusion. It links the word component "psycho-", which relates to the individual and intra-psychic dimension, to the "social" dimension of existence – the collective, societal reality. But this linkage is neither defined in the word, nor is it in any way clear. It is created simply by the magic of the word connection. "Psychosocial" does not represent an actual relationship. It merely implies an intention, a wish, at best perhaps a process. When reflecting on massive destruction within societies, we are always talking about concrete human beings – about bodies with flesh and blood. But at the same time we are talking about collectives – about social relationships, politics and power. When we look at these issues from only one perspective, the other perspective is missing. When we try to address both perspectives at the same time, we easily become disoriented, confusing concepts and metaphors. In fact, all our theories can be understood as ways to try to bridge the gap.

In what follows I will discuss three potential bridges that Hamber refers to in his article and reflect on their load-bearing capacity: the trauma concept; the concept of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and the intervention pyramid; and the construction of meaning on different levels. A short reflection on the power of discourse ends this article.

2   Insecure bridge 1:
the trauma concept

Hamber rightly criticises conceptual thinking on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), because it "tells us little about the context of violence, its cultural specificities, and how dealing with violence is linked with the socio-economic, political and cultural context" (Hamber in this volume, 4). He understands that PTSD pathologises a social phenomenon and that it "drives thinking towards homogeneity, as if all experiences of violence have the same outcome or need the same treatment". (ibid.) He offers some alternative understandings, referring to authors such as Martin Baró, Laub, Kornfeld and myself, but does not actually discuss the conceptual issue in depth. Yet in my opinion this is a key challenge, because the way we describe the wounds of the victims has an enormous influence on their suffering and on the perception of their suffering in society. In fact, the trauma concept seems to be the first bridge through which the psychosocial suffering of persons in a given society is defined. PTSD provides quite a clear description of individual suffering but completely ignores context and social reality. Instead of making a connection between the victim and the social cause of suffering, it deepens the divide, transforming a societal issue into a personal illness. Other trauma concepts emphasise the social dimensions more, for example those of Martín Baró (1992) or myself (Becker 1992) but possibly do not fully grasp the profundity

of the individual wound. These concepts are probably better bridges for linking the psychological and social dimensions but are nevertheless insecure.

In my opinion the concept of *sequential traumatization* by Hans Keilson (1992) is probably the best bridge on the market today. Keilson developed the term with reference to Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands. Being himself a psychoanalyst and at the same time a clear political thinker, he was interested in the inner psychic processes of his clients, yet he always understood that the key definition of trauma had to refer to the external context. He also understood that trauma in a political context is not a single terrible event with consequences, but a long and complicated process in which ruptures, breakdown, restructuring, new breakdowns etc. occur. The idea of sequence is thus key to his trauma concept, while at the same time preserving the idea of intra-psychic rupture and breakdown, so central to most other trauma definitions. Keilson originally defined three such sequences, focussing on the beginning of persecution, the time of direct terror and the post-war situation. Barbara Weyermann and I (Becker/Weyermann 2006; Becker 2014/2006) expanded this to six sequences, constructing a framework that could be used to contextualise trauma in very different cultural settings, always insisting on the process character of trauma. The framework presented in figure 1 shows that the specific characteristics of suffering cannot be predefined universally (like a fixed set of symptoms) but have to be described and understood again and again in the different circumstances out of which they emerge.
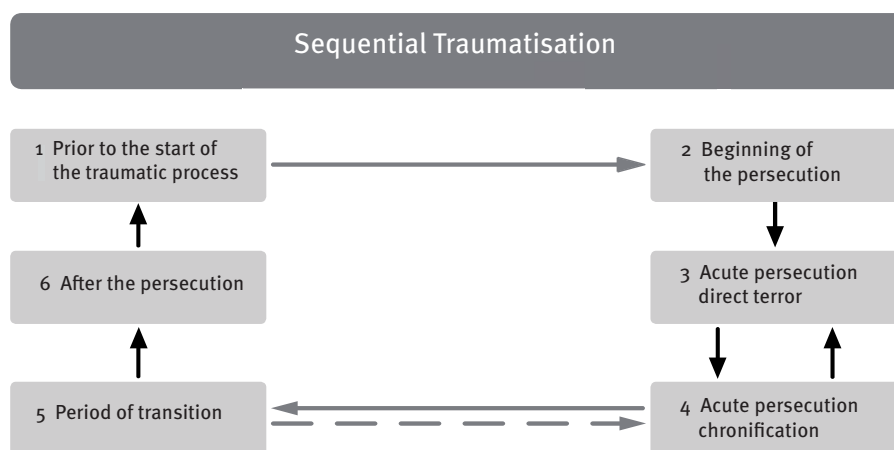
Source: Becker/Weyermann 2006.

Figure 1: Sequential Traumatisation. A basic framework of traumatic sequences in a given social context.

The *first sequence* relates to a period of relative *normality*. It is not easy to decide what "normality" looked like before the start of the traumatic process, i.e. before the official beginning of war or persecution, but this decision is necessary because this "normality" itself comprises a history marked by traumatic realities of varying intensity that play a role in what follows. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, we might define the sequence of "normality" as the time before 1992, when Yugoslavia still existed and war had not yet broken out. This Yugoslavia, however, was built on the traumatic experiences of World War Two, and these again surfaced during the war of 1992–1995. Thus, while defining the first sequence is a pragmatic necessity, it is also a recognition of the power and importance of history.

The *second sequence* covers the *initial period of persecution*, before it becomes completely overpowering. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina this would cover the years directly prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, which saw a burgeoning nationalistic discourse and the beginning of hostilities in the months leading up to open war. *Sequences three and four* describe the *times of acute terror* in which two types of situations need to be differentiated from each other: War does not unfold in real life like in a movie, where years of destruction are summed up in a few hours. In actual war and conflict, periods of direct terror alternate with moments of relative calm, in which people return in some measure to a normal life while awaiting the next

phase of acute destruction. This is why we differentiate between two – constantly alternating – sequences. During the phases of direct terror people suffer terribly and are focused on surviving. They might not even have the time to notice their traumatisation. But then follows what we call "chronification", a period of partial normalisation. In these phases people are under less acute threat, but they notice their suffering more. Fear is omnipresent.

Sequence five is the period of *transition*, which can last for a longer or shorter time. In the case of Bosnia, we could say that the country has never overcome this sequence and has been locked in an insecure period of transition since the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995. In many cases this transition does not lead into a post-conflict setting but back into war. Finally, the *sixth sequence* is the *time after conflict*, in which, as Keilson has convincingly proved, the trauma does not end but continues to provoke varying degrees of pathology, depending on the way power relationships in the society develop, the way it treats its victims and the extent to which it deals constructively with its own past of destruction.

The trauma concepts and interventions currently being applied seem to follow the idea that the simpler and the less context-oriented they are – the more oriented towards quick impacts – the better. Keilson's approach is more complex than other concepts but provides a much more suitable framework for a contextual discussion of trauma, one that acknowledges both psychological and social dimensions. As Hamber points out, trauma in the context of mass violence is not a one-off event, a single breakdown, nor does it have a clear pathology. It is a long and complex process, one that is sometimes more and sometimes less pathological. It is characterised by a difficult dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective. Our trauma language must try to reflect this as adequately as possible.

3 Insecure bridge 2:
the concept of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and the intervention pyramid

Hamber introduces the reader to the concept of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and to the intervention pyramid contained in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007). These guidelines are an attempt to structure the different types of needs of populations living through emergencies. Although I agree that these guidelines probably represent the most comprehensive approach to the issues to date, I think there are some serious problems with them that need to be understood. In other words, the IASC guidelines only partially manage to bridge the psychosocial gap.

The IASC guidelines define the composite term "mental health and psychosocial support" as "any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder" (IASC 2007, 1). On the one hand this definition assumes a link between mental health (MH) and psychosocial support (PSS), connecting different types of intervention. On the other hand the logic of the definition is confused, because PSS necessarily describes one or several *activities*, while MH is a generic term that refers first of all to a *state of mind* and only at a secondary level to an activity. This logical confusion has important consequences, because it enhances the idea held by many practitioners that mental health is not a state of being but something psychiatrists deal with, while psychosocial support is something undefined that basically implies recreational activities for people who are suffering. This is obviously not the intention of the IASC guidelines, but they are not clear enough on the issue. From a conceptual point of view it makes more sense to speak of "mental health and psychosocial *well-being*" (MHPSW).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" and adds that the "positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health as contained in its constitution: 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'" (WHO 2014, 1).

Closely linked, but with a slightly different emphasis, is the definition of psychosocial well-being given by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE): "The term *psychosocial* underscores the close connection between psychological aspects of our experience (e.g., our thoughts, emotions, and behavior) and our wider social experience (e.g., our relationships, traditions and culture)." Elaborating, the INEE states that "[m]ental disorders, which often benefit from clinical treatment, tend to involve severe psychosocial difficulties in managing thoughts and feelings, maintaining relationships, and functioning in expected social roles. However, many psychosocial problems do not require clinical treatment but are rooted in stigmatisation, lost hope, chronic poverty, uprooting, inability to meet basic needs, and inability to fill normal social roles such as that of student/learner. *Well-being* is a condition of holistic health in all its dimensions: physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual. Also a process, well-being consists of the full range of what is good for a person: participating in a meaningful social role; feeling happy and hopeful; living according to good values, as locally defined; having positive social relations and a supportive environment; coping with challenges through the use of appropriate life skills; and having security, protection, and access to quality services" (INEE 2010, 1).

The terms "mental health" and "psychosocial well-being", therefore, complement and enhance each other. In addressing the consequences of mass atrocities it seems vital to stress the linkages between the two concepts. At the same time, deeper reflection is needed to create different forms of intervention, ones based on an understanding of psychosocial support not as something broad and undefined but as specific activities that can stabilise or enhance well-being in a traumatising environment without recourse to medicalised models of treatment.

In relation to this complementary relationship between mental health and psychosocial well-being, the confusion in the logic of the IASC guidelines may seem trivial at first glance. Yet it can be important on the ground. For the last four years I have been cooperating closely with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) in their work with Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In all these places and under very difficult circumstances UNRWA offers basic health, education, and relief and social services. It has a wealth of experience in dealing with MHPSS issues, but only recently has it begun to coherently structure and plan its work so that dealing with these issues becomes a permanent ingredient of everything they do.

In the many discussions I have had with UNRWA colleagues in the field, the abovementioned confusion has been a permanent issue. It manifests itself, typically, as a division between health and education professionals. On the one hand, health professionals gladly discuss mental health but seem to think that psychosocial support has no place in their work. On the other hand, many education professionals think that mental health is for psychiatrists. All of them think mental health issues lead to specific interventions by psychiatrists and therapists, while psychosocial support is something anybody can provide and involves a lot of recreational activities.

So instead of a linkage between personal states of well-being, social process and political reality – instead of a permanent connection between health, education and social work – what I have often met on the ground is separation and conceptual splitting, and a non-acknowledgment of the very valuable practical MHPSS work many of these professionals are doing. The IASC confusion tends to enhance this problem instead of overcoming it. And if one compares the WHO definition of mental health with the INEE definition of well-being, their conceptual closeness is clear, but it is also clear that the WHO is focused on mental health and INEE on psychosocial support.

In his article Hamber also explains the intervention pyramid contained in the IASC guidelines. In my opinion, this pyramid has similar problems. It creates the illusion that while all people need basic services and security, not as many need community and family support, even fewer need specialised support, and only a very small number need specialised services such as psychotherapy. According to this understanding, deep psychological and psychosocial issues, and the need for trauma treatment, are mental health problems suffered only by a small group of people, while basic services and security are non-psychological needs shared by everybody. While I don't doubt the good intentions behind this pyramid, to me it seems to cement a separation between *basic needs* (ie. physical needs) and *psychological needs*, creating a false hierarchy and furthering the confusion of reality.

After a decade of quite close involvement in psychosocial projects in the Gaza Strip, which gave me insight into the debilitating consequences of several wars, I would prefer to turn the pyramid upside down. In a war-torn environment, with a population that is constantly being traumatised and re-traumatised, people need not only basic services and physical security. They also need acknowledgement and understanding of their ongoing extreme psychological suffering, and of the complex survival mechanisms they have had to employ. In such contexts, dealing with trauma cannot be considered part of "specialised services" but needs to be understood as an element of every social interaction. Intervention strategies must be deep and broad. It is not a case of "therapy here and security there", but of working to build relationships that acknowledge suffering and are able to deal with it not only in a therapist's clinic but also in schools, social gatherings, institutional settings and other everyday contexts.

4 Insecure bridge 3:
the construction of meaning on different levels

I strongly agree with Hamber's view that "creating a sense of meaning of what happened is a critical part of coming to terms with a legacy of political violence" (Hamber in this volume, 10) and that "creating meaning is an ongoing, messy process of negotiation and re-negotiation between the individual and society". (ibid., 11) To strengthen this bridge, I could even phrase his argument more radically: in its arrogance, international academic discourse on peacebuilding mechanisms looks for *the* solution, *the* mechanism, *the* framework for the construction of meaning. In reality, the construction of meaning always involves a conflict both within individuals and between them. It has to be messy. Any attempt to make it clear-cut and definite is just another attack on meaning, on the healthy capacity for conflict, on process. Yes, in one way the construction of social meaning will have to fight for *the* truth, for clear-cut distinctions between victim and victimiser, for a final working-through of the past. But when all is said and done there are different and contradicting truths at both an individual and a social level, and the only thing that would be harmful would be for the construction of meaning to end. In Germany we have been negotiating and re-negotiating the meaning of our Nazi legacy for 75 years. Fortunately, we still have not finished.

Between Israelis and Palestinians there is an ongoing asymmetrical conflict, with no peace in sight. Israeli social psychologist Dan Bar On and Palestinian Professor for Education Sami Adwan worked for years with a group of Israeli and Palestinian teachers to write a joint history book for children (Adwan/ Bar On, 2011). In this book they did not pretend to produce one narrative. They divided each page into three segments. On one side of the page we find a Palestinian truth, on the other side we find an Israeli truth, and in the middle we find an empty space for the reader. The authors belong to societies at war with each other. There is no chance of mutual understanding and reconciliation right now. But there is room for acknowledging different ways of constructing meaning, and perhaps there might be a little room for curiosity about the way the enemy constructs their meaning. To me, Bar On, Adwan and their team are

sending out a very powerful message about the multiplicity of narratives and the need to acknowledge this multiplicity, to work with it and on it.

5   The power of discourse

In concluding I would venture to suggest that Hamber's article, and my own and other people's comments – in fact, the whole dialogue issue – are part of the problem under discussion. This is neither good nor bad; it is just part of reality. There is no way we can talk about the impact of mass violence without impacting on it. We are not outside of the issue we are discussing – we are part of it. Societies have changing discourses about good and bad, about victims and victimisers, about suffering. These discourses are sometimes political, sometimes medical, psychological, literary etc. So the question is not only how we acknowledge, or fail to acknowledge, suffering, but also, how we shape suffering by the way we talk about it.

Trauma is never only trauma; it is not only a complex psychosocial process we can define and/or diagnose. It is also always a social discourse about morality, and this discourse can in itself be an agent of traumatisation. Brunner (2014) analyses this as "the politics of trauma". The French sociologists Fassin and Rechtman (2009) speak of "the empire of trauma". They convincingly explain the current trend of seeing the historically evolving trauma concept as being based on a dual genealogy: "...the reconfiguration of the relationship between trauma and victim, in which the victim gains legitimacy as trauma comes to attest to the truth of his or her version, has a dual genealogy – on the one hand scientific, based on the definition of trauma, and on the other moral, focused around the acknowledgement of the victim" (Fassin/ Rechtman, 2009, 29). Like Brunner, Fassin and Rechtman reflect on a reality in which our willingness to acknowledge suffering that is caused by political realities seems to have grown. But they also show that whatever we hear about this suffering is intimately linked to ongoing power struggles, and that scientific discourse mirrors these struggles and is in fact a part of them.

The psychosocial gap is not something we can avoid by being cautious, like the gap in the London subway. It is, and continues to be, a political challenge. Probably it cannot be bridged. I believe the only way to deal with this gap appropriately is to acknowledge it as a space of conflict, to try to make it a space in which healthy conflict can take place, and to try again and again to bridge it, even if this attempt is bound to fail. In more practical terms I believe it is very important to continue to struggle with the trauma concept, refusing to accept decontextualised, quick-impact treatments, and to continue to invite professionals to invent meaningful trauma work in their specific contexts. It is very important not to leave the trauma discussion entirely to the limited clinical world, which is where some professionals try to put it. I agree with Hamber when he says we have to understand trauma in its many dimensions (Hamber in this volume, 3-4), and I think the four broad approaches through which he tries to bridge the psychosocial gap are adequate and useful, not *in spite of* the contradictions and shortcomings they describe, but *because* of the honest ambivalence they promote (ibid. 11-16). I might be over interpreting, but I believe that the common thread running through Hamber's thoughts in this article is an essential belief in justice: justice understood not as an either-or – *either* an individual moral category *or* a normative social framework – but as both. On a more specific level I believe we need to bridge some of the unnecessary gaps between health-related and education-related approaches to the issue of trauma. And, finally, we have to accept and understand that discussing trauma is, and always will be, political – that it is, therefore, a vital part of any conflict transformation process.

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Recalling South Africa
Memory Work across Time and Space

Undine Whande

Content

1 Introduction

I remember well the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). I had come to South Africa a few months before the start of the first hearing, as a "bright-eyed and bushy-tailed" twenty-something enthusiastic about witnessing and partaking in this time of transformation in the country. At that time I only knew South Africa from my youthful times of rebellion in the German anti-apartheid movement. I loved the sincerity and courage with which South Africans approached the task, even though it was clear from the start that this would be a tremendously painful exercise. I recall going to one of the first hearings of the TRC and being warmly welcomed when I shared my interest in memory work based on my experience of having led youth exchange visits to concentration camps in Poland and inter-generational dialogue projects in Germany.

In a short space of time I came to know a set of widening circles of the people leading, working in, contributing to, and accompanying the TRC process. It was much the same people who stuck with it until the end and who patiently kept engaging in conversation with the never-ending stream of researchers and visitors coming in and out of South Africa at the time, wishing to somehow capture a piece of this extraordinary moment and process. Brandon Hamber was one of these dedicated contributors to the TRC process, and I have appreciated his work ever since because it stimulates questions that continue to intrigue me too, about how individuals' healing processes link to broader societal transformational agendas. I recall a number of conversations and seminars at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR)[1] in which we debated how communities could be more involved, what a genuinely safe space would look like for telling stories of great harm, and how to stay out of "rescue mode"[2] while being present to people who had lived through the enormous brutality of apartheid policy and practice.

Reminiscing, I observe us now in South Africa at another juncture in time. While I am writing this comment, xenophobic attacks are – again – targeting so-called "foreign nationals" in South Africa. People, most of them from African countries further north, are being chased from their homes, their shops looted and their livelihoods, if not their lives, taken from them. It seems that both the "othering" and the high level of violence embodied in apartheid policies and practices, themselves rooted in colonial conquest, have lingered and found new forms and avenues for their perpetually de-humanising patterns. I wonder about the appropriate response in the now, thinking about the work done during the TRC, recalling the disillusionment that set in quite early with regard to what the process could really achieve. The TRC marked a moment in time but was unable to shift the entrenched societal divisions. It allowed us to attain some truth in some cases but also left us with an overwhelming sense of the work still to be done. The TRC reached only a limited number of people in a direct, tangible way, yet it left behind a footprint of the nation's attempt to "face the past" for future generations to rediscover.

The first of these future generations is now coming of age in a way that finds voice, as we recently witnessed in the efforts of University of Cape Town (UCT) students to remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, an arch-symbol of the colonial past and conquest. The statue was still standing in the centre of the university campus, twenty-one years after "independence". I recall being part of a group of students that protested the continued existence of the Rhodes memorial in the 1990s (then it was graffiti, now it was "poo-throwing", which has become something of a Cape Town protest signature of late). I recall speaking to former students who had protested against the symbolism of the statue some ten years before us, in the late 1980s. Now, in 2015, the students were successful. The statue was removed after a three-week-long occupation by the students of the university's main administration building. The students demonstrated

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1   See: http://www.csvr.org.za/ [accessed 20 July 2015].
2   This is also known as the "White Knight Syndrome". Read more at https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-white-knight-syndrome/200905/rescuing-yourself-your-need-rescue-others [accessed 20 July 2015].

their courage, grit and willingness to dialogue, and it seems they came at the right moment in time. Some set up mini-dialogues on racial exclusion right in the middle of the busy campus, and all have vowed to continue a movement for social transformation, starting with the university. A new generation is finding its own struggle.

2 Transferring memory across generations – inaccessible emotions and disrupted meanings

What does this excursion into the past and present realities of South Africa have to do with Brandon Hamber's contribution on "Dealing with painful memories and violent pasts"? In my view Hamber also addresses a missing, or perhaps nascent, conversation between different generations in South Africa. I see a need for greater awareness of the potential and benefits of this conversation. The reality in South Africa is that the older generations know very well the impact of mass violence and the destruction of trust, relationships and belonging that Hamber describes: "A world is created where nowhere is seen as safe and where the line between death and extreme suffering on the one hand and ordinary living on the other is obliterated" (Hamber in this volume, 3). South Africa has several societal fault lines in this vein that may speak to other countries' realities as well – fault lines of memory, in a sense, that persist long after or violent oppression have ended.

In South Africa one such fault line is the divide between those who can now access relative comfort and safety and those who cannot. For many South Africans, a war-like reality – a situation where "nowhere is seen as safe" – continues until today in the form of crime and domestic violence. On the Cape Flats, an area to which many black South Africans were forcefully removed during apartheid's racially based displacement schemes, the transgenerational transfer of trauma is palpable. Children are exposed to violence on the street and in the home from an early age and grow up to perpetuate the cycle. Other South Africans have managed to escape, or were privileged to never fully experience, these stark realities. This is the horizontal divide across the nation, mostly based on a still-racialised economic system. There is also a transtemporal divide, and this is the one I want to focus on in my response to Hamber's essay.

The current parent and grandparent generations experienced apartheid violence and exclusion in ways that their children may not even be able to imagine from the perspective of their own lives. Yet even those South African children privileged to now live lives sheltered from violence and poverty inherit something akin to "emotional residues"[3]; they absorb the unspoken and unprocessed past fears and sufferings of their parents. Children of (now) middle-class parents who were themselves deprived under apartheid experience this phenomenon often in ways that may be hard to discern. They may live with an ever-present feeling that all is not as rosy as it is made out to be when parents emphasise "how good the children have it now". They are often told that they are not suffering as the parents did in the times of apartheid. Yet they may have strong emotions and inexplicable sentiments they cannot make sense of. These are the ways in which traumatic experience, as Hamber (ibid., 3) describes, "precludes its [own] knowing", as it is transferred

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3   Raymond Williams speaks about this as "structures of feeling" and "formations of relationship" (see Williams [1989c], quoted in Eldridge/Eldridge 1994, 4; see also Kayser-Whande 2005, 11; 21).

into later generations' lives. The same children may have actual physical symptoms or be prone to illness, addiction and suicide without any overt reason.

Sabine Bode has written extensively about this phenomenon in the context of the German "war children" and "war grandchildren". When she began to research this topic in the early 2000s she discovered an unspoken pact of silence. Germans born between 1930 and 1945 described their war childhood as normal. They showed no interest in talking about it and seemed generally "cut off" from the emotional reality of their early years:

> *Here we have a group of people who had terrible experiences in their childhoods, and yet, for decades, never had the feeling that they had experienced anything particularly unpleasant. They are unable to engage emotionally with these experiences and, as a result, lack access to the most important influences of their childhoods* (Bode 2004).[4]

She also describes the impact of this silence and inaccessible emotional reality on the later generation, the "children of the war children" (which is my generation). In some of her stories, for instance, descendants were having dreams with vivid details of a war which they neither experienced nor were ever told about. They dreamt their parents' actual unprocessed memories.

> *People born in the 60s and 70s have frequently told me about their dreams about the war. (…) Children can "inherit" the war fears of their parents, and how serious the consequences of such a legacy from the Forgotten Generation can be* (Bode 2009).[5]

In South Africa it is especially the domain of the family that is little talked about when considering the broader societal transformation process. I concur with the critique Hamber levels at PTSD and trauma models being superimposed on a reality like South Africa where many cosmologies and modalities for understanding intra-psychic phenomena exist. I really appreciate his efforts to highlight the significance of "meaning-making" in the process of healing memories of a harmful past. Violence, as he says, "disrupt[s] meaning systems, ways of life and everyday existence" (Hamber in this volume, 5). Hence, understanding what meaning is attributed to the past is not only "integral to recovery" but central to releasing the creativity that is required to imagine and make new lives at all. For most black South Africans, there is not really a desirable prior state of being to 'recover' to. Many white South Africans realise, too, that any nostalgia for the authoritarian past is not only 'costly' at a social level but also potentially inhibits their own prospects of the future. Something new has to be imagined, created and lived, and even now, twenty-one years into the 'new' South Africa, it still feels like just the beginning of that process.

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4 Sabine Bode (n.d.), quotation from an excerpt in English entitled "War Grandchildren – the Heirs of the Forgotten Generation", available at www.sabine-bode-koeln.de/war-children/war-grandchildren/ [accessed 20 July 2015]. The original was published in German (Bode 2009).
5 Sabine Bode (n.d.), quotation from an excerpt in English entitled "The Forgotten Generation – The War Children Break their Silence", available at http://www.sabine-bode-koeln.de/war-children/the-forgotten-generation/ [accessed 20 July 2015]. The original was published in German (Bode 2004).

3 What really matters –
to imagine, to relate

I am not convinced that, in such processes, there really is a needs pyramid, as Hamber suggests, where some needs are deemed more important than others, depending on the time elapsed after the period of harm. I concur that securing basic survival and supporting the activation of existing resources and support systems has to precede specialised professional intervention where possible, so as to avoid prioritising a project-based, work-generating modus for professionals at the expense of existing local resources and healing practices. However, based on my own experience I would be inclined to work with Max-Neef's paradigm on human needs (Ekins/Max-Neef 1992) rather than a Maslowian hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943):

> *Human needs must be understood as a system. That is, all human needs are interrelated and interactive. With the sole exception of the need of subsistence, that is, to remain alive, no hierarchies exist within the system. On the contrary, simultaneities, complementarities and trade-offs are characteristic of the process of needs satisfaction* (ibid., 99).

In this regard, for instance, "transcendence"[6] can be just as much the primary need in a situation of deprivation as anything else, depending on the traditions, values and viewpoint of the people concerned. I remember a lot of anger being directed at me when, during the time of the TRC, in a storytelling process known as the Healing of Memories, we suggested that perhaps participants from more impoverished areas would prefer more livelihood-oriented projects instead of a storytelling-based retreat experience. The notion of prioritising economic practicalities over psychological needs and even spiritual healing was strongly rejected:

> *What do you mean? That because I am poor all I want is food and nothing for the soul? How do you think we survive all along? How can we uplift ourselves when our spirits are down? No my dear, the workshop is all right for us. The healing is important even if you need bread* (quoted in Kayser-Whande 2005, 213-214).

The question of how much emphasis is placed on healing and restoration as something akin to returning to a *prior* state of being and a *prior* state of relationships (especially since reconciliation implies this) has moved in me for a long time. In South Africa, for instance, the authors of the Freedom Charter[7] were able to put into writing a thinking that was quite unimaginable in the reality of 1955. They displayed the vital ability to imagine the unimagined. It seems to me that this is the key to activating potential in scenarios of social devastation – to (re)imagine, to dream new relationships and, based on these, to innovate and co-create a new reality over time. Being imaginative in a context that has defied and destroyed relationships is one quality at the core of social healing processes, yet it is often subsumed under practical and functional needs in countries emerging from war and destruction. While life after a physical injury

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6   Transcendence has the spiritual connotation of coming to terms with a life event or story, in this instance regardless of the circumstances of the present. Verene Nicolas and Alastair McIntosh of Scotland's Centre for Human Ecology developed Max-Neef's suggestions into the "Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs", which includes the need for 'transcendence'; see www.verenenicolas.org and www.alastairmcintosh.com [accessed 20 July 2015].

7   In 1955, the ANC sent out 50,000 volunteers into townships and the countryside to collect "freedom demands" from the people of South Africa. This system was designed to give all South Africans equal rights. The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies - the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. A copy of the charter can be found on the website of the African National Congress (ANC); see www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=72 [accessed 20 July 2015].

may be characterised by nostalgia for a prior 'healthy' state in the light of bodily woundedness, the notion of "social woundedness" does not really work on the same terms. Instead it requires, the creation of spaces in which it is again possible to "dream" new realities into being. This dreaming is not something ethereal but a tangible process in which the human ability to (re)create meaningful and substantive lives feeds off a generative impulse that is first imagined (or dreamt). This process may be in motion long before any action is visibly taken. In my observation it needs a quality of quietening, silence, and silent listening that can too easily be interpreted as a wish for denial or forgetting. Often only later generations live the dreams of the previous ones. Yet the failure of the dreams to become reality in one generation makes them no less important to that generation.

4 Healing across time

Experiences across the generations in post-independence Africa, post-war Europe and the post-dictatorship Americas show that our vision of "dealing with painful memories and violent pasts" needs to be much more long-term. Hence, the inter- and transgenerational dimension, I feel, could form a stronger part of Hamber's framework. He points out the limitations of any process aimed at dealing with the past, none ever "making good" completely: "Coming to terms with the past ... is a life-long process that is context-dependent and changes over time" (Hamber in this volume, 7). I would suggest it is a transgenerational process that affects at least the next four generations. Indigenous wisdom – for instance, that of Native American and African traditions – would say that each of our actions affects at least the next seven generations. After four generations, as now in Germany, the impact of the past is no longer seen as in any way personal or direct. Yet a less tangible sensation of guilt can still be traced that may drive a young German to want to "go out and better the world" (see South African German Network 2011). I recall a conference on memory work in Cambodia a few years ago, where it turned out that most of the organisations hosting the conference had young German volunteers who had been giving pivotal support to the process (see Impunity Watch 2012).

What does this transgenerational outlook mean for the healing framework Hamber proposes? He suggests that "[h]ealing, therefore, is learning to live with situations of extreme suffering and integrating them into one's life so that one can build relationships and engage productively, ensuring that loss does not dominate everyday experiences" (Hamber in this volume, 8). This he describes as a continuum that changes according to context and individual circumstance – rightly so, in my view. However, as much as this may be the task of the generation most directly affected – to find a way to function in life again, to be able to move and not stay frozen in the moment of trauma or be stuck in a traumatic time zone – the task of the following generations is somewhat different and also needs to be noted in the framework. It may well be that the next generation busies itself with "making good" what to them is the suffering of the victimised parents. Children of perpetrators and beneficiaries may attempt to "make good socially" the deeds of the parents and grandparents with regard to these family members' (often unacknowledged and unprocessed) responsibility for harm. Most of the generation that experienced apartheid seems to have a more outward focus. What matters now is to become economically successful and to climb up the social ladder. A following generation (perhaps only the third) may well find itself looking inward again and asking questions about the psycho-emotional realities of family and community. In this way, loss unacknowledged and unseen has a tendency to resurface, even if it has been ignored by a generation or two.

In Germany this happened in the 1980s, when the third generation after the war reached adulthood. Many small projects of oral history, of tracing what happened in one's own town or family, emerged. Teachers incorporated such efforts into history lessons, sending their students on research missions to the local town hall. Perhaps not surprisingly, many such projects were met with hostility, even forty years after

the war, as Hirsch 2012 has outlined (the film "The Nasty Girl" by Michael Verhoeven, 1990, also gives a good illustration of this problem).[8]

Hence, although the aim may initially be, as Hamber says, to ensure that loss does not dominate everyday experience, later generations often feel called to go back to that loss and explore its implications more deeply. This is not least because memories of severe harm continue to drain energy even from the life of later generations, who can often make no link between their (frequently individualised, personalised or pathologised) illnesses, addictions, or suicides and the memories themselves. They are often unaware of how strongly the broader society suffers from harm experienced in the past, and that such memory radiates across the boundaries of families and communities into national and trans-national systems.

5 Healing across space

In my years of working in the field of trauma and memory work I have not met a single person, including myself, who is not driven by a deep healing quest that ultimately stems from their personal biography. Sometimes this is hidden from consciousness, and I meet strong resistance, with statements like: "The cause I am involved in is bigger, and there is nothing personal in my being here". The more my focus is on "helping" and "healing" others in ways that occlude the focus on self and on one's own journey within this particular engagement and its modalities, the more I may need to look closely at the impulse that spurs me on. Psychologists may be familiar with this impetus of self-reflexivity. But within other disciplines related to the field of transitional justice, memory work and healing, I do not find a similar kind of readiness for reflection. Healing is often seen as something separate that needs to be "outsourced to the psychologists" or "comes later". The personal needs to be contained, impersonalised and dealt with 'professionally', as if psychological hurt is infectious.

I believe that engagement for healing is not, and cannot be treated as, separate from the interveners' deeply personal work of self-healing. If the two dimensions were indeed seen to be related, it would pose interesting questions regarding "professionalism" and the notion that professionals go and offer services to "others" who are deemed in need of such professional help. While, undoubtedly, there is merit to professional support systems and to rigour in the "art and trade of helping", there is an element here that, to me, cuts across all professions that engage in processes of dealing with the past. Perhaps, invoking Steve Biko's famous remarks, this is best expressed in the notion of a quest of what it means to be "truly human" (Biko 1987/1978)? What are we trying to remember, as humanity, in this collective quest to "make good" and create alternative realities for future generations to remember?

In that vein there is, as Hamber (in this volume, 8) states, a need to be wary of selling techniques or addressing a set of symptoms through a series of interventions. I agree with his sense that timing is critical and that different processes may prove beneficial at different moments and in different generations. I also suggest that a spatial dimension be taken into account, so that we ask not only *when* meaningful, transformative memory work can happen but *where* certain parts of this work can take place. Bear with me for a moment as I depict my own experience:

When I was involved with the TRC process in South Africa, my mother came to visit me from Germany. We went to one of the TRC hearings together, and she was deeply moved by the experience. I recall that we decided to climb Table Mountain together afterwards. It was during this walk that she suddenly opened up and related to me the story of her childhood. In eloquent and harrowing detail she painted a picture of her

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8 *The Nasty Girl* (German: *Das schreckliche Mädchen*) is a 1990 West German film by Michael Verhoeven. The film describes the efforts of a German high school student to undertake an oral history project about her town during the Nazi era and how this leads not only to her uncovering unspoken history but also to her being socially ostracised. See www.bpb.de/shop/lernen/filmhefte/34132/das-schreckliche-maedchen [accessed 20 July 2015].

early years – born disabled, placed straight into a euthanasia programme of the Nazis, saved by her mother to then live through displacement, bombings, the rape of her mother by Russian soldiers, the hunger after the war and the flight from east Germany, then her later efforts to build a stable life and family. She spoke of still facing sleeping disorders, panic attacks and persistent nervousness, yet never considering that there could be a broader pathology than her own personal struggles. The story went on for several hours. I felt both bewildered and blessed at that moment. After so many years of searching for answers to the complex causalities around my sister's death (she starved herself to death as a teenager in 1981), I suddenly saw the mosaic puzzle of the family tragedy drop into a crystal clarity against the backdrop of history.

By adding the missing pieces of my mother's experience, I was able to trace some of what I had felt in my own body without ever having had an explanation for these sensations. One inexplicable sentence in my head started making sense: I often told myself, "You have no right to exist". Nobody had ever said that to me, yet these words played in my mind. Was I living my mother's experience of being considered worthless life upon her birth? Later, during a return visit to Germany, I asked my mother for more details on some of the events in the story. She looked at me blankly and said: "Really, did I say those things to you? I do not remember that." So strong was the need of her first-generation memory to conceal itself that, when in Germany, she could not remember some of what she had told me on Table Mountain. I suspect that in order to ensure her survival and sanity, such obstructions had literally become "emplaced" in her memory. I chose to respect this and allow her silence.

I learned from this incident that memory work not only takes us across time but also across space. This experience may help illumine some of the questions I have received from South African friends who have gone abroad because they felt they simply couldn't stand it anymore and had to leave that place. They may need a break from memory. It is often their children who have to come back and "search for the missing pieces of the story" (for an account of similar memory journeys, see Girulat et al. 2007).

6 Allowing closure, defying closure

When Hamber warns against a language of closure, I concur and would take it further, and argue: *at a personal and interpersonal level, closure is the felt sense of a temporary resting place in a journey of memory (work) across the generations.* Healing, in that sense, is more a dissolution of the stranglehold of the past on future generations than a resolution. In the end, it is the kind of narrative incision that interventions such as the TRC attempted to make on a broader scale. It means saying to each other: "Now we will tell a different story, even if that which is dreamt up is not yet our reality". Even if that which once was our reality still continues to harm: the 'in between' space matters. It is about the courage to dream in the face of a reality that persists even after it has supposedly disappeared. It is about the courage to face pain and allow it, even if this allowing becomes possible only a generation or two, or three, later. It is in the *allowing* of the continuities of pain – at whatever point in time – that a form of witnessing can take place. As Hamber (in this volume, 9) says, one needs to accept that these processes are "always contested, incomplete, and being negotiated and re-negotiated over long periods of time and through different (…) contexts." If laying the past to rest is possible, seeing, sensing, experiencing memories across time and space then become the faculties that enable some of the phenomena and pathologies to dissolve and disappear. Others remain, re-ignite and need another quality of attention, one that perhaps only the next generation can bring to them. The stories need to be told, while the silences need to be respected, even if this seems paradoxical.

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Berghof Foundation

Dealing with the Past in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict
The Power of Narratives, Spaces and Rituals

Andrea Zemskov-Züge

Content

1 Introduction

Brandon Hamber's essay addresses two important questions: "What is the role of different approaches for dealing with painful memories and violent pasts?" and "How do the different dimensions – interpersonal and intergroup relations, memories, and identities at the individual and collective level – relate to one another?" (Hamber in this volume, 2). These questions open up a universe of additional topics related to the cultural context, societal preconditions and obstacles to dealing with the past in post-war societies. I read his remarks against the background of my field of work in the South Caucasus. Here I engage as a historian, having specialised in Soviet and post-Soviet war memory, and as a dialogue practitioner striving to make use of scientific concepts and findings for establishing a sound and resilient peacebuilding system in the region.

Hamber's text inspired me to critically reflect on my own assumptions and preoccupations, and on the particular circumstances and political situation that frame my work in Georgia and Abkhazia. My comment will be developed in four steps. In the following – second – section I will give a short introduction to the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict setting. In the third section I will examine two main differences between Hamber's and my fields of work. One concerns the setting of peacebuilding work: whether perpetrators and victims have to live in close proximity to each other, or whether they live largely apart or even completely separated from each other. The other difference concerns the roles and repertoires of insiders compared to the potentials of external actors. I will outline some differences in the scope and reach of these actors. In the fourth section I will address several emerging issues that are useful for the practice of dealing with the past regardless of regional specifics and draw conclusions in the fifth and final section of this comment.

2 Background: the Georgian– Abkhaz conflict setting

The Georgian–Abkhaz war of 1992–1993 was a consequence of the disintegration of the Soviet Empire.[1] Previously unofficial and suppressed discourses on "national" and "ethno-political" identity had been emerging in many Soviet republics since 1987, when the former Soviet President Michael Gorbačev opted for more openness, granting freedom of speech and print. In Georgia, a nationalist movement gained power. In 1991, Georgia became an independent state. At the same time the Abkhaz national movement, drawing on experiences of oppression, started to push for more political power and independence in a federative state. As state institutions were weak, this confrontation led to repeated violent clashes, starting in 1989, and to outright war in August 1992. It resulted in ten thousands of war dead on both sides and 8000 wounded (Peterson 2008, 187). According to UNHCR data (UNHCR/EU 2009, 6), about 240,000 Georgians were expelled from Abkhazia during the war, with Russian support. Most of them settled in Georgia as internally displaced persons (IDPs). Abkhazia had proclaimed itself a republic before the outbreak of the war in July 1992, yet it has been acknowledged so far only by Russia (in 2008) and a few smaller states. Up to now (2015) it has been impossible for many IDPs to return. From an Abkhaz perspective, the return of a large number of ethnic Georgians, who had been displaced during the war, is seen as great risk. New occurrence of violence is feared as well as disputes about property, land and housing, the IDPs had to abandon. The Abkhaz population today numbers around 200,000 people (varying according to different

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1 For a comprehensive overview, see Auch 2004.

estimates). Many of the remaining Georgian minority are deprived of Abkhaz passports and the right to vote, due to the Abkhaz authorities' fears of shattering the current fragile majority situation. Due to border restrictions, most citizens of Georgia proper are not even allowed to enter Abkhazia today. Georgian perspectives on war history are therefore completely marginalised in Abkhaz public discourses on the war.

Today, the overall impact of the war is much more perceptible in Abkhazia than in Georgia. Nearly every family lost members during the war. The fighting took place on Abkhaz territory. The history of the war is represented as a glorious founding myth. It is remembered frequently in Abkhazia. Victory day is celebrated on September 30th with many festivities. But this vivid memorial culture does not at all reflect the memories of the former Georgian population and their views on the history of the conflict.

In Georgia, with a population of over four million, the war has had much less demographic impact: in comparison to the Abkhaz side only a very small percentage of the population suffered directly from the war. There is no glorious victory narrative to be told. Only a small percentage of the population (mainly the older generation of IDPs) have their own memories of cohabitation with the Abkhaz or of the war. Very few remember the discrimination and injustices against the Abkhaz minority in Soviet times, which are so central to the Abkhaz narrative. Public commemoration of this war plays a comparably minor role in Georgian public discourse. There is, however, a widespread friendship narrative that plays down Abkhaz agency in the war and emphasises instead the Russian role. This discourse again does not include the motives and experiences of the Abkhaz side.

3 Separate societies vs integration of both conflict parties

Hamber describes tensions caused by uneven dynamics in the way individuals and societies come to terms with past events. I fully agree: we must accept that victims need to address their experiences and deal with their trauma in a thoroughly individual manner and at their own pace. They cannot be expected to subordinate their individual needs and feelings to a societal or political agenda. This has become obvious in the Caucasus as well. Georgian IDPs strive to return to their houses, whether or not this is deemed acceptable by Abkhaz or even Georgian politicians. People who have lost relatives have a strong wish to find the missing, identify the bodies and take care of the graves of the deceased, no matter how the political situation develops and which territory the gravesites are assigned to. These needs can easily be exploited politically by both sides.

The conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia is further escalated by factors that stem from the international framework. Political leaders and large sections of the population align themselves with different political and ideological camps: the Abkhaz to the Russian sphere of influence and the Georgians to the EU and US spheres of influence. A whole range of questions and memories have been "outsourced" from Abkhazia and others were never integrated into Georgian official discourses. In the present state of isolation from each other, none of the sides is forced to question their assumptions and remember those details about the past that do not fit their world views. On the Georgian side, the idea of the "Abkhaz brothers" who have been overrun and blindsided by the Russian enemy is widespread. In this view, Abkhaz are not considered a "real conflict party" at all. On the Abkhaz side, it is easily forgotten that not all Georgians who were evicted or killed were nationalists or even opposed to Abkhaz independence. Competing narratives are fostered, and this in the long run helps to perpetuate the conflict.

I have established above that in the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict setting, the conflict parties are largely separated from each other. Only a small Georgian minority with very limited reach is living in Abkhazia

today. In conflict settings where the two sides are separated, an impulse from the outside is often needed in order to integrate the other side's experiences and views. I will refer to an example from the Georgian–South Ossetian conflict setting. In a workshop I conducted in Georgia with young people, war witnesses and veterans, we listened to an interview recounting a woman's experiences concerning Georgian non-state conflict actors, the so-called "Neformaly". These "Neformaly" would wear uniforms and come to South Ossetian homes to confiscate property and control the non-Georgian population, often acting violently and inducing fear in the non-Georgian population during the escalation of conflict in 1989. These actors were described very vividly, along with the fear their appearance provoked in the witness describing them. During the discussion, young Georgian workshop participants started challenging the war witnesses present, demanding more information about these "Neformaly" and their role in the escalation of conflict. This part of history was obviously not part of the usual Georgian discourse. Especially interesting was the argumentation of one war veteran, who claimed that these actors should not be seen as violators, but as dissidents who freed Georgia from Soviet rule. He met with fierce resistance from the young participants, who questioned his positive assessment. An intense and fruitful discussion on the Georgian nationalist movement followed. It had been induced by integrating parts of the "other side's" experiences, experiences rarely talked about in Georgia today.

Another question addressed by Hamber is the resistance of many victims to reconciliation processes. He underlines that some victims felt pressured into forgiving their perpetrators (Hamber in this volume, 8) and rejects calls for "closure" (ibid.). It seems obvious to me that in societies where victims and perpetrators live together, or where, as in Rwanda, perpetrators are released from prison and return to their communities, these questions become acute. But even separated neighbouring societies like Georgia and Abkhazia cannot stay apart forever. In a post-war society, different groups often hold different stakes in deciding whether reconciliation processes should be initiated and how far they should be taken. One group might speak in favour of reconciliation and dialogue, while another group might strictly oppose this or, for that matter, demand "closure" and opt for a "new start from a blank slate". I believe that in the context of the Georgian conflict, this demand often seems to express opposition to reconciliation rather than an act of reconciliation. The past has not yet been elaborately discussed between the conflict parties. Therefore, suuggesting a "new start" means demanding that certain aspects of the conflict can never be spoken about and, consequently, that their occurrence must never be acknowledged. Such an approach allows perpetrators on both sides to "hide" behind discourses of friendship and harmony. "Silent" defenders of violence can hold on to their opinions, not having to change their points of view. This imposes narrow limits on the development of trusting relations between former enemies and creates constant obstacles in cross-conflict-line contact. It is therefore necessary to create spaces in each of the conflict groups where the past can be addressed in a safe environment.

In our work on the violent past of Georgian–Abkhaz relations in the context of Berghof Foundation's Caucasus programme[2] over the past few years, we have learned some general lessons on how resistance can be fruitfully embraced by the dialogue process. These experiences might also, to some extent, prove beneficial in other conflict settings or formats.

One important experience is: when dialogue events are organised and conducted, reservations on any side must be taken seriously and given space. They are usually voiced on both sides by participants of the dialogue events and interest groups that are not directly involved. For example, victims' organisations may announce officially that it is amoral to talk to the former perpetrators, claiming that it violates the victims' dignity. Or: participants of a dialogue event may be afraid of "stirring old wounds" or of listening to the other side at all. Facilitators and organisers must take into account that people have good reasons for not trusting the "other side", for keeping the memory of disappointments and negative experiences alive, and for refusing to address these difficult topics at all. On both sides we heard reservations such as: "We do not want to talk to 'them' at all"; "'They' will never change"; and "Why do we have to come back to these

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old stories? Let's talk about the future". These comments are important, and many people on both conflict sides have such feelings. They must therefore be perceived as a necessary and justified phenomenon. Only if they can be articulated will other related questions come to the fore, such as: what do we gain from attitudes of resistance? But also: what do we lose when we strictly adopt them?

One possible answer is that by avoiding direct contact with the other side we gain a feeling of safety and a position of power. On the other hand, we lose opportunities to make our views and perceptions of the conflict scenario heard, and to receive acknowledgement of our suffering. We may also forego the chance to better understand how the other side sees the situation, and we might lose economic or social opportunities. Reservations can be used fruitfully if they are discussed on each side separately, prior to cross-conflict-line dialogue. It is important that these discussions are facilitated in a way that allows reservations to come to the fore.[3] It is only by acknowledging one's own and the other sides' right to experience feelings of mistrust and reservations, that participants and related groups can overcome their fears and see the winning side of cross-conflict-line contacts.

Another important experience that stems from our work: people will only be won over to relationship-building initiatives if they feel they can personally benefit from them. It is important that those who want to talk to people from the other side actually have rewarding experiences and can afterwards report positively on these encounters. Even in reluctant groups in society there are always individuals who are curious and want to know more about the thoughts and perspectives of people on the other side. If these open-minded individuals can be persuaded to share their memories, impressions and reservations with their own peer group, more reluctant people may become involved in discussions and create openings for bridge-building across the conflict divide. Processes of reconciliation need to be pluralistic and to integrate critical voices in order to become rooted in society. Reservations are not only acceptable but necessary for building trust in the long run.

4 The potential of insiders and outsiders in dealing with the past

While Hamber presumably writes from the perspective of an expert insider, I work as an external expert supporting local people who are willing to address the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. As an external expert I can adopt specific roles and approaches that may be helpful for changing the perspectives of stakeholders. At the same time, addressing issues of the violent past in a setting where people have to deal with painful memories is a difficult and delicate matter.

The first and most important role in dealing with the past must be played by insiders. Much better than any foreigner, an insider can see and understand what Brandon Hamber calls the "distinctive political, social and cultural meanings" of violence (Hamber in this volume, 5). Insiders can see the needs and troubles of their peers and find sensible and sensitive ways of approaching them. Hamber's remarks reminded me of one of our project partners, an Abkhaz woman who had lost her son in the war and founded a mothers' organisation in the post-war years. She observed that many hundreds of mothers, even more than four years after the war, were still wearing black and covering their heads with mourning scarves. This was and is especially the case in rural regions. The role of the mourning mother completely dominated their lives, and it seemed impossible for them to assume any other role. It was hard for them to find the

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3   The methods developed and used by the Berghof team will be described in our training manual, forthcoming 2016.

point in time when they could or should return to a more regular life, without the feeling of being a "bad" mother or depriving the fallen son of his right to be honoured and mourned.

In a spontaneous symbolic gesture at a public memorial event, the leader of the mothers' organisation took off her mourning scarf and the one of another mother who had approached her on the scene. During the following weeks after the event, again and again mothers approached her, asking for their scarves to be taken from their heads. In reaction to these pleas, with time, the organisation developed a ritual in which they would go to mothers' homes throughout the country and, in honouring their sons, remove their shawls, offering them in replacement a coloured, speckled shawl. In Abkhaz tradition the speckled shawl could be worn for mourning as well as in daily life. By offering each grieving mother a substitute, every one of them was empowered and given the possibility to decide. Did she want to continue to cover her head? Or was it also appropriate for her to wear the speckled shawl on her shoulders, keeping it at the same time as a reminiscence of the deceased? In its symbolic power, the act of removing the scarf is accessible to everybody, independent of their education and background.

This ritual, of course, could only have been developed and conducted by insider facilitators. The organisation's activists would share with the mother the responsibility of removing the scarf, thus opening a possibility for transforming the feeling of sorrow into a positive remembering of the deceased. In this activity, I see insiders who are pioneers for dealing with the past communicating with reluctant members of their own community who are scared of being criticised by their village communities if they decide to relinquish the symbols of mourning. The approach chosen by the women mentioned above is revolutionary, because it helps free individuals from social restraints and supports them as they take control of their lives. The women are not urged to find closure but empowered to find new ways of integrating mourning into their lives and honouring their deceased. That way they can deal with their loss at their own pace and are not excluded or separated from other women in the same situation, even if they have different patterns of coping.

The intervention described above was undertaken by a group of insiders; it was shaped as a symbolic act and directed at concrete transformations in peoples' lives. For an outsider, this would be overbearing and risky. First of all, outsiders need to listen and observe in order to understand what happened in the past and what impact it has had on people on both sides of the conflict divide. In listening and observing, outsiders can share their observations and mirror peoples' statements and behaviour, asking questions and adding outsiders' perspectives to the insiders' discussions. In so doing, outsiders also have a certain space for manoeuvre. As an outsider one can say and do "strange" things that would not necessarily be acceptable for insiders, operating to a certain extent outside of local discourses. Outsiders can, for example, choose the instrument of discursive interventions, aiming to challenge conflict-relevant stereotypes. An outsider can challenge a dominant narrative that is sacrosanct to insiders, such as the friendship narrative in Georgia. To a certain extent outsiders can also formulate and defend unpopular "truths", and they can address events that are not usually remembered publicly. In this case they must be prepared to accept the role of scapegoat for a limited amount of time in order to facilitate and catalyse a discussion. This potential can also be used for "importing" views and memories from the "other side". In this respect, outsiders can adopt the role of messengers, moving between the different constituencies and enabling a communication that cannot be initiated by insiders directly.

5 Conclusion: Narratives, spaces and rituals

Brandon Hamber writes: "Thus, any society grappling with mass injustice should seek to open as much social and psychological space as possible and set down as many clear moral markers as achievable. It is only through doing this that an adequate context can be created in which victims can undertake the difficult intra-psychic work of coming to terms with the injustices they suffered." (Hamber in this volume, 16). In the Georgian–Abkhaz context, a clear marker would be for example the uncompromising renunciation of violence. Until not long ago, the phrase "What's lost by war can be won by war" was still widespread in Georgia and continued to be supported in the Saakashvili government's policy. I am convinced that a deep and thorough engagement with Abkhaz war memory on the Georgian side can bring about a sustainable change to this discourse. Sustainable peace can be achieved in the region only if this moral marker is adopted: the clear and sustainable message, sent by policymakers in Georgia, that "reconquering" the territory lost to Abkhazia is not an option, and that it is unacceptable even to verbally ponder military action. In shaping the dominant narrative of the past, policymakers in Georgia must recognise and clearly state that the damage done to the Abkhaz-Georgian relationship by war has been so serious that there can be no "business as usual" in the relationship, and that a denial of past violence or, worse, any threat of future violence, will do permanent harm to future relations.

In my view, suitable narratives and discourses about the violent past are at the centre of finding ways to constructively overcome violent events. It is vital that these discourses be pluralistic, reflecting the perspectives of various groups in society. There cannot be only one thread of memory; a variety of memories must exist and be accessible in each society. They must complement and support each other, even if they contradict each other at times. In my scientific work on narratives in the late Stalinist Soviet Union, I have come to the conclusion that Stalin's history policy on the "Great Fatherland War" was highly devastating not so much because it depicted a purely militarist perspective in which only the 1944 victories counted, but mainly because it claimed to be the only acceptable history narrative (Zemskov-Züge 2012b, 286ff).

This leads to the question of how pluralistic interpretations of history can be developed in society. What role can state institutions play in this respect and what can non-state actors contribute? What kind of space is needed to conduct such work? State institutions, of course, even in democracies, have certain directives as to which interpretations of history are accepted and on which ones they base their official policy. However, to shape discourses on the past in a pluralistic way, nurturing controversial discussions, the process should not be left to professional historians in state institutions alone. NGOs, museums, schoolbooks, art and literature all need to engage in the process and add pluralistic meaning, based on historical facts.

Non-state actors are much freer in their interpretation of past events than state institutions. If, for example, a victims' organisation offers psychological support and group therapy to their members, in which they can recount and share traumatising experiences, a space is created, independent of political correctness and official lines, where narratives can be shaped according to the needs of survivors. A youth organisation that seeks to help post-war generations understand their parents' experiences can contribute a lot to transgenerational bridge-building. Art projects can help people to cope with painful memories by expressing consequences of violence that are difficult to verbalise. Such organisations and initiatives are always bound to their members' views and interest. They can contribute to making visible additional perceptions that may complement and challenge the dominant narrative without replacing it. While state institutions are responsible for establishing central moral markers, non-state actors are responsible for adding plurality and diversity.

I will add one final point: I believe that interpretations of history, if they are to become fully integrated and understood in society, should not stay confined to their verbal existence but also manifest themselves in other forms. As shown in my example (see section 4), rituals can hold great significance for witnesses and their families and open up possibilities for transforming war-related identities. History can be presented in a way that corresponds with traditions and in accordance with the specific cultural and societal meanings ascribed to the violent pasts in the particular conflict context. Such rituals are easy to adapt and can be understood regardless of educational background. Since reconciliation is always at risk of provoking fear, traditional and more familiar forms and actions can help to reduce such fears and give the people involved confidence in the positive results of their challenging endeavour. As the example of women changing their scarves has shown, rituals can unite several key functions and leave room for individual choices that integrate mourning and honour the deceased while creating steps towards a transformation of grief. In these cases, the individuals can adjust the ritual to their own realities and feelings.

These three elements – balanced history interpretations with clear moral markers, pluralistic spaces for remembering and discussing the past and suitable rituals of commemoration – are, in my view, crucial for enabling a society to deal with its violent past. For cross-conflict-line encounters, a sound balance between critical self-reflection and positive experiences in direct contact is vital. At the end of the day, only self-reflection can create a safe and fruitful base for reaching out across the conflict divide, be it between groups inside a society or across ceasefire lines or state borders.

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Berghof Foundation

Grappling with the Stranglehold of the Past over Time
A Response

Brandon Hamber

Content

I cannot do justice to the rich and thoughtful comments on my essay "Dealing with Painful Memories and Violent Pasts: Towards a Framework for Contextual Understanding" in this short response. The respondents who so graciously shared their thoughts have provided much to consider; I can only touch on the implications. I will not dwell on the commonalities in the approaches put forward by the commentators and myself, but rather focus on the divergences or elaborations posed by their insightful comments.

Suffice to say, the commentators and I seem to share a concern with understanding the impact of political violence in as much depth and nuance as possible, all holding a deeply contextual view of how societies and individuals in the aftermath of war and repression reconstruct meaning in social, political and psychological terms. This is, as David Becker adds, reiterating some of my points in my essay, always a political process and concerns power relationships. Becker also concurs with me that such processes and the outcomes that follow are inevitably fraught, incomplete and ambivalent.

That said, as a starting point I draw on Undine Whande's eloquent comment that healing "is more a dissolution of the stranglehold of the past on future generations than a resolution". This phrase captures the essence of what several of the respondents convey, that is, although I provide a framework for understanding the gaps and challenges of reconciling individual and societal political challenges, there are ongoing questions about how my framework applies over time where the past still permeates the present. With this in mind, I have chosen to comment on four issues that could enhance the framework I put forward in my essay.

1 Intergroup dynamics and persistent narratives

A theme across the commentaries is the importance of damaging narratives in societies emerging from conflict. Drawing on Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Olivera Simić reminds us how competing narratives of suffering can be persistent and can continue to be "fought with other means" long after formal hostilities have ended. Andrea Zemskov-Züge adds that there is a silence in the Georgian and Abkhazian context, where neither side remembers "details about the past that do not fit their world views". Competing narratives are fostered, perpetuating conflict.

These comments are useful in reminding the reader, as I have noted elsewhere (Hamber 2012), that how transitional justice interventions link to intergroup relations remains largely undertheorised and under-researched, with a few exceptions (e.g. Aiken 2010; Arthur 2011). In other words, one way to expand the framework I present in my essay is to consider the intergroup dimensions and saturating nature of identity politics in more detail. As I note in the essay, but do not expand substantially, there is a need to delve into the worlds of power, not only at the national level, but also within and between groups.

Simić supports my call to create a "framework of meaning at the collective level" but is concerned that in some societies this is not possible, such as BiH, where the collective context is dominated by a culture of victimhood and denial. Becker too reminds us that alternative truths exist in the Israeli and Palestinian context that seemingly cannot be reconciled into one narrative, essentially arguing that accepting a multiplicity of narratives might be a pragmatic option. Zemskov-Züge raises a further complication in the case of Georgia and Abkhazia, where victims and perpetrators no longer live together. The structural distance allows different narratives to persevere and each society to mutually "hide" behind a pretense of harmony.

Simić's paper reminds us that victims have their own agency, narratives and identity politics. Competing hierarchies of suffering, she argues, can result in different groups assuming "a monopoly on suffering and a power of veto on reconciliation". This can be the result of victims themselves but may also

be due to the manipulation of the status of victimhood "by political elites". Zemskov-Züge also notes how victims are politically exploited in the Georgian-Abkhaz context.

Victims, as Simić concludes, can therefore be both agents of positive social change and agents of resistance to new reconciliatory narratives. Therefore, although in my essay I talk of victims generically and the importance of guaranteeing their rights, if the framework I develop is to be expanded, Simić reminds us that a more detailed focus on the politics of victimhood is needed. To really get to grips with this, as I note in my essay, we need to problematise the power relationships implicit in dealing with the past, for example, the power dynamics and incentives implicit in championing different approaches ("reconciliation", "justice", "forgiveness", "forgetting").

The commentaries also have implications for transitional justice mechanisms more broadly, although the respondents do not expand into this arena. Transitional justice mechanisms can create a context where intergroup relations can be fostered, but equally have risks and could, under certain circumstances, aggravate intergroup conflict. For example, as I point out and expand upon elsewhere (Hamber 2012), political trials can create a new national narrative that can build civic trust as those guilty of violations are prosecuted (Fletcher / Weinstein 2002). At the same time, if perpetrators represent a specific ethnic group, there is no guarantee that prosecutions will enhance intergroup relationships. Groups could become further estranged as one group sees the offenders as perpetrators and the other as martyrs or the "new victims" of a successor regime.

Likewise, truth commissions can mark a social and political attempt by politicians to take stock of the past, acknowledge atrocities, and symbolically allow different groups previously in conflict to commit to a new future (Hamber 2012). But they too, if not undertaken properly, can reinforce certain narratives. A modest expectation of the potential impact of transitional justice mechanisms is therefore needed when thinking about how they might improve intergroup relations. As a result, a number of the commentators note, as I do in my essay, that culturally appropriate initiatives will need to run alongside transitional justice processes to aid intergroup transformation such as contact, trust-building processes, therapeutic and psychosocial interventions, dialogue, traditional practices, museums, developing new curricula, opening archives, public education, and art projects. As Zemskov-Züge notes, this can all add pluralistic meanings to the past.

But none of this can be divorced from the social and political realities such as inequality, economic problems, tenacious and negative government discourse about "the other", and ongoing discrimination in different forms (race, gender, class, etc.), if they exist. Such factors all have the potential of exacerbating and creating new social fissures, despite transitional justice, peacebuilding or psychosocial initiatives. Many of those I know who testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa have become more negative about the experience over time. This is not a failure of the TRC as such, but the failure to take some of its recommendations into the present and to effect real change in people's lives.

2 Inter-generational nature of dealing with the past

Once we accept the long-term nature of dealing with the past, Undine Whande's call to look at the past through an inter-generational lens is to be welcomed. She is correct in mentioning that my essay does not directly tackle this issue. This is a reflection of the framing of the essay, which was focused on the impact of transitional justice processes on those who go through them or have been directly affected. But I am grateful for Whande's suggestions, as she beckons a deeper look at the implications of addressing the past across generations.

That said, I am not sure if a desire to understand the past from one generation to the next is predictable, inevitable or generalisable. What happens inter-generationally is dependent on what has gone before and the nature of the present. The memories and associated traumas of the past are not carbon-copied from one generation to the next, but rather take on a life of their own, manifesting in a myriad of ways. A transparent, public process of discussing the past will have a different outcome than social silence about human rights violations or where identity politics go unchallenged across the years. As Whande points out, and I agree, how future generations will see the past will be linked to whether they have been freed from the "stranglehold" both practically (say in terms of still living in poverty or not) or how identity politics are played out in the present.

To link this to the South Africa context, the question, therefore, is not "did the TRC uncover the past sufficiently", but how was the past carried into the present and how is it reflected upon today. Obvious shortcomings in South Africa were the lack of public education that followed the TRC process and the failure to prosecute those that who did not avail themselves of the TRC amnesty. As a result, as Whande powerfully notes: "The TRC reached only a limited number of people in a direct, tangible way, yet it left behind a footprint of the nation's attempt to "face the past" for future generations to rediscover."

But to extend Whande's thinking, perhaps it is the depth and size of the footprint, in terms of the attempts to deal with the past at the time and shortly afterwards, that will affect how or if a new generation will find "its own struggle". The shape of this struggle will be determined by the past and present. To this end, a campaign such as *Rhodes Must Fall*, which Whande discusses, is about the failure of not adequately dealing with the past, the inability of those who lived through apartheid to constructively unpack the past for a new generation, and a frustration with the present to offer a vision of a better future.

To put this another way, the context of the present continually reshapes how we look at the past, as well as how we use the past in the present. As I note in my essay, although lessons may be learned (as the phrase goes), that does not mean we will apply them in the present. We continue to "remember" the past and "reinvent" it depending on the ever-shifting context. This is even more so for those who did not experience it directly, such as young people, who feel its after-shocks and walk in its shadow. This, as Whande notes, is amplified in the current war-like reality of poverty, crime and domestic violence experienced by thousands in South Africa today.

What I would add, however, is that there is also an unwritten gendering of such contexts. We need to ask why it is that it is largely men who carry direct violence from generation to generation, and how certain forms of being have become entrenched in our political systems (e.g. male-dominated parliamentary structures built around aggression and dominance). Yet the issue of masculinity is seldom discussed, and if it is, generally only in narrow terms focusing solely on persistent violent masculinities. As I have outlined (see lead article in this volume), in societies such as South Africa, a focus on the direct political and criminal violence often overshadows the violence embedded in everyday life: on the sports field, in the classroom, in the home, in public spaces, in language and in the media, most of which has a strong tendency to reinforce certain types of hegemonic (often violent, silencing and oppressive) masculinities. The result of all this is that for most citizens, the more brutal masculinities of those involved in direct violence (combatants, police, the military, violent protestors, criminals, those who assault their partners) are deeply enmeshed with the violence of the everyday (see Hamber 2016).

Ongoing violence is not simply the result of the moments of "exceptionality" seen in the past (e.g. torture, disappearance) carried out by far smaller numbers of people (former combatants or soldiers) slipping into the present and exacerbating other issues such as domestic violence. In fact, it may well be the opposite, and the moments of exceptionality were made possible by the direct, cultural and structural violence of the everyday. The question is, therefore, not only how to prevent violent masculinities manifesting from generation to generation through trying to change the actions of individuals or groups of men (and some women), but also how to stop pervasive masculinities that marginalise the poor, distort community and family life, and corrupt our political systems, not only through the naked exercise of power, but also through the hidden masculine cultures operating within a variety of hierarchies and social spaces (Hamber 2016).

3 Sequences, context and traumatisation

Becker argues that sequential traumatisation as a concept bridges the psychological and social dimensions of political violence. He eloquently outlines the concept in his response, so I will not repeat it here. Elsewhere, I have also written at length about Keilson's concept of sequential traumatisation (Hamber 2009) and why I think it is a useful way to frame how we think about the impact of extreme violence, so I can only echo Becker's sentiments. Thinking of trauma sequentially means asking the question: How is dealing with the legacy of a politically violent past different during times of conflict, in transition, and during times of peace?

The following extract is from a radio show on 28 January 2008, documenting the voices of survivors of the La Mon Hotel bombing by the IRA in 1978 in which 12 people died. The comments highlight their unhappiness with Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and now working in government with Sinn Féin, who are closely linked with the IRA. The survivors are seemingly, or had been, DUP supporters:

> *"(...) for years, we have been told by the Democratic Unionist Party that they wanted investigations carried out (...) to find out who was behind it. Since Paisley and McGuinness got together, we haven't heard one thing about these inquiries...Personally, when I see Paisley and McGuinness [Sinn Féin and Deputy First Minister] together and see them chuckling (...) Aah (...) when people like ourselves sit and watch on the television that sort of thing going on, it would really make you sick. It would make your stomach turn. After all these promises about never sitting down [together] (...) it really is annoying."*

What is evident from this excerpt is that for survivors, a transition to peace brings its own challenges. Once the conflict is over, individuals can be left questioning the meaning of their suffering and what its significance is in a changed context. For the victim quoted above, it highlights that moving on for them is different from what moving on means for politicians. They feel distressed that the political party they support is now working with "the enemy". At a macro level, the changes the comments refer to are ostensibly positive as a peace agreement has been forged in Northern Ireland. But at the same time, for some individuals, peace has negatively altered their meaning system. Thus, victimisation is not only tied to specific historical incidents, but is also continually reinterpreted across time and differently in different contexts. If the theory of sequential traumatisation is right, as Becker proposes, we can therefore expect people to experience different mental health impacts at different moments in time. We have, therefore, to continually pay attention to the changing context and understand its implications, and by extension we should see changing the context as a psychological intervention.

A further question is whether the concept of sequential traumatisation may be pertinent to the types of concerns that Whande raises about those who have not experienced the violence of the past directly but have absorbed "the unspoken and unprocessed past fears and sufferings of their parents". As noted, I firstly think this depends on how the past was dealt with, or the size of the transitional justice footprint, for want of a better way of putting this. What we know in South Africa, for example, is that some attempts were made to deal with the past, but the footprint was not as deep as it could have been. Secondly, it relates to the politics of the present and if a new future can be imagined and realised. In the absence of the latter, and to draw on Keilson, the present will become yet another persecutory sequence. But more theorising is needed here.

That said, in South Africa and many other places, the stranglehold of the past remains that where you are born, and to whom, still largely determines your future and what you might achieve. This must change

if we are to truly change the impact and meaning of the past in the present. But I have no magical solution how to change the macro and micro socio-economic contexts that so pervasively affect us all. To quote the French economist, Thomas Piketty, "the distribution of wealth is too important an issue to be left to economists, sociologists, historians, and philosophers" – and I would add psychologists to the list. This, however, does not preclude us all engaging in the debate.

4 Thinking holistically

There is much in my essay about the importance of thinking about holistic ways of dealing with the past. To this end, I am not surprised that both Whande and Becker picked up on my use of the intervention pyramid contained in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007). Becker notes that "While I don't doubt the good intentions behind this pyramid, to me it seems to cement a separation between *basic needs* (i.e. physical needs) and *psychological needs*, creating a false hierarchy and furthering the confusion of reality". Whande echoes this and is not convinced that "there really is a needs pyramid (...) where some needs are deemed more important than others". Given these comments, I feel compelled to respond about my use of the IASC pyramid and will use this as a way to make some concluding comments.

Zemskov-Züge, in her response, notes that in my essay I write as an "expert insider" and she largely works as an "external expert" supporting local people who are willing to work on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Certainly, in the South African, and probably the Northern Ireland context at this stage, I can claim the position of an "insider" ("expert" is perhaps a term others should confer rather than oneself). However, interestingly, when I used the IASC model I was essentially targeting "external experts", and by this I mean those who perhaps come to the issue of thinking about victims' needs in political contexts as development and humanitarian aid workers, or peacebuilding practitioners. To this audience, who are often "sold" various psychological treatments as the panacea to victims' needs, I wanted to make the point that a range of needs exists and in fact specialist psychological and psychiatric services are a very small part of the picture. The IASC pyramid served this rudimentary purpose for essentially making an argument about resource allocation, but I accept that as a model it "confuses reality" as Becker notes.

Like Becker and Whande, I think the IASC pyramid does not show sufficient interrelationship between different needs and levels – perhaps I should have made that clearer. It is also not, and I did not mean it in that way, another form of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs at an individual level, although it is easy to see how it can be read in that way. In my more recent work, I and others have criticised the notion of "psychosocial" as it still largely implies a fairly mechanistic interaction between the "psycho" and the "social", and the IASC pyramid does the same (Hamber/Gallagher/Weine/Agger et al. 2015). I concur with Becker that the binary between social and psychological is essentially an "illusion". In my essay I quote Williamson and Robinson (2006), who say that one cannot compartmentalise mental and emotional issues as distinct from physical and material issues; they are not only interrelated but also indistinguishable.

Therefore, although the concept of psychosocial is helpful and extends the boundaries of theory and practice beyond the individual, it misses key dimensions of human experience (Hamber/Gallagher/Weine/Agger et al. 2015). That is, the emotional and psychological, and the material and social, cannot be separated out and interventions that focus on one side of the "psycho" or "social" equation or the other (although useful at times for individuals), or models that imply the "psycho" or "social" affects the other in a linear or even dynamic way, do not conceptually grasp how people live their lives and how their sense of well-being is constructed (ibid.).

That said, to find the words to capture this composite reality, or to outline what this means in practice for societies emerging from conflict, is not easy. I am grateful to Becker and Whande for raising the issue,

but equally think much work remains to fully understand how psychosocial interventions integrate, interact or are linked to the social context and to potentially transformative changes for both individuals and societies. In my own and others' recent work, we have started to consider this difficult question (Hamber/Gallagher/Weine/DasGupta et al. 2015).

However, what we do know, to go back to my earlier use of the word "exceptional", is that for many experiencing extreme political violence, their suffering is not just about the exceptional (meaning human rights violations such as murder, torture, disappearance). Of course these can be features of a repressive context and can be devastating, but in most cases violence is not a one-off or isolated event, and social problems are not merely variables affecting mental health that come and go with governments. Rather, life is a series of daily stressors of different kinds and magnitudes that cannot be disentangled easily or experienced in some sort of isolated way; they also generally persist long into the future (Hamber/ Palmary/Nunez 2015). Such experiences cannot be captured by or fully represented by a series of projects or programmes, or one-dimensional models, as coming to terms with the past and human rights violations is essentially a personal lifelong project requiring different approaches and social practices at different moments that will shift and change with time. To fully capture this process, I conclude with a quote from a recent work (ibid., 178):

"Clearly, a holistic approach would be best, but what this means in the complex world (…) is almost impossible to define – but what we now know…is that the everyday experience of life, psychological wellbeing, spiritual enrichment and material existence are interconnected, interlinked and often indistinguishable. No healing approach (…) fully captures this. In the final instance, however, what seems to be at the core of the distress which is used as the driving force to seek out healing of some sort is a desire to make sense of what is happening in the precarious world (…) To this end (…) [it all shows] the importance of meaning making within the healing process no matter how it is finally addressed."

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(All links in this text and in the section of references were accessed on 23 February 2016, unless otherwise indicated).

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