The Individual and the Collective: Promoting Post-Conflict Peace Processes through Psycho-Political Forums in Africa

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For Mark and Diane, who taught me to live my dreams.
“Mere praise of peace is easy, but ineffective. What is needed is active participation in the fight against war and everything that leads to it.”

-Albert Einstein
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Glossary

As defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders, 4th edition, text revision:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:
Symptoms following a trauma for a minimum of one month:
- Re-experiencing
- Emotional numbing
- Hypervigilance
- Helplessness
- Horror
- Can have a delayed onset

Somatoform Disorders: General Information
- marked by unpleasant or painful symptoms with no apparent organic cause
- often not physiologically possible
- rule out psychosomatic disorders
- rule out malingering
- rule out fictitious disorders

Somatization Disorder
Symptoms:
- chronic unpleasant or painful physical symptoms with no organic cause
- common complaints: chronic pain, heart palpitations, gynecological complaints
- vague, dramatic or exaggerated complaints
- more common in women

Major Depressive Episode
Must have five or more symptoms for over two weeks (one symptom must be either depressed mood or anhedonia):
- depressed mood
- anhedonia
- weight loss or gain
- insomnia or hypersomnia
- psychomotor agitation or retardation
- fatigue
- worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- diminished ability to concentrate, think, indecisiveness
- recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation
- cultural specificity
Introduction

Crisis areas around the world affect both the individuals in a society and the society in general. Most peace processes used today work to patch up the society as a whole so it is stable enough to work with international organizations, not necessarily to promote peace within the country. The international community essentially forces the peace process and must generalize the issue into a dichotomy of one side versus the other, and thus brushes over large issues in the conflict while ignoring numerous festering and tender wounds the society as a whole still must overcome. Even the most basic conflicts are more complex than this simplistic dichotomy, and therefore peace processes often struggle.

In Africa today, we see the result of decades of conflict still surfacing in many different countries including Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Sierra Leone and many others. In most of these ongoing conflicts, much progress has been made and many efforts to promote peace and tolerance between the various groups have occurred. However, the peace process must deal with situations such as the numerous child soldiers, displaced people, refugees, sexual assault victims, torture victims, and overall mistrust between groups. These situations vary in magnitude and consequence between individuals, organizations, political parties and governments yet have enormous impact on the state of the society as a whole.

In order to establish and build communities of peace, the utilization of psychological practices must be implemented in addition to the traditional method of
diplomacy and negotiation between warring factions and international organizations. The peace-making process today attempts to address major psychological issues but in segregated ways as through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteers. In addition, a major problem with NGOs is the potential to concentrate their energies on westernizing the conflict and the solution, both of which can result in negative consequences for the society as in dissociating from their culture and formulizing their history in an inappropriate schema. In reality, what the current peace-making process affects is primarily the ruling government, which often speaks very little to actual sentiments within the individual and does not affect those most affected by the conflict; i.e. child soldiers, refugees, and displaced people. Peace is a process that must be sustained over time and is not an event that a single mechanism will suddenly implement. Although it is hopeful that the government or viable elections will produce a leader who will be able to unite such differing viewpoints as say the Apartheid government in South Africa with the African National Congress, more often than not, the psychology of the country will remain unaffected by the peace process.

It is the psychology of the country that must be overcome in order to fully reach a peaceful solution or what A. Brenes and M. Wessells call to “build a culture of peace.” (Brenes and Wessells, 2001). Extreme levels of trauma such as those seen in many of the conflicts throughout Africa require more to establish peace than a treaty and vow of cooperation. The peace process as it stands today does not affect the crucial areas of distress that have the possibility of turning into a further conflict. Therefore the establishment of peaceful relations between warring factions has only short-term effects. I propose that institutionalizing psychological constructs for individual theories and
treatment within the political paradigm of peace-making such as transitional justice mechanisms is imperative to establish a culture primed to cooperate and work towards peace after a traumatizing and violent conflict.

**Major areas of post-conflict psychological therapy for the individual**

The experiences of child soldiers, refugees, displaced people, sexual assault victims and torture victims all hold a key to the peace-process and the establishment of cultures of peace. As Herman points out, “witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic of trauma” (Herman, 1997, 2). Conflict can affect an individual in a number of ways and can have varying degrees of psychological effects. I will first look at the extreme cases of child soldiers, refugees and displaced people, sexual assault and torture victims to understand how intractable conflicts affect the individuals.

*Child Soldiers*

Child soldiers are a growing populace in the world today. It is estimated that over 300,000 child soldiers exist today (Park 2006). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child soldier is defined as any person engaged in hostilities that is under the age of 18. A child soldier can either be abducted or voluntarily take up arms, although most child soldiers offer reasons implying coercion into the position and a lack of alternatives. Military forces use child soldiers in three ways. First is in basic combat. Child soldiers are easily desensitized to kill, and often have no moral regard formed against such acts (Pearn, 2003). Thus, military officials have an easy time getting children to murder without having any concurring reason to commit such acts.
The second use of child soldiers is through manual labor. These children are forced to dig trenches, transport ammunition and supplies, or cook and clean. Children are often rewarded for their work through access to drugs and high-technology games such as war and fighting video games. These substances reinforce their behavior through modeling and addictive behavior (Hill and Langholtz, 2003).

Third, female child soldiers are used for sexual behavior and in forced marriages. The girls are often gang-raped by the other male child soldiers. The girls can also be given away as a wife in reward for some of the male child soldiers. The males will often have numerous wives and are not faithful to their wives, which can possibly be spreading diseases between the girls. Thus, the girls lose all control over the rights of the body, and often fall victim to viral infections (Park, 2006). The combination of these three uses “produce changes in personality and patterns of behavior…, and alter the framework children use to interpret and make sense of danger” (Hill & Langholtz, 2003).

One former child soldier interviewed in Gulu, Uganda shared her story in 2002:

“I was abducted at night from my home on December 26th 1996, by the lord’s Resistance Army. On the way to Sudan, and abducted boy tried to escape. He was recaptured and I had to kill him by beating him to death with sticks. One day, I was beaten seriously because I dropped a water container during gunfire. In Sudan, I received military training for one month. I learned how to assemble and dismantle a gun. After that, I had to fight both UPDF (Uganda People’s Defence Forces) in Uganda and SPLA (Sudan Peoples Liberation Army) in Sudan. Several times I went to villages to loot food and abduct other children. One day, I was given to a commander as his wife. I got pregnant and delivered a boy. In a fight with UPDF, I managed to escape, but I had to leave my child in the bush. I don’t know what happened to him” (Derluyn, Broekaert, Schuyten & De Temmerman, 2004).

Getting to a stable life again after having been a child soldier with multiple traumatic situations is very difficult. The initial stress and trauma of an intense conflict situation can have immediate effects that last up to six months, not to mention any psychological
trauma that may onset later (Weine et al., 1995). For child soldiers who have to face possible murders, forced marriages, losing or leaving children behind all before the age of 18, recovery is imperative in order to function in society. Furthermore, child soldiers “have been shown to be associated with perhaps the highest risk of psychiatric morbidity” (Pearn, 2003).

There are numerous rehabilitation programs available to escaped or former child soldiers. The atrocities committed by child soldiers and on child soldiers create an atmosphere within which they are excluded, avoided and shunned by society, especially when trying to reintegrate back into the same society. The years spent in combat or assisting combat leave them a lost generation, unwanted by society, unskilled, uneducated and with behavioral tendencies with a propensity for aggression and violent exertions (Hill and Langholtz, 2003). These children are primed for aggression and if unchecked by society easily fall back into what has become for them normal and appropriate behavior—violence and aggression—especially since one of the few skills ingrained in them is pulling a trigger.

**Interim Care Centers for Child Soldiers**

Interim Care Centers (ICCs) have been set up in many instances throughout Africa such as in Uganda and Sierra Leone. These camps work to rehabilitate the child soldier and reintegrate them back into society. Having to combat the terrible situations these children have faced, the programs seek to reunite families first, “if a child’s family can be found, aid organizations initiate a sensitization campaign to prepare the community to accept the former combatant…if a child’s family cannot be found, the child’s sent to an orphanage or assigned to foster parents” (Hill & Langholtz, 2003).
reestablishing strong familial bonds, the child can be shown love and care as a counterpart to the violence to which they have become accustomed.

Communities also have to go through some form of forgiving process, having been the victims of a lot of atrocities due to child soldiers. Awareness programs and social inclusion therapies have been set up in order to create social support networks for the children (Hill and Langholtz, 2003). These ICCs also create a safety den for the children so they are not recaptured by the military, “they offer a place removed from both military and community life where former child soldiers can begin to readapt to their identity as children or adolescents” (Hill & Langholtz, 2003). The reintegration into society also ensures that the communities don’t throw out the children when the military forces come back in search for them.

At an individual level, numerous therapies have been implemented in order to get rid of the negative cognitions that child soldiers face as well as the drug dependence, violent behavior and to educate them. For example, “former child soldiers in Sierra Leone’s ICCs received vocational training in tailoring, auto mechanics, carpentry, painting and decoration, arts and crafts, and motorcycle mechanics” (Hill and Langholtz, 2003). Practical skills allow these children a future where before the only option available to them was through continued violence or military involvement.

As detailed by Pearn, child soldiers face three profound conundrums in their adult lives that affect peace. First, the desocialization and dehumanization of the mind of the child soldier perpetuates in his or her method of violent arousal. The child learns violent release methods of conflict resolution, interaction and sexual relations that persist into adulthood. With these profoundly varying methods of coping, child soldiers unfailingly
express high levels of psychiatric morbidity and often find the only outlet to be joining
the military forces or a rebel army (Pearn, 170).

The second dilemma is the problem of schooling. With the average age of
abduction around 9-13 (UNICEF website), the child soldier spends his formative years
killing rather than in school. Yet, in the post-conflict arena, altering a former child
soldier’s behavior to learn new skills is much more difficult and requires the necessary
therapy for any traumatic experiences the child may have undergone. In addition,
schools must accept these children as students which require the society at large to allow
these former soldiers a new life.

The third dilemma facing child soldiers is the occurrence of PTSD. Although the
occurrence of this disorder is widely variable with estimates ranging from 5% all the way
to 90% in politically traumatized people (Hill and Langholtz, 2003; Derluyn et al., 2004),
it is still a concern. The behavior many of these children are forced into while in the
army has the potential for severe cognitive, behavioral, and somatic symptoms to arise
later in life. This disorder can cause extreme dysfunction and problems if the symptoms
are not attended to.

Rehabilitation programs have been largely successful, especially in countries that
include both Western and local methods of healing (Hill and Langholtz, 2003), but these
programs are not entirely sufficient. First, many scholars have voiced concerns of the
cultural appropriations of programs that are saturated in western psychology. According
to an article by Pearn (2003), the use of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnosis
is moot in societies that do not conform to a Westernized understanding of the world, and
by approaching the child soldier issue from that standpoint, we are creating an unethical situation of cultural assimilation.

Although I see some good in recognizing the possible quandaries of enforcing westernized healing and reconciliation methods, the situation facing a post-conflict country is dire. The former child soldiers have lost their childhood, are without education, deal with drug addictions, never learned a higher moral regard and as The Washington Post puts it, “learned little more than how to pull a trigger.” Understandably, the societies in which the children reenter exhibit scared and prejudiced feelings that stigmatize the children. Not only does the country deal with the problem of how to teach applicable and peaceful skills and methods of dealing with conflict to these children, but it must also find a way to reconnect them into the society. The absence of a future for these children creates a turbulent prospect for peace that must be addressed if the cyclical nature of violence is going to be stopped.

Refugees

Refugees, displaced people, sexual assault victims and other politically traumatized people are affected in many different ways, yet have numerous similarities in their reaction to trauma. According to the Journal of American Medical Association’s Patient Pages, about 1% of the world’s population or 65 million people are refugees of some sort. They face numerous difficulties, specifically an extreme disruption in their lives that is characterized by frustration, anger and fear. In addition to this disruption, refugees also have three separate psychological disorders that are commonly found, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Major Depressive Disorder, and Somatization
Disorder (Patient pages, 2005). These disorders can occur from stressors they experience before, during or after the conflict.

In the initial stages of a refugee’s new life, the main psychological components are fear for one’s life due to the lack of protection they feel from their government, but also due to the instability in their region. Refugees often also feel frustration at the lack of control they have over their own lives (Eleftheriadou, 1999). Individuals are forced to leave their homes to save their own life, but they in turn lose the reality of life as they knew it. This can leave the refugees with a sense of bitterness, anger and frustration.

In addition, refugees face a lot of problems and hardship in the transitional stages, often being forced to stay in a camp once having entered one. Having had few choices for survival other than entering a camp, refugees and displaced people face extreme ecological and militant hostility in fleeing their homes. Having escaped the threats of roaming rebel forces, they may feel guilt at having survived when loved ones did not, “The stress of being a survivor is often extremely debilitating” (Eleftheriadou, 1999). It can be enhanced with the realization that the entire village may be destroyed losing not only personal possessions, but culture, friends, family and life as the refugee knew it.

Third, the refugee may feel intense anxiety about the loss of their home. Having experienced some form of combat or violence prior to fleeing their home, refugees live in a state of uncertainty (Eleftheriadou, 1999). Many may have been subject to torture, rape, or witnessed these atrocities. Many are physically hurt, hungry, without food, water or money and without the possibility of refugee camps many would have nowhere to turn (Stepakoff et al., 2006). I interviewed Walter Lam, a former refugee from Uganda who
sought asylum in the United States and is currently working for an advocacy organization for intractable conflicts in Africa. He says:

“from a refugee’s perspective, I have lost everything. I have gone through what no human being should ever go through. I lost everything I worked for, I was forced to leave my home and begin again in a new country. They are tough conditions and it is so hard to forgive. The only way I can forgive and agree with peace and reconciliation is in a situation where the conditions at home are changed and there is new peace. If not, if I am still displaced, I will always have bitterness. I cannot go home yet” (Interview, Lam, 2007).

CVT programs address diverse problems possibly affecting the individual’s situation, “among the most common psychological sequelae of torture and war atrocities are feelings of isolation and stigma. This psychological sense of being set apart from the rest of humanity was reinforced by the physical remoteness of the camps and the lack of access to transportation, electricity and means of communication” (Stepakoff et al., 2006). These camps have a difficult job especially due to the extreme polarization of the trauma some of the people have witnessed, and the difference in magnitude and symptoms of individuals.

Refugee population—torture victims and sexual assault victims

 Refugees and displaced people are also often subject to torture, sexual assault and extreme threats. Dr. David Gangsei with Survivors of Torture International states that 30 percent of any refugee population will have been tortured (Gangsei, 2007). Torture victims have many similar symptoms to refugees and sexual assault survivors, with some differences. One survivor who spoke out said, “you get to the point where you no longer feel the pain. The pain that remains is psychological” (Gangsei, 2007). The psychological trauma can completely constrict an individual to the point that normal
functioning is lost, “torture victims often suffer from somatic symptoms, sleeping problems, nightmares, loss of memory and functioning” (Gangsei, 2007).

These people are often unable to speak about their trauma due to either further persecution or fear of retribution by the perpetrators. They live in a state of fear and constriction (Herman, 1997). In post-conflict situations, these victims are often incapable of participating in a healing process because “they deny its existence, either because they cannot bear to speak about what happened to them or because they are undocumented refugees who fear deportation if they seek assistance” (Gangsei, 2007). Survival becomes a methodical process where identification with the individual’s former life and the possibility of a future becomes limited as a form of necessity and adaptation.

In torturing an individual the perpetrator takes a life, “while the majority of patients complained, “I am now a different person,” the most severely harmed stated simply, “I am not a person”” (Herman, 1997). In addition, a major problem with torture in post-conflict healing is that it is impossible to persecute each person responsible for committing these acts. Thus, often times the actual torturer is allowed to go free while only the person ordering the torture is punished (Gangsei, 2007).

Women and sexual assault victims too suffer as a population that is often not focused on. Women and girls are often raped when the men cannot protect them, when a village is ransacked, during the move to a camp, and still are often not even safe once at the camps. Even before the move, while living in the villages under constant threat of military intervention, women are often not protected. Women can often be the most vulnerable to the consequences of war such as landmines which in turn leave them more vulnerable to assault by ransacking forces:
“In Africa, women do 80% of the work in food production and thus are most likely to be injured by landmines, either during or after armed conflict. They thus lose their ability to work in the fields and for that reason may be abandoned by their husbands. Girls who lose limbs from landmines or other weapons of war are less likely than boys to be fitted with prostheses, thus suffering lessened opportunities for normal lives” (McKay, 1998).

Due to their role in society, their survival, physical and psychological health is imperative for the maintenance of structure in a village. Once the women have been abandoned, there is no one left to take care of the children. In addition, women are sexually assaulted for political, genocidal, retributive and possessive reasons. If the women are already debilitated, they are left more vulnerable to assault. In a study conducted in the Nyala Province in Darfur, researchers found that women “expressed limitations of sexual and reproductive rights—including rights to consensual marriage and sexual intercourse and decisions on spacing and timing of children—which may negatively affect health” (Kim, Torbay, & Lawry, 2007). The assault that women suffer in conflict situations is pervasive across all sectors of their lives. Not only affecting their daily routines, sexual assault has physical medical consequences, psychological consequences and often can lead to unwanted pregnancy. These women “cannot express her humiliated rage at he perpetrator, for to do so would jeopardize her survival... she is left with a burden of unexpressed rage against all those who remained indifferent to her fate and who failed to help her” (Herman, 1997). Whether victimized by a lack of protection or a violation of her person, women are a population that is vulnerable to abuses and injustices at all stages of conflict.

Without any legitimate healing process, this anger will have little chance of abating. Refugee situations are compounded further by the inclusion of all of these people in one space. With an entire population having experienced or been witness to some atrocity, it
is imperative to remember that, “victimization has a ripple effect, spreading the damage in waves out from victims to all those with whom they have intimate contact” (Remer, & Ferguson, 1995). Survivors of torture, sexual assault, and violence, witnesses to these events, children, and often perpetrators of some of these crimes live together in refugee camps (UNHCR, website).

Building Peace for Refugees

Numerous organizations including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Center for Victims of Torture International (CVT) are doing what they can to help refugees around the world. These organizations also use both westernized and non-westernized methods of healing, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and psychotherapy from a Western perspective, and healing rituals and symbols (e.g. offering kola nuts to newcomers), use of traditional stories, and song from an African perspective (Stepakoff et al., 2006). UNHCR often serves to provide basic food, resources and medical needs to refugees (UNHCR website, http://www.unhcr.org/home.html). CVT offers a “psychosocial program to provide mental health care, to train local refugee counselors, and to raise community awareness about the effects of war trauma and mental health” (Stepakoff et al., 2006). This program has been extremely successful in helping these people recover their lives.

However, it is imperative to note the basic but immediate needs of any displaced person at having just fled their mother country, “It has often been thought that refugees “need” counseling or psychotherapy, but the reality is that many people need other resources, such as housing, when they first enter a country…This may mean that the abrupt nature of the events and the shock of the experience frequently cannot be
processed until a later stage” (Eleftheriadou, 1999). Although these experiences can be extremely dysfunctional, mere survival often demands other priorities to supersede establishing peace in these individuals. However, if the opportunity arises in refugee camps, they still can have powerful improvements for the community.

If able to establish some initial stability for the refugees, CVT programs move forward working in a three stage model. First, they aim to provide a safe space for the people to come forward and discuss their lives in a way that ensures them no consequences will befall on them for sharing. If such a safe space is managed, the programs move forward to enable the people to mourn their losses, their culture and their lives, “It is vital that loss and mourning, or what has been called cultural bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1984) with the literal loss of the mother country, are allowed to take place” (Eleftheriadou, 1999). In addition to this, the refugees must mourn what has been called a “nostalgic paradox” referring to the positive and negative, referring to what one wants from the past and what one does not wish to have from the present” (Eleftheriadou, 1999).

Once this mourning stage is adequately dealt with, the next stage in this psychosocial program is in reconnection. Stepakoff points out how isolation and stigma are common psychological symptoms from having experienced trauma or violence. In addition, their research team based in Guinea and working with Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees, believed “that grief tends to be more overwhelming and terrifying when people feel isolated and unsupported” (Stepakoff, 2006). In order to combat this grief, as well as to constructively alter the anger and frustration into a manageable emotion that could instigate social change, reconnection with humanity, the community
and the lost loved ones are imperative. In one example, CVT in Guinea created a timeline cloth for Liberian refugees. This collaboration allowed the individuals to see their trauma in light of the country as a whole, “this was the first time that they had ever linked their personal stories to a larger historical and political context, thereby becoming better able to make sense of traumatic experiences that had previously seemed entirely incomprehensible” (Stepakoff et al., 2006). The realization of the entirety of the conflict enabled the individuals to reconnect with the society and work towards building peace.

Having come to a realization of the enormity of the conflict, how does a society go about building peace? It is one thing to come to terms with the effects on an individual, but when one person turns into thousands or millions as in the conflicts in South Africa and Rwanda, can a country overcome the cyclical nature of violence to work towards reconciliation?

**Transitional Justice Mechanisms in Africa for the collective**

From an international perspective, transitional justice mechanisms are being utilized across the world in order to promote cultures of peace and end intractable or violent conflicts. To date, there have been over 20 different Truth Commissions across the world ranging from places like South Africa to Yugoslavia (Honeyman et al., 2004). These commissions have a number of things that must be taken into consideration including social trauma and healing, military pressures, historical and cultural considerations, and logistical and financial problems. As seen above, individuals suffering from intractable conflicts endure incredible hardships making peace and healing processes imperative. Much of this suffering is caused either directly or indirectly from militaristic influence (Honeyman et al, 2004). The military is often the most stable and
efficient sector of a society, yet it is inherently violent and can diminish the peace process. In addition, how a society functions normally will alter whether they work as a collective or individualistic society and where the focus should be. Lastly, the process of a truth commission is often expensive. Countries coming out of long-term wars are often not financially stable to rebuild a society and work to create peace at the same time. I will look at two of these commissions, Rwanda’s Inkiko-Gacaca courts and South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to analyze how truth commissions work in Africa to establish reconciliation in a post-conflict setting and how they can be improved.

\textit{Rwanda and the Inkiko-Gacaca courts}

Rwanda is a country that has been subject to years of ethnic strife. With contrasting viewpoints of the country’s historical background that dictate one’s sympathies with one ethnic group or the other, even the history is embroiled with the ongoing conflict. It is undeniable that the various ethnic groups in the country, the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, have a complex and pejorative relationship of cyclical violence and conflict. This violence most recently culminated in the genocide of nearly one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus in April to July of 1994. The death toll was only one aspect of the violence, “Also during these three months, tens of thousands of Rwandan women were raped and hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were internally displaced or became refugees” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). The year 1994 marked one of the most violent years for the country in its history.

Regardless of whether the violence started pre- or post-colonialism, the country is in a position where peace must be achieved to end the cycle of violence. From the
Tutsi’s holding more power during colonialism to the turn over of power to the Hutu’s at independence, control within Rwanda has been segregated according to ethnicity for years. Starting with the revolution in 1959 against the Tutsi governmental elite, violence between the ethnic groups resulted in waves of people fleeing the country, “this revolution began a cycle of ethnic violence that would recur over and over in the post-independence era” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). Over the years violence between Hutus and Tutsis created a steady flow of people between Rwanda, Burundi and the surrounding area, especially with the massacres in Rwanda in 1963, 1969, and the genocide in Burundi in 1972, and 1975. Thus, the magnitude of the violence between these two groups has been extreme and repetitive, leaving thousands of people injured and victimized, possibly over an entire lifetime.

In the 1994 genocide too, the violence against people was not one-sided. It is generally accepted the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) committed its own atrocities against the Hutu in an effort to bring peace to the country during the genocide, “Though this army saved the lives of many Tutsis and moderate Hutus on their march towards the south and west, Human Rights Watch data on RPF actions at this time indicates that thousands of Hutu civilians and militia members were killed by the RPF in retaliation for the genocide that continued elsewhere in the country” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). The ongoing violence between these two groups has encompassed all of society to an extent that even with a goal of peace, it is difficult to not feel the need for vengeance and retribution.

After peace was restored, with the help of the UN the country set up the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwandan (ICTR) to prosecute those responsible for
the genocide. However, this court, with its judicial and legal procedures would not suffice to aid the country with the legal matters of all the people that had contributed to the genocide, “approximately 125,000 people accused of perpetrating the genocide were held in overcrowded prisons” (Staub, 2004). In addition, although the formally accused are awaiting sentencing, the rest of the population, as witness to the atrocity, is left facing the initial reconstruction of society within close proximity to those complicit with the violence.

In an attempt to create peace out of the conflict, as well as to deal with the overflow in the prisons, the people of Rwanda set up the Inkiko-Gacaca courts. The lack of geographic separation and the cycle of violence that was all but inevitable without true reconciliation between the groups made some form of transitional justice mechanism imperative in order to rebuild a peaceful culture. The idea of amnesty having been rejected, “many people noted that gacaca, which stressed the importance of reconciliation between disputing parties, provided a useful alternative perspective to that of adversarial Western-style courts” (Honeyman et al., 2004). In the end, the people’s courts were established to complement the ICTR and traditional courts in Rwanda.

The people’s courts consisted of 19-member panels made up of adult residents that were considered persons of integrity in the community to moderate the hearings. These panels are supposed to try people that were not necessarily the organizers of the genocide, “Rwanda’s National Unity and Reconciliation Commission expects the grassroots tribunals to try…those accused of theft, looting, destruction of property, and murder (and not those accused of giving orders to carry out these crimes)” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). The panels mete out punishment according to a list of possible
punishments such as community service or life imprisonment, but cannot sentence death on someone found guilty (Corey & Joireman, 2004). The overall goals of the Inkiko-Gacaca courts are to decipher the truth, achieve justice, and to reestablish collective norms of right and wrong through participation in the legal process.

Although this process was intended to enable the perpetrators of violence to comprehend their role in the cycles of violence and to establish reconciliation between the embroiled ethnicities, these courts unfortunately also seem to serve the opposite. The people running the courts are forced into participation, often against their will, given little training and told to mete out punishments. In addition, many scholars fear the retributive nature of the courts will only serve to reignite the feelings of anger and injustice between the warring ethnicities and serve to feed the continued violence (Corey & Joirman, 2004). Also, the close proximity and forced participation of the survivors to the perpetrators may re-traumatize those victimized or cause societal backlash at confessing. Lastly, children who were not yet born during the time of the genocide are forced to experience the conflict through the eyes of the survivors first hand possibly causing vicarious trauma.

The judges, also known as inyangamugayos, had no choice to judge once picked, yet often had little to no education. They were given six days of training, but it not enough to answer all their questions. Honeyman et al., (2004) reveals this issue of participation and training with a comment by one of the inyangamugayos, “it is not right for me to participate in Gacaca—I didn’t want to be a judge, but the people forced me to because I had good behavior, even though I protested that I’m not educated at all.” The education level often made the training process more confusing for these judges, and left possible expectations of the process unmet by a lack of awareness of all the participants,
“Judges unfamiliar with methods of legal interpretation will face difficulties in adjudicating extremely complicated cases and administering just penalties” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). Furthermore, it would be near impossible to have even a negligible psychological effect on an individual having witnessed such atrocities. Personal emotions and subjective perspectives on the part of the judges could alter the fairness and legitimacy of the process. In an ideal setting with the subject matter at hand, identifying truth, in order to reconcile victims would be extremely difficult but without proper training and facing a wide range of expectations, the process will be near impossible.

Regardless of the expectations of the court proceedings, the retributive nature of the process makes true reconciliation difficult if not impossible for the Hutus and the Tutsis. The fact that the RPF was responsible for many Hutus deaths, especially in the North requires acknowledgement. Yet, these courts are only trying Hutus that committed some crime during the actual genocide, not both sides, “in the rhetoric of the government, these ‘war crimes’ are considered separate from the genocide and will not be tried by gacaca courts” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). Thus, these courts are left arbitrating from one side only although the genocide was a consequence of both sides committing crimes. This fact in the face of continued cycles of violence from both ethnic groups leaves the courts with a vengeful component that could easily reignite anger and frustration on the part of the Hutus who were also victims in this tragedy.

The people participating in the procedures also run a high risk for increased trauma and victimization. The entire community is forced to join the hearings and add their experiences to the cases at hand. Yet, often times this means, “rape victims fear personal encounters with those who raped them; the many people who were tortured
during the genocide must face the creators of their scars. The concerns of the witnesses also extend beyond the scope of what may happen during the hearings” (Corey & Joireman, 2004). This forced acknowledgement of the perpetrator increases the anxiety and unease of those who were hurt during the events. This forced participation does not allow the victims to overcome the trauma they have experienced in a safe setting, but rather obliges them to face their hurt with no viable protections.

Lastly, due to the forced participation of everyone in society, children who were not yet living when the genocide occurred, must sit and experience the gruesome reality of the mass killings. The future generations, then, are subject to the same biases, opinions, and confounds of the past generations. Rather than being able to look at history through an objective lens, they will see the issue of the genocide through a one-sided, subjectively moderated, retributive justice mechanism. Staub (2004) elucidates this concern of the Inkiko-Gacaca courts as creating “new trauma of children as they are exposed to vivid images of the violence for the first time, or women who in their testimonies have to describe the rapes that other people have not known about.” In terms of enabling the future generation an education regarding the country’s history, receiving the knowledge first-hand of the 1994 genocide can do no more to establish peace and reconciliation for the community.

In regards to building a culture of peace in Rwanda, although the Inkiko-Gacaca court had an initial goal of ending the cycle of violence and establishing truth, justice and peace for the country, the goals are a long way from being realized. The enduring pain, trauma and victimization of all the citizens of Rwanda are not being addressed in a way that could adequately diminish their anger in order to reconcile; “the creation of a human
*rights culture* is widely viewed as pivotal to reconciliation in modern societies. This usually involves introducing new legislation and policies, as well as measures to safeguard these initiatives” (de la Rey, 2001). In regards to Rwanda’s attempt to satisfy the basic needs for peace, the Inkiko-Gacaca courts are a far cry from establishing justice, truth, fairness and social norms of right and wrong. Although, the attempt will provide a good footing on which to base further peace applications, more concern over the role of each individual within the society needs to take place in order to move forward. In contrast to the incomplete process of the Inkiko-Gacaca, South Africa presents a country that although not without fault, still affected change in the society.

**South Africa and the TRC**

In the case of political conflicts, the combination of witnesses and victims encompasses all of society. This means that all trauma, all crises, all suffering is an individual stigma as well as a collective wound that must be healed appropriately and on both fronts. South Africa presents a country that although formerly mired in a racial and prejudiced government system, has managed to overcome the initial trials of extreme crisis. The combination of laws enacted served to construct different lifestyles for black and white based on the beliefs of the white people, “apartheid was a complete system of racial segregation which determined life circumstances and access to opportunity” (de la Rey, 2001). The policy of apartheid starting in 1948 officially began the severe racial biases, corrupt government officials, overt violence and segregation, and clandestine homicidal operations that served to create a violent and seething atmosphere on the verge of civil war.
The individual in South Africa suffered many consequences. Although South Africa did not use child soldiers in the traditional sense, adolescents and children partook in the social unrest through much of the conflict. Children revolted against the apartheid government demanding better services such as education throughout the years of strict apartheid. A primary example of the consequences these students face occurred in the Soweto uprising in 1976 where 23 people were killed (Baines, 2006). While protesting for an improved education, the South African police responded with teargas and bullets. The South African Student’s Movement was one of the many ways these children reacted and participated in the violence, one of the many ways these children were affected by the conflict. Many were abused, maltreated, and coerced into sexual behavior. Mark Mathabane in his autobiography *Kaffir Boy* even alludes to the sexual bribery some children suffered in order to eat. Although not always participating directly as soldiers, the effects on children were pervasive and encompassing.

The black population in South Africa was repeatedly forced to move in consideration of the increasingly strict policies enacted the National Party in government. The black population suffered having to move to townships on the outskirts of urban areas. Or, without the proper identification that was extremely difficult to obtain, the black population was forced to the natural reserves which were often without any natural resources and no aid:

“Forty percent of the Africans live in hopelessly overcrowded and, in some cases, drought-stricken Reserves, where soil erosion and the overworking of the soil makes it impossible for them to live properly off the land. Thirty percent are labourers, labour tenants, and squatters on white farms and work and live under conditions similar to serfs of the Middle Ages. The other 30 percent live in towns where they have developed economic and social habits which bring them closer in many respects to white standards. Yet most Africans, even in this group, are impoverished by low incomes and high cost of living” (Mandela, 1964).
The conditions under which the majority black population lived were minimal and impoverished. This lifestyle created a multitude of expatriates, displaced people and refugees, the desire for violence and retribution by those who stayed and suffered under the conditions, and an overall unrest in the community.

The people who stayed in the country saw many tragedies on all sides. The system required mandatory internal displacement. The black majority had no voting rights. The violence between the races was extreme and pervasive (de la Rey, 2001). The government could not be trusted and the rebel movements became infuriated and violent in response: “It was the government that provoked violence by employing violence to meet our nonviolent demands” (Mandela, 1995). The fear, trauma, unrest and unease that permeated this society touched everyone leaving few unscarred. When the government began its transition process to democracy, the country was on edge, aware that the angry black majority could easily retaliate against years of oppression. Instead of erupting into anarchy and civil war, however, the country managed to transform its dire situation into a peaceful and effective democracy.

South Africa has completely restructured its sociopolitical format and made gigantic strides in improving race relations between all groups of people. One of the most influential and original aspects of the country’s peace process was creating their own structure for justice, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This commission speaks to the psychological damage inflicted on the people of South Africa, and their determination to overcome the emotional trauma and schism present between the different races. The TRC had three main committees to address the wrongs facing the country—the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee, and the
Repatriation and Rehabilitation Committee. Each committee addressed various aspects affecting a specific problem in the peace process. However, upon analysis of the functions of the TRC, many glaring problems arise including assumptions about building peace, creating unrealistic expectations that increased trauma, and ill-defining key components.

First, the TRC addressed the inequities and gross human rights violations that became norm during apartheid, but failed to do so in a manner that allowed fair acknowledgement for the individuals victimized by apartheid rules (Byrne, 2004). Working under the assumption that a generalized truth about the events in the past would lead to peace in the country, the TRC led to a more subtle assumption that discussing one’s traumatic experiences also would lead to peace and healing. This assumption did address a number of issues facing the society at large. Where before the groups existed in a state where they had no tolerance let alone trust of each other, the TRC did enable a sense of tolerance between groups to be established (Garcia-Rivero, 2002). However, without trust, the future stability of the country remains uncertain in the face of the differences between standards of living between the black and white populations.

Some studies also reveal that inappropriate planning and ill-conceived methods in the TRC increased the large amount of trauma and victimization already perpetrated in the country. Many of the people who participated in the TRC left feeling many frustrations at the process such as unequal treatment of victims and perpetrators of violence, unfair procedures, lack of truth being obtained yet amnesty still being granted, and no compensation for the pain of reliving the events. In interviews conducted with some participants of the TRC, researchers found “some interviewees expressed
frustration that perpetrators in the very same case contradicted each other and that this showed that someone was not telling the truth” (Byrne, 2004). Yet if granted amnesty, the truth would never be fully determined. In addition, further frustration with protocol was elicited as “victims felt that time constraints, language barriers, and the emotionally trying context (i.e., re-experiencing events through retelling) of statement-giving may have affected the amount, type, and accuracy of the information they provided” (Byrne, 2004). The minimal amount of time allotted by the government to fulfill the TRC process therefore increased the amount of stress and anxiety many victims already felt.

In addition to these numerous allegations, it has also been shown that “Amnesty,” one of the three key factors outlined in how the TRC would bring about peace does not have a translational equivalent in Zulu, Sotho, or Tswana (Byrne, 2004). Thus, if one was not fluent in English or Afrikaans, the word often came to mean something to the extent of forgiveness, not freedom from political persecution. Expectations of forgiveness and reconciliation, may have served to alienate other participants that felt that it was their right to offer forgiveness. The poignancy of the TRC was therefore lost on the much of the population that was expected to agree with its process and reconcile with the countries past.

At the same time, it is undeniable that in the transition from a situation of intractable conflict such as South Africa’s, the TRC enabled a larger population to work under a psychology of forgiveness and peace that otherwise would not have been there. The benefit of speaking out against the crimes that were subjected on some, and the creation of a public voice caused many suffering under similar emotions to unite together from differing sides in acknowledgement of their mutual traumatic experiences: “the
commission would restore the moral order of South African society, create a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law, and prevent the past abuses happening again” (de la Rey, 2001). The TRC also enabled new facts to be discovered and for perpetrators to apologize or show remorse (although this was not always the case).

As seen with South Africa’s TRC, acknowledgement and reconciliation go a long way toward restoring connections within the social arena. However, acknowledgement is only a foundation for establishing peace; peace in terms of conflict may be achieved, but peace between smaller conflicting groups or individuals still exists. Collective versus individual trauma must be dealt with on both levels. The TRC affected peace on a collective level, but due to numerous planning flaws, increased individual levels of trauma. Individual trauma, if dealt with at all, was acknowledged with monetary compensation, which was often insignificant and less than expected, and thus moot (Byrne, 2004). Any further advancement to individual psychological healing had to take place underneath the veil of governmental capacity. Meaning social order and peaceful relations in the country was no longer a primary concern for the state, but rather pertinent only as much as it did not affect the advancement of the political will of the state. In the end, the focus on truth and amnesty led to tolerance and peace, as well as frustration about the lack of power in meting out forgiveness and further victimization.

Conclusions

On an emotional level, it seems absurd to believe that anyone having experienced political trauma or victimization would be able to function in a society without altered behavior. The psychological barriers to healing caused by intense suffering and crises must be broken for the society to establish a cohesive and cooperative performance. The
effects of extreme suffering from conflicts can have severe consequences on individuals as well as society as a whole. More than just acknowledgement, “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Herman, 1997). Whether healing as an individual or as a collective society, acknowledging the events that occurred is imperative before any healing process can occur.

In many of the conflicts throughout Africa, the crimes inflicted upon individuals carry a much larger emotional burden that will require greater effort in order to overcome the negative social psychology that has been created and reestablish peace in a community due to the extreme trauma that intractable conflicts can incur. Both individual methods of healing and collective methods of healing are imperative in order for societies to overcome the incredible amount of trauma they have suffered in protracted conflicts. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Somatization Disorder, and Depression are common themes among traumatized people throughout the world, and can lead to numerous behavioral transformations that greatly affect society, “because trauma affects every aspect of human functioning from the biological to the social, treatment must be comprehensive. Because recovery occurs in stages, treatment must be appropriate at each stage” (Herman, 2003). The realization of multiple stage recovery also must be taken into consideration in order for peace to be realized.

Psychological healing for individuals suffering from pervasive situations have shown to be effective. Whether for the child soldier, refugee, torture victim or sexual assault victim, appropriate, indigenous infused therapy can provide the necessary treatment to allow the individual recovery in a community. However, these centers must
be careful to infuse a sense of purpose, not exposure to painful events through incomplete definitions and inadequate or Westernized methods.

Judith Herman proposes Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to address the consequence that the “connection between the patient’s present symptoms and the traumatic experience is frequently lost” (Herman, 1997). Thus, new definitions of culturally applicable definitions should be determined in order to adequately assess the magnitude of the burden that people suffering intractable conflicts undergo. Specifically, a revised definition of PTSD is imperative to accurately reflect the symptoms and healing process for extreme situations and allow for greater clarity and efficacy in therapy.

From the perspective of the collective, psychological healing is much more difficult since the society as a whole must alter its social paradigm. Transitional justice mechanisms seem to be a method with which social change has a possibility of occurring. However, these mechanisms also pose serious threats to the safety and peace of a community if not accurately executed or understood by the people participating. Rwanda’s Inkiko-Gacaca courts provide an example of how even with the intended goal of reconciliation, forced participation, one-sided justice, and poor planning can debilitate the process of social change before it is started. South Africa’s situation, although restoring tolerance between groups could be improved through greater research and translational efforts. Yet, the TRC serves as a provocative baseline for future peace processes.

If taken with a political perspective, establishing tolerance and trust between groups is only the first step. Actual peace, reconciliation and recovery will not occur until much more work has been done to alleviate the stress of trauma. Thus further
psycho-political policies must be implemented to create cultures of peace but with a few alterations in scope.

I propose that new transitional justice mechanisms be based on the same approach of individual healing methods. The three-stage model of establishing safety, mourning the tragic events and losses, and reconnecting with the community presents a reliable and valid model that is an appropriate baseline for social change and psycho-political healing. Establishing a safe community in post-conflict situations that included extreme violence or trauma is a minimum in order to co-exist, “the final report of the TRC suggests that a weak or limited form of reconciliation that emphasizes peaceful co-existence may often be the most realistic goal for societies trying to overcome decades of conflict, especially in the beginning of the peacemaking process” (de la Rey, 2001). The TRC shows how a balanced transitional justice mechanism can provide the baseline for tolerance needed to establish safety. It is imperative that both sides identify their role in the conflict, and their need to heal. The victims suffer, but so too “members of the perpetrator group feel wounded, either because they had been previously victimized, or because the violence has been mutual” (Staub, 2001). Safety is prerequisite for both sides. Yet, this is only a first step, after tolerance must come trust.

Included in the mourning process would be the acknowledgement of the “different sides of the conflict relat[ing] to one another as humans in relationship” (de la Rey, 2001). By both sides acknowledging fault for their actions, and seeing the mutual pain, a community can begin to mourn its past and work toward a brighter future. In addition, this mourning stage can incorporate the understanding of what Ervin Staub calls the ideology of antagonism, the perceived identity of an individual as in conflict with the
other, in order to reestablish social moral norms, “truth commissions and tribunals, by establishing what has actually happened, make it less likely that perpetrators will be able to consider themselves victims, which otherwise might lead to renewed violence by them” (Staub, 2001). The ending of cycles of violence is imperative, and thus focuses on collective fault and collective mourning. This collective healing is necessary for peace to be established, and the process of mourning as a society will begin to infuse respect and understanding in the opposing groups that will hopefully eventually lead to trust.

Having recognized new social moral norms, the society can move to reconnect with the other side. This may take on the form of extreme circumstances such as demilitarizing politics through enabling child soldiers an education to escape the lifestyle of the gun, or may take a broader approach through enabling an individual to see their experience in light of an entire community. Inevitably in the healing process, there will emerge “a powerful representation of massive collective losses that had resulted from repeated, large-scale civil wars. Thus, pain that had seemed purely personal was discovered to be part of the larger, collective phenomenon of ethnopolitical persecution and war” (Stepakoff et al., 2006). Since this pain is mutual, the community as a whole having mourned and feeling safe can establish a baseline connection through the event in order to work towards a peaceful society. Societies at large can work on this through annual memorial days, integrated memorials, or educational methods such as peace education classes.

Lastly, governments must include smaller scale social change models such as peace education programs in schools in order for future generations to understand conflict resolution and negotiation. These programs can emphasize, “equal status between the
groups, sustained interaction between participants, interdependence in carrying out a common task, support from authorities, and potential for the development of friendship” (Salomon, 2004). Furthermore, these programs will ensure the continued integration of both parties in the ensuing years after the conflict. For cases like South Africa where trust between groups has not been established, peace education programs would increase the likelihood of incorporating trust into the social paradigm.

In conclusion, individual methods of psychological healing work well to restore people’s lives. Although there have been moving transitional justice mechanisms that aim to serve similar roles for the collective, these mechanisms must be thoroughly researched, well-balanced, seek truth and reconciliation rather than retribution as their goal and be based on more individual methods of healing in order to enact social change. These mechanisms are provocative and show a level of efficacy that is hopeful for building cultures of peace after protracted conflicts.
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