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Deepening understandings of success and failure in post-conflict reconciliation

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ABSTRACT

Is failure in reconciliation reversible, or does it become over determined at some point? Can signs both of reconciliation and its failures co-exist and survive at different levels of peacebuilding? Should we be thinking in terms of 'reconciliation' or even 'reconciliations' instead of 'Reconciliation' with a Big R? To address these questions, this article stresses the factors that emerge from five case studies: 1) the treatment, definitions and feelings of victims of the conflict; 2) the continuation of violence in new forms; 3) the political power struggles that were left unchanged by the conflict; 4) the lack of political will for change, particularly to structures of economic injustice; 5) divisions between national elites and local populations; 6) the role of external actors; 7) deeply entrenched conflict identities and narratives; and 8) the multi-faceted factor of time in assessing success versus failure..

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Introduction

One of the most challenging and little-understood phases in peacebuilding is the process and period that has come to be known as 'reconciliation' by many practitioners, despite qualms, disagreements and doubts about the appropriateness of the term itself.¹ This phase is not that of war-ending, of negotiations, of ceasefires and peace treaties. It is not synonymous with post-conflict reconstruction, including the process of restoring government institutions and, often with copious help from outside actors, setting up elections, with the idea that elections will herald a return to 'normalcy' and a functional state. Herbert Kelman wrote, in distinguishing between reconciliation and other parts of post-conflict peacebuilding, '[t]he settlement process is not especially designed to change the quality of the relationship between societies'. For Kelman, reconciliation, as distinct from conflict resolution, is about relationships, the changing of conflict identities, and the process 'whereby the societies learn to live together in the post-conflict environment'.²

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¹Tamar S. Hermann, 'Reconciliation: Reflections on the Theoretical and Practical Utility of the Term', in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39–60.

²Herbert Kelman, 'Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation: A Social-Psychological Perspective on Ending Violent Conflict Between Identity Groups', *Landscapes of Violence: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal Dedicated to the Study of Violence, Conflict and Trauma* 1 (2010): 1–3.

A list of conflicts from the late twentieth century to the present, particularly intra-state ones, reveals the extremely difficult nature of the task that Kelman's definition implies. Of these conflicts, many have formally 'ended', meaning an end or sharp diminishing of deaths at the hands of political armed actors and/or the state, often via such conflict resolution methods as outside facilitation and mediation, peace treaties, and elite bargaining – or total, asymmetric victory by one side. Yet, durable peace has not been achieved. Trust between groups and between citizens and the state, collaboration across old battle lines, tangible signs of new inclusiveness and equity, reintegration of armed actors or refugees and the internally displaced, truly reparative measures for victims – these, among many other signs of the forging of new relationships and identities, are not present. Many post-conflict societies remain deeply dysfunctional, with the appearance of new forms and configurations of violence and plausible scenarios for the future renewal of wide-spread armed conflict. Reconciliation is often, at best, a partial achievement.³ Despite the growth of conflict resolution as a field and many successes in other phases, this phase of peace-building, reconciliation, demands continued further research and better practices, including understandings of not only 'what works', but what 'doesn't work', and why.⁴

Despite efforts from many disciplines to pin down an acceptable definition of post-conflict reconciliation and to find a better word for this phase (*rapprochement*? *co-existence*?), disagreements persist. Yet while we seem to have come closer in 20 years of research and writing to a general understanding that clarifies the range of attributes associated with the concept of reconciliation, how to promote durable reconciliation remains a challenge with few clear answers. In the late twentieth century, the answer seemed to lie somewhere in French and German achievements in international reconciliation and Germany's domestic work in reckoning with its own past, but it is increasingly clear that this history is not replicable, and certainly not in all other contexts, especially in intra-state conflicts.⁵ There may be generalisable features of inter-group political and social reconciliation, but the process is highly contextualised, and there are many challenges.⁶

The passage of time since reconciliation and transitional justice became popular topics of research and practice has not helped us: cases that seemed to offer examples of reconciliation, such as South Africa, have not lived up to the hopes generated by the transition, the leadership offered by Nelson Mandela, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Despite being a focus of intense attention by peacebuilders, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is increasingly distant from any hope for a basic peace agreement, let alone inter-group reconciliation. Post-conflict contexts in which national processes thought to promote reconciliation, such as trials and truth or 'historical clarification' commissions, as well as local processes, took place, such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Peru, ultimately have not seem to have benefited, if we take surges in criminal violence

³Valérie Rosoux and Mark Anstey, eds., *Negotiating Reconciliation in Peacemaking* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

⁴Roger Mac Ginty, *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding* (New York, Routledge, 2013).

⁵Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

⁶See Claudio Corradetti, Nir Eiskovits, and Jack Volpe Rotondi, eds., *Theorising Transitional Justice* (New York, Routledge, 2016); Arnaud Kurze and Christopher Lamont, eds., *New Critical Spaces in Transitional Justice. Gender, Art, and Memory* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2019).

and continued structural violence to indicate failures in reconciliation.⁷ At the interstate level, the German-French history has not inspired a similar pattern in Sino-Japanese or Korean–Japanese relations.⁸

With few examples of ‘success’ in reconciliation (and in the rest of this paper we will refer to progress interchangeably with success, since it is now widely accepted that reconciliation is a continuing process rather than an endpoint and ‘end of history’ exercise), it is time, not to assume that reconciliation is impossible, but to examine our definitions of success and failure, and to think about whether we are looking in the right places for our interventions and assessments. The turn towards measurement in the field of peace and conflict studies is already providing us with new and imaginative ways to assess reconciliation potentially both at a granular, local level as well as at a national one.⁹

Reconciliation, originally a highly abstract concept, has become much more precise and tangible. Hopefully, this will help us understand some of the interrogations implied by the question: with few examples of success in, or robust progress towards, reconciliation, what is failure? In a paper in progress on conceptualising reconciliation, Portuguese scholar Natalia Bueno poses the question: ‘Thinking about reconciliation as the positive end of the spectrum, the question about its negative pole arises. Is it nonreconciliation? Separation? Hatred? Revenge?’.¹⁰ What constitutes failure, not just stalled or imperfect reconciliation? Furthermore, is failure in reconciliation reversible, or does it become over determined at some point? It seems easier to recognise failures of reconciliation than successes, not only because there are so few examples of truly robust reconciliation that fit the idealised conceptions we may be inappropriately holding, and so many of failures. Failure of reconciliation in terms of violence renewed or continued in new forms, lasting inter-group divisions and exclusions, continued impunity, inability to deal with the past, including accountability for gross human suffering – these are all dramatic conditions that seem to apply to too many post-political-conflict contexts. But is it possible that cases of failure also contain within them a spectrum? Perhaps we demand too much of our concept of reconciliation. Can signs both of reconciliation and its failures co-exist and survive at different levels of peacebuilding, from the macro to the meso to the micro level, within the different directions in which reconciliation can work, horizontal or vertical? Should we be thinking in terms of ‘reconciliation’ or even ‘reconciliations’ instead of ‘Reconciliation’, ie, with the implications of thickness and sustainability of Reconciliation with a Big R?

A multi-year project, conceived and launched by Valerie Rosoux (UCLouvain), on failures of reconciliation, sought case studies to try to answer some of the questions above, and to compare findings of scholars from different disciplines and on different regions and types of violence. Beyond questions of what constitute failures of

⁷Roddy Brett, ‘Guatemala: the persistence of genocidal logic beyond mass killing’, in *How Mass Atrocities End: Studies from Guatemala, Burundi, Indonesia, the Sudan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Iraq*, ed. Bridget Conley-Zilkic (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017), 29–55.

⁸Yinan He, *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish. Relations since World War II* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁹See Madhav Joshi and Peter Wallensteen, eds., *Understanding Quality Peace. Peacebuilding after civil war* (New York, Routledge, 2018); Elizabeth Cole, and Pamina Firchow, ‘Reconciliation Barometers: Tools for Post conflict Policy Design, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13 no. 3 (2019): 546–569.

¹⁰Natalia Bueno, ‘Reconciliation and Its Subtypes: A Contribution to Empirical Measurement’ (paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, February 22–26, 2017).

reconciliation, how are these judgements made and who makes them, and what factors cause reconciliation efforts to appear to fail, there is the conceptual question of the utility of studying failure. Is it a mirror image of success? Does it help us to understand success in reconciliation to look at post-conflict failures? Do success and failure each have different modalities, or are we simply asking the same questions in opposite ways? The current set of case studies does not directly address this conceptual problem, but nonetheless implies it. The research was intended in part to inspire future, more focused research on reconciliation and how it is assessed, and so we will not only summarise here some of the findings from the set of case studies, but also lay out future paths for research. Probing failure itself as an area of focus may be one such path, but others may emerge from the current research that will help to develop the field of research on post-conflict peacebuilding.

The case studies

All the case studies look at intra-state conflicts. In the cases of Peru, Guatemala and the former Yugoslavia/Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conflicts had significant roots in ethnic and ethno-religious identity. The conflict in Colombia is arguably more complex than those of Peru and Guatemala, with deep roots in Colombia's history of political and urban-rural divisions, as well as organised crime (mainly narco-trafficking); it is the longest-running conflict of the five, and identity is one aspect of the conflict, but not the major one. In all three of these conflicts in Central and South America, the conflicts were part of the Cold War, with communist insurgencies and involvement from both super-powers of the period, the United States and the former Soviet Union. In all three, the costs of the conflict in human suffering fell hardest on the rural poor in general, and on two groups, indigenous people and, in Colombia in particular, on Afro-Colombians, who form significant a subset of the historically impoverished and marginalised. In Bosnia, the conflict itself, growing out of the break-up of a multi-ethnic political entity, reified identity issues that had been minimalized to a large extent during the Yugoslav period, despite a history of ethno-religious conflicts that had not been addressed publicly during the communist period. In Côte d'Ivoire, the conflict, catalysed by a contested election, had regional roots but also reflected growing tensions over who was to be accepted as 'Ivoirien' in parts of the country with significant populations with roots in neighbouring countries.

The five conflicts ended in different ways, from international mediation (Bosnia and Guatemala) to outright military victory (Peru and Côte d'Ivoire) to an internal peace process, with international 'accompaniment', in Colombia. Different official activities to promote reconciliation and justice have taken place in or with regards to each: truth and reconciliation commissions in Guatemala, Peru and Côte d'Ivoire; international trials of perpetrators of atrocities (the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, albeit far from the region, in The Hague, and trials of Côte d'Ivoire's former president at the International Criminal Court), as well as some limited domestic trials in Peru, Guatemala and Colombia. In addition, a vast array of civil society initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation have taken or are taking place in Colombia, with fewer in Guatemala and Peru, and arguably the fewest in Bosnia and Herzegovina (a number of regional projects for the entire former Yugoslavia do exist, such as joint journalism projects) and Côte d'Ivoire.

The state of post-conflict peace and reconciliation varies between the case studies, although it is difficult, and perhaps not wise, to try to briefly sum up such complex conditions, and in fact, reconciliation is a moving target – witness, for example, the recent violent unrest across Colombia, catalysed by increased suffering among the poor due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Bosnia is perhaps the most stable but also a very ‘cold’ peace, without widespread violence since the Dayton Accords but also little interaction between the three main ethnic groups, as well as political and economic stagnation. Guatemala remains one of the most violent countries in the region, due to criminal violence, with continued extreme inequality, a situation mirrored, perhaps to a less extreme degree, in Peru. Colombia’s promising peace process has suffered recently from lack of both national political support and elite commitment to economic reforms, particularly rural reforms of land ownership. Yet Colombia’s Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission, established by the 2016 Peace Accords, has moved forward with regional activities, Colombia has created a longitudinal tool to measure peace and reconciliation across regions, and there is an active programme at the national and local levels of support for victims and disbursement of reparations, all impressive achievements by the standard of most conflict-ridden countries. In summary, while these cases hardly represent a comprehensive collection of types of conflict, post-conflict conditions for positive peace, and efforts at reconciliation, they do represent a spectrum of differences and similarities to inform our inquiry into how we define, measure and understand failure in reconciliation.

Cross-cutting themes and insights from the case studies

In the rest of this introduction, we summarise some of the insights from articles and discussions that grew out of the original project, including some of the strengths and weaknesses of attempts to consider conflicts from the angle of failure, and then discuss how this research could be integrated into future areas of research in post-conflict peacebuilding.

Eight themes emerged from the five case studies that appeared to contribute to failures of reconciliation, although causation is not clear, that is, it is not clear whether these factors all caused failures of reconciliation, or whether some or all grew out of that failure. These factors are: 1) the treatment, definitions and feelings of victims of the conflict; 2) the continuation of violence in new forms or, put differently, lack of security; 3) the reflection in measures intended to further reconciliation of political power struggles that were left unchanged by the violent conflict; 4) the lack of political will among elites for change, particularly to structures of economic injustice; 5) divisions and power imbalances between national elites and local populations, often, but not exclusively, urban elites and rural populations; 6) the role of external actors, and, closely related, attempts to insert foreign tools, practices or concepts into local contexts; 7) deeply entrenched conflict identities and narratives that have proven resistant to transformation, the problem that Brett in his chapter on Guatemala calls the ‘cognitive foundation’ of a given conflict; and 8) the multi-faceted factor of time in assessing success versus failure.

The topic of victims stems from the reality that victims, while identified by human rights and transitional justice experts as the group whose needs ultimately should drive both justice and reconciliation measures, are in reality often those most excluded from

post-conflict reconstruction. The anguish and often fierce unwillingness of survivors to express forgiveness or drop the search for justice for their suffering and for those who did not survive is often perceived as an encumbrance to a society that wants to move on from years of war, and to avoid the potential divisiveness of criminal processes against perpetrators.¹¹ Victims, who come so often from the ranks of minorities or the very poor, generally represent a small part of the population, and their wartime experiences are often remote from the majority of the population, especially national elites. This theme emerges strongly in the cases of Colombia, Peru and Guatemala. In Colombia, the needs of victims in remote rural areas are too often unmet (despite the creation of a government office, the Victims Unit, to oversee reparations), as is apparent in the situation in Quibdó, where internally displaced farmers with nowhere else to live occupied a coliseum. In Peru, where one part of the population, that which supported the Shining Path insurgency either physically or morally, or even were victims of the Peruvian military without having been Shining Path supporters, is considered outside the circle of reconcilable actors. Here a split has developed between 'good' victims and 'bad', undeserving, or even false, victims, the latter due to the fact that carrying an official victimhood status entitles one to certain forms of reparation, albeit limited. This leaves the condition of victimhood precarious, contested, and possibly risky for those in search of state aid and reparations. In addition, measures taken by state bureaucrats that were intended to be part of a repertoire of reparations become so foreign and incomprehensible to indigenous survivors of the violent conflict that their already existing mistrust of a distant and historically racist state is deepened, rather than assuaged – a key goal for reconciliation measures. In Guatemala, the same groups from which the majority of victims of wartime violence at the hands of the state and its related paramilitaries came continue to suffer disproportionately from lethal post-war violence, despite the fact that it is now economic- based, rather than politically based, violence. In each of these cases, and many more beyond the scope of this project, reconciliation, when it appears to progress at all, is often irrelevant or even threatening for certain groups, which raises the critical question, progress towards reconciliation – for whom?

Lack of security and continuation of violence as factors indicating the absence of reconciliation appear perhaps most clearly in the case of Guatemala, but is also evident in examples from post-conflict Colombia and Peru to South Africa. This brings up a conceptual problem in the study of reconciliation: can we say that the continuation of violence is an impediment to progress in reconciliation, or does it stem from lack of conditions for reconciliation? Many scholars note that the concept of reconciliation can rarely be separated from the factors that drive or impede it, which adds to the difficulty in analysing reconciliation. These cases suggest that lack of political will by elites to control violent actors and enact programmes to counter the drivers of economic violence are distinct forces that undermine or even doom reconciliation. In Guatemala, the contemporary state is often intertwined with organised crime; in Colombia the state and its institutions remain absent from large sections of the vast and rugged country, despite Colombia's being a middle income and strongly institutionalised country. This set of issues relates closely to the problem of deep divides that exist between national elites and local

¹¹Thomas Brudholm and Valérie Rosoux, 'The Unforgiving. Reflections on the Resistance to Forgiveness after Atrocity', *Law and Contemporary Problems* 72 (2009): 101–117.

populations. An example is Côte d'Ivoire's post-conflict condition, in which one side, the winner of an asymmetric victor supported by UN and French forces, cynically uses the discourse of reconciliation for what is in fact a combination of force majeure and the political interests of elite actors. Despite the provision of international resources and aid for, and national elite acceptance of, the enactment of the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission [CDVR], this particular example of reconciliation and transitional justice practice ultimately has served as a continuation of the original conflict and has been intertwined with power struggles. In Griveaud's words, 'the reconciliation initiatives appear to a significant part of the population as asymmetric operations enforced by those who won the war. In that sense and in many others, the CDVR's process is a "mirror of the original conflict"'.¹²

The damage done to any possible pathways to reconciliation by outside actors deploying concepts developed in the West and lacking either a deep knowledge or commitment to the country is laid bare in Griveaud's study of Côte d'Ivoire's truth commission and the role of foreign transitional justice 'advisors'. This case is a vivid example of the much-lamented tendency, since the development of the transitional justice field since the 1990s, to treat transitional justice as a rather mechanistic process with internationally established norms, tools and expertise. Among those tools are truth commissions, trials and reconciliation exercises to bring together local representatives of various sides of the conflict – whether or not they want to be brought together, and whether or not trials and truth-telling meet their needs and resonate with their conceptions of peace.¹³

The cases of Guatemala and Peru demonstrate the impossibility of reconciliation in contexts where identities are deeply entrenched – not only conflict identities, but identities with roots deep in a society's history. This is the problem that Odak refers to as that of 'the Perennial Enemy', the conception of the 'other' as one who has and can never have any other identity than that of enemy. In Guatemala, the indigenous Mayans, since the colonial founding of what has become modern Guatemala, have been seen both by Spanish-descended *peninsulares*, the elite of the country, as well as the mixed ladino population, as deeply and negatively 'other', as savage, lazy, heathen, unable to be 'modern', and a drag on the nation's development. The identities of Guatemala's non-indigenous were naturally shaped, in their turn, in contrast to this despised 'other' group. When the Cold War identity of 'leftist', 'red', and Soviet-backed guerrilla was grafted onto the older stereotypes about the indigenous Guatemalans, the result was a set of social groups whose identities were unchanged by the end of conflict, peace negotiations and even a well-intended and in some ways praiseworthy historical commission (the Commission for the Clarification of History, or CEH). Efforts at bringing to trial the perpetrators of the worst atrocities of the conflict have met strong opposition from elites and the military, despite the determination of Guatemalan victims to use the courts and trials to achieve justice. In this case, the conflict identities that Kelman referred to have proven utterly unamenable to transformation, a condition that is related to the lack of

¹²Elizabeth Cole, 'Reconciliation as a peacebuilding practice: new questions, new ideas', *Insights Newsletter* (USIP, fall 2014): 1–4.

¹³Briony Jones and Julie Bernath, eds., *Resistance and Transitional Justice* (New York, Routledge, 2018); Ivo Aertsen, and Brunilda Pali, eds., *Critical Restorative Justice* (Oxford, Hart, 2020).

political will on the part of the elite to accept any kind of structural economic changes – which if enacted would be intended to benefit the indigenous and other extremely poor Guatemalans.

Finally, the case studies for this project raised several questions on the conceptual level. In an article on the religious groups involved in the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia and the theological views of religious leaders, Stipe Odak raises the question of whether using the rubric of failure to understand reconciliation merely produces a binary understanding of reconciliation – failure versus success – that offers no utility. The author discusses efforts at rapprochement that do not yet conceive of such a robust change in conflict identities as reconciliation, concluding that even if these efforts do not ‘succeed’, ‘failures’ of reconciliation do not mean that the whole prospect was null and void. Odak proposes that reconciliation be seen as a ‘multi-dimensional’ system, within which varying degrees of success are possible. This view resonates with the increasingly widely accepted view that reconciliation is not an end state, but a process, and further, a concept, which is unstable. What looks like robust reconciliation can regress, for example, or change as new factors arise to influence the relations of former combatant groups.

This leads to a theme that emerged in different but recognisable forms in the analyses of the Guatemalan, Peruvian, Balkan and Colombian cases, and which is conceptually addressed in the latter two. This is the theme of time. The question of different recognisable phases of post-conflict intergroup relations, and of practices appropriate or possible to each, has been discussed in the literature under the problem of sequencing.¹⁴ For example, some forms of intergroup engagement may only be possible in the second or third generation, not among those who experienced the violence first-hand.¹⁵ However, the questions raised in this particular group of cases are somewhat different.

Odak’s study focuses on theological conceptions of and actions for reconciliation. He discusses reconciliation as an aspirational concept, conceivable only in a time-frame beyond our mortal and secular one, and asks whether this inevitably limits its usefulness in peacebuilding. He develops the concept of ‘Placeholders of Reconciliation’, actions undertaken even during conflict, which are not reconciliatory in themselves. Nonetheless they imply an ‘intent to enact’ which must necessarily predate robust reconciliatory action: ‘Placeholders of reconciliation, just like heterotopias, are not accidental responses to immediate needs; they are rather accompanied by an intention to enact, even on a small scale, a better moral order that might hopefully prevail in future’. In addition, an obstacle to moving forward with reconciliatory actions that Odak calls the existence of a ‘Perennial Enemy’ not only implies deeply hardened conflict identities that may not prove to be malleable via interventions or attempted practices, as discussed above, but also implies the question of time. Odak writes that

[a] perennial enemy is an enemy clothed in a shroud of quasi-eternity, always in the form of a collectivity. The idea of perennial enmity functions as a lens that skews readings of both past and future. Such labels, however, have serious social ramifications. If people accept that

¹⁴ Arnim Langer and Graham K. Brown, eds., *Building Sustainable Peace. Timing and Sequencing of Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Peacebuilding* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016); Natascha Mueller-Hirth and Sandra Rios Oyola, eds., *Time and temporality in transnational and post-conflict societies* (New York, Routledge, 2018).

¹⁵ Bjorn Krondorfer, *Unsettling Empathy. Working with groups in conflict* (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

members of another group are their perennial enemies, they might retroactively (and counter-historically) read all peaceful periods that preceded conflicts as exceptions to the rule of permanent hatred.

In the difficult environment in which the ‘perennial enemy’ concept is prevalent, Odak also proposes that we take into account another idea that does not guarantee any success along a spectrum leading towards robust reconciliation, but nonetheless implies that there is not a total failure. This is his concept of ‘Degree Zero of Reconciliation’, which only looks for signs that some members of conflictive groups see signs of humanity in one another – without – yet? – any commitment to the advancement of reconciliation: ‘It is a framework, a scale, a possibility of existence in which reconciliation can grow. In the DZR, reconciliation already exists since it frames actions in positive and negative terms. However, it does not yet represent any actual growth’. Within this proposed temporal path, however, what can nourish future growth is admittedly not very clear: the frozen conflict and unstable peace of the Balkans, with its deeply divided and separated national groups, is evidence that we – including religious leaders who profess a belief in the possibility of reconciliation – do not know how to catalyse new developments in inter-group relations.¹⁶

Rios examines the case of a reconciliation which remains out of sight in a place where violent conflict, as in Guatemala, continues despite a formal peace agreement and even the public commitment of elites to practices associated with reconciliation and transitional justice. In this case of larger failures, Rios documents practices that have proven positive for those that engage in them, micro-examples, if you will, of ‘success’, at least at the level of practice. Rios’ conceptualisation of the emotion of ‘ilusión’ in the Colombian case also entails the question of time. Here we have a case of a ‘pre-reconciliation’ practice, the creation of knitting circles, among displaced victims of violent conflict: for these people, hope, as a possibility of a true change for the better in their situation, an end to violence, repair, and a return to home and land, was lacking entirely in the years before Colombia’s peace process began. And despite larger changes in the political environment, it remains absent for many victims, especially the displaced. Rios proposes we consider a different emotion, *ilusión*, which, unlike hope, is characterised by a kind of emotional, philosophical and temporal ‘in-betweenness’, a space between hope and despair, ‘transformation and conservation, dynamism and resistance to change, the past and the future as a social experience’. This conception, like Odak’s study of how religious actors in a post-conflict, divided society see reconciliation, challenges attempts to characterise reconciliation and post-conflict peacebuilding in terms of success and failure, and point to what Odak terms a ‘need for reimagination’.

A last example of the theme of time in assessing reconciliation and its practices is the reaction of Peruvian highlander conflict survivors to a national programme of exhumations, which include re-exhumations for complex bureaucratic and normative reasons that clash with, or remain elusive to, the perceptions of the local people. In this case, the national priorities, based on rationalised, scientific practices, knowledge and principles, are foreign to the local impoverished, largely powerless indigenous peasants, and one of the troubling aspects for them is the resultant disjuncture in their senses of time: the State

¹⁶Martina Fischer and Olivera Simic, eds., *Transitional Justice and reconciliation. Lessons from the Balkans* (New York, Routledge, 2016).

(as well as being the holder of sheer power) presents itself as a thorough and careful investigator for whom accuracy trumps time-limits. For the waiting family members, who have gathered their tools to reinter their victims and look forward to enacting once again the proper burial rituals, the sense of unlimited waiting is a new kind of torment that continues the conflict, and symbolises the power-imbalances and lack of ability to empathise that has characterised their relationship with the state from well before the civil war, and that underlay the conflict. It can even be said that, within the space of reconciliation and transitional justice practices, two different processes and conceptions of time exist, with one undermining the other: the temporal process of public, national transitional justice and reconciliation practices ended up undercutting the community's sought-for reconciliation time-process. Neither one necessarily dominates in terms of length of time – for example, by contrast to the re-exhumations example, the state-backed and internationally endorsed practices may imply a brief, clearly delimited time-frame, such as the holding of a trial, while local processes of remembering and mourning may require a much longer timeframe.

A final factor raised in several papers, in particular Rios and Odak, are emotions, or feelings and their role in reconciliation success and failure, in particular, feelings present in the pre-reconciliation phase – hope, or, in its absence, *ilusión* – that characterise unrealised reconciliation in Colombia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both Rios and Odak touch upon the psychology of reconciliation – how states of mind, that evoke feelings and behaviours, are a component part to the processes, relationships, and policies of reconciliation. The state of *ilusión* allowed women in a knitting circle in Colombia to imagine a state of security, activity, meaning and agency outside their precarious, insecure life as refugees encamped in a local stadium. Odak's Placeholders of Reconciliation are mental constructs of a future reconciled place that lead to conciliatory, constructive behaviours even in the midst of violent conflict, while his Zero Degree of Reconciliation is a psychological process of 're-humanizing' the enemy. It is a reversal of the psychological process of dehumanisation, where seeing people as less than human removes the moral prohibition that enables violence, genocide and systemic discrimination. While much of reconciliation practice is focused on processes and the reforming of political and social institutions that can shape renewed relationships between groups that perpetrated and experienced violence, less attention has been paid to the psychology of reconciliation, and which cognitive behavioural shifts must occur to support individual and group reconciliation. Rios and Odak describe interesting shifts in cognitive frames and behaviours that, in these cases, remain nascent for reconciliation due to many factors – the absence of state commitment, the enduring conception of a perennial enemy. Yet, another consideration in reconciliation failure has to be the lack of understanding of how unconscious mental constructs, forged through the experiencing of violence and profound fear, or changed by a sense of security and individual or group agency as a result of a peace settlement, shape the behaviours that support or undermine reconciliation processes. Organizations such as Beyond Conflict and the Peace and Conflict Neuroscience Lab have been studying the mental processes that drive violent behaviour – dehumanisation, the perception that one's 'sacred values' are threatened – and designing effective interventions. What if more attention were paid to the mental processes that support reconciliation – rehumanisation, shedding of the perception of perennial enemies, etc. – and the interventions that might help form them? And, perhaps as importantly,

through assessing via the use of neuro-psychological practice, could we discover whether and how current reconciliation programmes in fact might serve to reinforce psychological frames of fear, Othering and dehumanisation, and so contribute to, rather than mitigate, the lack of reconciliation success?

Overall, what is still not known is whether post-conflict societies that, in the decade after the formal end of conflict look to be failures of reconciliation, like Guatemala or Côte d'Ivoire, in the longer term can succeed in creating moments or pockets of reconciliation, perhaps regionally instead of nationally, or among certain groups only (horizontal reconciliation) but not between citizens and the state (vertical), or vice versa, etc. What seems clear from our studies is that while there may be mixed stories, where achievements in reconciliation do exist, as in Colombia, there are post-conflict contexts where reconciliation in any form, at any stage, seems like a cruel delusion.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

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