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**Working Paper**

## The Puzzle of Reconciliation after Genocide and the Role of Social Identities: Evidence from Burundi and Rwanda

Global Cooperation Research Papers, No. 23

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

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*Suggested Citation:* Reinold, Theresa (2019) : The Puzzle of Reconciliation after Genocide and the Role of Social Identities: Evidence from Burundi and Rwanda, Global Cooperation Research Papers, No. 23, University of Duisburg-Essen, Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21), Duisburg, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14282/2198-0411-GCRP-23>

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10419/214716>

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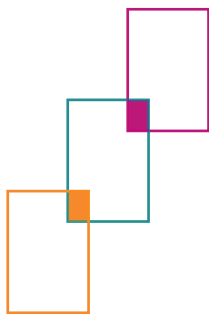


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Theresa Reinold

**The Puzzle of  
Reconciliation  
after Genocide and the  
Role of Social Identities:  
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## Global Cooperation Research Papers 23

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*Printed by* UDZ, Duisburg

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ISSN: 2198-1949 (Print)

ISSN: 2198-0411 (Online)

DOI: 10.14282/2198-0411-GCRP-23



# The Puzzle of Reconciliation after Genocide and the Role of Social Identities: Evidence from Burundi and Rwanda

Theresa Reinold

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## *Editors Preface*

*We are happy to present Research Paper No. 23 - 'The Puzzle of Reconciliation after Genocide and the Role of Social Identities: Evidence from Burundi and Rwanda' by political scientist Theresa Reinold, Junior Professor for Global and Transnational Cooperation Research at the University of Duisburg-Essen. The paper explores identity politics as a key factor for explaining the successes and failures of officially orchestrated reconciliation processes after mass atrocities. Rwanda and Burundi are presented as examples of how different approaches chosen by the respective governments have affected reconciliation in deeply divided societies. Based on ample empirical evidence, Reinold concludes that neither in Burundi nor in Rwanda have antagonistic social identities been successfully transformed after genocide. But there is good news too. While attempts to impose an overarching 'national' identity have largely failed, cooperation at the micro-level, which lacked any coercive character and which enabled intimate social contact between the former antagonists, seems to have been rather effective in reconstructing social identities and promoting reconciliation. The paper is only meant to be 'a first plausibility probe into the identity-reconciliation nexus in post-conflict societies', as Reinold modestly declares. But it nevertheless offers important insights in forms and outcomes of transitional justice mechanisms and thereby contributes to our ongoing research on 'pathways and mechanisms' of cooperation at multiple levels.*

*Volker Heins*

# The Puzzle of Reconciliation after Genocide and the Role of Social Identities: Evidence from Burundi and Rwanda

## 1 Introduction

The question of how societies emerging from genocide, torn apart by months, years, sometimes decades of extreme violence, manage to return to normalcy, restore social relationships and lay the foundation for sustainable peace is a thoroughly puzzling one. It is not intuitively plausible that people who chopped each other's families and friends into pieces can go on to peacefully co-exist, attend village meetings, engage in neighborly banter, pray together at church – in short, do things that regular people do together in their daily lives. The guiding hypothesis underlying this research paper is that identity politics is a key factor for explaining the successes and failures of reconciliation processes. I will first elaborate the argument theoretically, drawing on the voluminous literature on conflict transformation and reconciliation, where social psychologists have made important contributions, as well as the equally voluminous literature on transitional justice (TJ), which is dominated by legal scholars and political scientists. Thereinafter I will illustrate my argument empirically based on two different post-genocide societies, namely Burundi and Rwanda, which are similar in many critical aspects yet have adopted extremely different approaches to identity politics and reconciliation. This is by no means intended as a systematic comparative case study, but merely as a first plausibility probe into the dynamics of reconciliation and the role of identity politics therein. More rigorous and systematic comparative research will be necessary to arrive at reasonably certain causal inferences about the reconciliation-identity link in post-genocide societies.

Now, why is this relevant? There are two answers to this question, one focusing on the policy implications of such an endeavour, the other one on its academic significance. To begin with, in light of the amount of (donor) resources that are going into reconciliation and peacebuilding projects around the world, it is quite striking that all this money, all these efforts are devoted towards an endeavor whose outcome is so uncertain and whose underlying mechanisms we understand so little (Skaar 2013: 56f). Since the end of the Cold War the international community has spent well over a billion dollars on transitional justice projects (Weinstein 2011: 1). The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for instance, cost more than 50 million US dollars; the ad hoc tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) costs a whopping 177 million US dollars per year; and its Rwandan counterpart

(ICTR) spent one billion US dollars between 1995 and 2007 (Ibid). Identifying the complex causal linkages underlying post-conflict reconciliation processes – including the impact of transitional justice mechanisms – will thus provide policy-makers with more effective tools for reconciliation and peace-building in conflict-torn societies, thereby preventing a relapse of these countries into violence in the medium- and long-term. Second, this research paper equally seeks to contribute to the academic debate about reconciliation and identity politics. Despite a vast literature we still know very little about the exact causal mechanisms underlying reconciliation in societies emerging from mass atrocities, one of the reasons for this being the near-total absence of interdisciplinary work on this issue (but see Aiken 2013; Ford 2012; Milanovic 2016a and 2016b). This is all the more regrettable as one cannot fully grasp the dynamics that are of interest to this research paper – which play out at the micro- as well as macro-levels – without synthesizing insights from different disciplines that focus on these different levels of analysis.

In the following, different bodies of research will be canvassed. To begin with, the voluminous literature on TJ, a field to which legal scholars and political scientists have made important contributions, will be reviewed. However, this literature has not been able to identify the causal mechanisms linking TJ to reconciliation – one reason being TJ enthusiasts' lack of appreciation of the ambivalent role of social identities, which have often presented a stumbling block for TJ mechanisms' attempt to establish a historical record shared by all antagonists and end the culture of denialism that often pervades post-conflict societies. Second, the equally voluminous literature on conflict transformation and reconciliation will be discussed, where social psychologists, who usually address specific aspects of this process at the micro-level at the expense of macro-level forces, have taken a leading role. While a number of important studies in this field have been authored by political scientists and sociologists who are more cognizant of the larger political context, such research tends to focus on single-case studies, whereas comparative studies across post-genocide societies remain wanting, especially those integrating micro- and macro-level perspectives.

The paper seeks to address the following questions: have antagonistic identities been successfully transformed after genocide in the cases under scrutiny? Have macro-level initiatives such as government-imposed superordinate identities led to reconciliation? Alternatively, have micro-level reconciliation projects, for instance those involving cooperation in the pursuit of superordinate goals, been effective? Which other factors affect the reconciliation process and how do the different factors interact? The main findings can be summarized as follows: in neither Rwanda nor Burundi have antagonistic identities been successfully transformed after genocide, although one must distinguish between macro- and micro-level interventions. Imposing a superordinate identity in a top-down process has not been very effective in either case, whereas there is some evidence suggesting that bottom-up cooperation has been rather

successful in reconstructing social identities and promoting reconciliation in the case of Rwanda. Transitional justice in turn plays a rather ambivalent role in post-conflict settings. It seems that TJ can only be effective if it is perceived as being applied in an even-handed fashion, and if the political environment is supportive of accountability-seeking. Neither condition is entirely fulfilled in Rwanda or Burundi.

The paper is structured as follows: to begin with, I will clarify core concepts and review the vast literature on transitional justice and conflict transformation. Subsequently, the ‘identity factor’ will be introduced and applied to the cases of Rwanda and Burundi. Finally, preliminary findings will be presented and open questions for future research identified.

## 2 Core Concepts

This section will define core concepts employed in this paper, starting with genocide. I will use a conceptualization proposed by Barbara Harff, which is widely accepted in genocide research and which expands upon the definition of genocide in the *Genocide Convention*: ‘Genocides and politicides are the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents – or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities – that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group’ (2003: 58). Genocide thus represents ‘intergroup behavior at its most horrific extreme’, where individuals are selected for annihilation merely because of their membership in a devalued social group (Hogg and Abrams 1998: 1).

Genocide has a severe impact on the social fabric of a country. Basic human needs – security, physical integrity, and esteem – are profoundly frustrated. Genocide divides people into perpetrators, victims, and bystanders (Hilberg 1993), even though sometimes the line between the three groups becomes blurred, as some people may be both victims and perpetrators, for instance. Each of these groups is affected differently by genocidal violence. In the course of genocidal violence, the perpetrators come to adopt a de-humanizing attitude towards the victims, whom they exclude from the moral universe, as a result of which the inhibitions people normally have against using violence against others disappear. As Ervin Staub notes, ‘[t]here is a reverse of morality, so that killing becomes the right thing to do’ (2003: 305). The moral fabric of society thus becomes severely damaged as conventional notions of right and wrong cease to exist. Group dynamics assume a critical role in this context, as they come to ‘dominate the psychology of perpetrators. Embedded in a group, trained in submission to authority, and further indoctrinated in ideology, people give up individual decision making to the group and its leaders. The ‘We’



acquires substantial power, in place of the “I” (Ibid.). Genocide perpetrators thus exhibit the submissive tendencies Milgram famously discovered in his electroshock experiment - where participants administered what they thought were severe electroshocks to innocent people merely because a person in a position of authority told them to - at their extreme. Societies experiencing genocidal violence undergo a ‘resocialization in beliefs, values, and standards of conduct. New institutions emerge that serve repression, discrimination, and the mistreatment of identified victims. They represent new realities, a new status quo’ (Ibid.).

Just as perpetrators dehumanize their victims in order to rationalize their own participation in mass atrocities, bystanders to the genocide also feel social distance between themselves and the victims, although it does not have to go as far as dehumanizing the latter. However, a certain degree of social distance between victims and bystanders is necessary in order for the latter to stand by while innocent people are being slaughtered on a massive scale (Staub 1978). Changing societal norms regarding the use of violence against the victim groups further bolster bystanders in their passivity. As Paul Slovic put it, does such seeming indifference to the suffering of others reveal some ‘fundamental deficiency in our humanity?’ (2007: 79). Slovic draws on affect theory to explain inaction in the face of mass atrocities. The role of affect, i.e. the ‘positive and negative feelings that combine with reasoned analysis to guide our judgments, decisions, and actions’ (Ibid.) in motivating human behavior, has been extensively studied by psychologists (see, e.g., Clark and Fiske 1982; Forgas 2000; Tomkins 1962; Tomkins 1963). Slovic uses affect to explain why people often remain passive in the face of genocide: ‘One fundamental mechanism that may play a role in many, if not all, episodes of mass-murder neglect involves the capacity to experience *affect* .... The reported numbers of deaths represent dry statistics .... that fail to spark emotion or feeling and thus fail to motivate action’ (2007: 79).

Finally, victims experience genocidal violence as a deeply traumatic event, as an extreme form of disempowerment. In the aftermath of genocide, survivors struggle with a desire for revenge, an inability to forgive, but also fear of repeated victimization, acute loneliness, alienation from their fellow citizens, an inability to trust, etc. Consequently, most existing research on victims of genocide has addressed post-traumatic stress symptoms, the trans-generational transmission of trauma, and a desire for revenge exhibited by survivors (Field and Chhim 2008; Sagi-Schwartz et al. 2008), but also, albeit less frequently, positive effects such as resilience in the face of adversity, coping mechanisms, and empowerment (Gasparre et al. 2010; Suedfeld 2000; Shnabel et al. 2009).

Now, while (genocidal) violence may be ended through a peace agreement, it is widely agreed in the literature that this form of conflict settlement is not sufficient to create a reconciled society (Bar-Tal 2000; Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004; Kriesberg 2001, 2004; Lederach 1997; Long and Brecke 2003; Staub,

Pearlman, Gubin, and Hagengimana 2005). Reconciliation, rather than mere conflict settlement, is desirable because studies indicate that violence is likely to resume when a conflict has been settled but underlying grievances and hostile attitudes towards the out-group have not changed (De la Rey 2001; Staub and Bar-Tal 2003).

This research paper therefore adopts a definition of reconciliation put forward by Herbert Kelman, who sees reconciliation as a process of identity change, whereby the negation of the former antagonist is no longer a defining feature of one's own identity: 'Changing one's collective identity by removing the negation of the other from it implies a degree of acceptance of the other's identity ... The change in each party's identity may go further by moving toward the development of a common, transcendent identity – not in lieu of, but alongside of each group's particularistic identity ... What is essential to reconciliation, in my view, is that each party revise its own identity just enough to accommodate the identity of the other' (2008: 24; see also Kelman 2004, 1999a, 1999b).

### 3 The State of the Art

Surprisingly, the link between the reconstruction of group identities and reconciliation first articulated by Herbert Kelman has been somewhat overlooked in the burgeoning TJ literature. TJ designates the 'full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation' (Annan 2004: 4). Debates about TJ have centered on a number of overarching questions about the evolution, form, locus, and consequences of TJ (e.g., Arthur 2011; Biggar 2001; Brahm 2007; Brounéus 2008; Byrne 2004; Buckley-Zistel et al. 2014; Chapman and van der Merwe 2008; Clark 2010; Clark 2012; DeBrito et al. 2001; Drumbl 2007; Elster 2006; Fletcher and Weinstein 2002; Gibson 2004; Hayner 2002; Kritz 1995; Lundy and McGovern 2008; Lutz and Sikkink 2001; Minow 1998; Orentlicher 2010; Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006; Schabas and Darcy 2004; Shaw and Waldorf 2010; Sriram 2004; Stover and Weinstein 2004; Teitel 2000).

For a long time, TJ was uncritically embraced as normatively desirable, although its impact on reconciliation actually remains poorly understood. A recent meta-review (Skaar 2013: 55f) of three literature reviews on TJ and reconciliation (Thoms, Ron, and Paris 2008; Hazan 2006; Mendeloff 2004) concludes that 'there is a huge gap in our empirical knowledge with respect to what transitional justice may or may not do for reconciliation' (Skaar 2013: 56f; for similar conclusions see Duggan 2010: 315; Fletcher and Weinstein

2002: 585). With regard to the specific category of genocidal violence, a 2012 study on the *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia* (ICTY) points out that ‘the linkage between criminal trials and reconciliation is especially tenuous in genocide cases’ (Clark 2012: 55). Other TJ skeptics voice similar concerns, arguing that the digging up of painful memories may reactivate tensions and thus undermine societal peace (see, f.ex. Snyder and Vinjamuri 2003; Stover and Weinstein 2004: 323). This challenges the argument defended by TJ enthusiasts – such as former ICTY Judge Richard Goldstone – that there can be no reconciliation, no lasting peace without justice (Lewis 1995). In the absence of rigorous comparative research, it will be impossible to state the scope of conditions under which TJ has one effect or the other. Unfortunately, ‘[t]he bulk of impact assessment studies on reconciliation are single-case studies, which although may be superbly conducted have relatively limited value in terms of generalization’ (Skaar 2013: 57).

What is more, the findings from different studies about the same country sometimes contradict each other: whereas one prominent study on the impact of the *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC), for instance, finds that truth-telling had a positive effect (Gibson 2004), another widely cited study challenges the idea that the TRC contributed to societal healing (Chapman and van der Merwe 2008). This flurry of ‘competing stories’ unfortunately ‘does not provide policymakers with a sound empirical foundation for making informed decisions about when, where and how to promote transitional justice in countries emerging from war or authoritarianism’ (Thoms, Ron, and Paris 2008: 12). Much of the existing research, Oskar Thoms et al. maintain, is ‘analytically weak, relying largely on impressionistic descriptions of a small number of well-known cases, rather than systematically comparing impacts across a broad range of cases’ (Ibid.: 5). In a similar vein, Harvey Weinstein laments that ‘[a]necdotes abound, assumptions remain untouched by lack of evidence’ (2011: 1).

Another obstacle to a better understanding of the TJ-reconciliation link is the lack of appreciation for the ‘identity factor’ in much (albeit not all) of this literature (Aiken 2013: 211). Nevin Aiken makes an important point in stressing that in order to fully understand the effects of TJ on reconciliation, we need to engage the ‘fundamental issues of collective identity at the root of mass violence’ because TJ has a role to play in reconstructing or possibly cementing the antagonistic identities that had given rise to conflict in the first place (Ibid.: 25). He regrets that ‘no attempt has yet been made to synthesize the structural and institutional insights of transitional justice and the social and psychological theories of identity and intergroup reconciliation developed in the conflict transformation literature’ (Ibid.: 3). While Aiken has merged these two strands of the literature in his study of reconciliation in Northern Ireland and South Africa (Ibid.), he does not address the peculiarities of post-genocide societies, which are the subject of this research paper. Nonetheless, his work represents an important step towards a sustained interdisciplinary dialogue

that could significantly improve our understanding of reconciliation.

Interestingly, a parallel development has begun in the discipline of international law, where scholars have begun to apply social psychological theories to the functioning of international criminal courts. Stuart Ford (2012) kicked off the debate with an excellent study demonstrating how people's perception of these courts are filtered through various cognitive biases which generally make these courts' perceived legitimacy a negative-sum game. Marko Milanovic (2016b) in turn equally draws upon social psychology in order to explain why the ICTY has struggled to transform the culture of denialism that is still prevalent in many parts of the former Yugoslavia. Both studies furnish fascinating, yet partial insights into the processes of reconciliation in post-genocide societies that also inform the theoretical framework elaborated below.

In order to piece together the puzzle of reconciliation, it thus seems worthwhile to venture into the territory of social psychologists. In the following, I will provide an overview of the conflict transformation literature, where social psychologists have assumed a leading role, even though scholars from other disciplines have made relevant contributions as well. In-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel and Turner 1986), conflict-supporting group narratives (so-called 'chosen traumas', see Volkan 2001; see also Bar-Tal et al. 2014), social distance and dehumanization of 'the Other' (Haagensen and Croes 2012; Halpern and Weinstein 2004; Harris and Fiske 2011) are all identity-related dynamics that are known to contribute to the escalation of violence into genocidal behavior (Staub 1989 and 2003). Thus, if reconciliation is to succeed, the antagonistic identities underlying the escalation of violence will have to be somehow reconstructed. However, while intuitively appealing, this strategy is fraught with many difficulties, as group identities fulfil important psychological functions, and during conflict people go to extremes to keep their identities intact.

So how can it be done? As Walter Stephan self-critically notes in a recent volume summing up the state of the art on the issue, '[o]ur understanding of how to bring about intergroup reconciliation is in its infancy' (2008: 389). Existing social-psychological research addresses specific aspects of the reconciliation puzzle, namely those related to the emotional changes involved in reconciliation, such as feelings of collective guilt (Branscombe and Miron 2004) or collective victimhood (Shnabel et al. 2013), victims' need for empowerment (Shnabel et al. 2009), trauma and recovery (Pearlman 2013), the effects of truth-telling on victims' mental health (Brounéus 2008; Byrne 2004), the role of forgiveness (Noor et al. 2008; Staub et al. 2005) or the effects of specific media interventions on reconciliation (Bilali 2014; Paluck 2009; Staub 2014). Education specialists in turn have explored the role of curricular reform in reconciliation processes (Bellino 2015; Oglesby 2007; Rubin 2016; Swimelar 2013; Tawil and Harley 2004; Warshauer Freedman et al. 2008).

The reconstruction of social identities fueling conflict has equally been addressed to a certain extent. While (re-)engineering social identities has proven unproblematic in laboratory studies (e.g., Dovidio et al. 1997), changing people's sense of belonging in applied settings is fraught with many difficulties (Pettigrew 1998), and naturally, post-conflict societies are especially challenging. While some research on identity-engineering has been carried out outside of the laboratory situation (e.g., Guerra et al 2013; Shnabel et al. 2013), Sigrun Moss and Johanna Vollhardt (2016: 328f) point out that post-genocide societies have received little attention from social psychologists. However, upon closer inspection one finds that some research has been done within and outside the discipline of social psychology: on Bosnia, Sabina Cehajic et al. 2008 and Leonard et al. 2016 have produced interesting insights, the Holocaust has equally received some scholarly attention (e.g., Wohl and Branscombe 2005), and quite a few studies have been published on Rwanda (e.g., Buckley-Zistel 2006; Buckley-Zistel 2009; Eltringham and van Hoyweghen 2000; Hintjens 2008; Kanazayire et al. 2014; Longman and Rutagengwa 2004; Thomson 2011; Vandeginste 2014; Zorbas 2009). While these contributions have offered interesting insights, as single case studies their potential for theory-building remains limited.

In sum, existing research has not been able to fully piece together the puzzle of reconciliation and the role of identity politics therein. The challenge lies in integrating micro- as well as macro-level perspectives, but owing to disciplinary divides, existing studies tend to adopt either one perspective or the other, but rarely both. In order to improve our understanding of reconciliation dynamics, hitherto disparate disciplines need to be joined and more comparisons across cases must be carried out. Social psychologists have generated important insights into the dynamics of intergroup conflict and the role of social identities therein, focusing on post-conflict psychological changes in individuals and groups. TJ scholars in turn – predominantly political scientists and lawyers – have researched the contribution of macro-level interventions to peacebuilding and reconciliation. What is missing is a holistic approach that takes into account structural factors at the macro-level (such as the institutional design of post-conflict polities, scope conditions for effective TJ interventions, the role of political elites, the conflict-narratives they propagate, media discourse, the role of education, etc.) on the one hand, and the changes induced in identity constructions at the micro-level on the other hand. Richard Ashmore et al. lament that '[a]lthough self and identity play a critical role in some (perhaps most) intergroup conflicts, social scientific analyses of that role have thus far been largely isolated from each other' (2001: 4).

## 4 Theoretical Framework: the Identity Factor

The leading hypothesis of this research paper is that identity politics are a key factor shaping the dynamics of reconciliation processes. Identity is variable rather than a constant (Abdelal et al. 2006), which can be mobilized for both conflict and peace (Anderson 1983; Anstey et al. 2016; Connor 1994; Fearon and Laitin 2000; Hastings 1997; Horowitz 1985; Kaufman 2001; Kaufman 2006). The politics of identity (Laclau 1994; see also Calhoun 1994; Eder et al. 2002) is therefore integral to processes of conflict escalation and de-escalation. Social identities fulfil important functions for individuals seeking to preserve their self-esteem and trying to make sense of the world, yet they also provide the basis for discrimination of ‘the Other’ and antagonistic relations between social groups. The world is a complex and oftentimes messy place, and human beings have an innate need to reduce this complexity and to perceive social reality as orderly, coherent and predictable. Social categorization helps human beings to do just that.

*Social Identity Theory* (SIT) (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 1986) and *Self-Categorization Theory* (Turner 1985; Turner et al. 1987) are the two leading approaches developed to explain the causes and consequences of social categorization. Social identity consists ‘of those aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging’ (Tajfel and Turner 1986: 16). SIT posits that individuals generally seek to maintain a positive concept of themselves, and that membership in a positively valued social group contributes to this goal (Tajfel 1974: 67ff). Yet social categories do not merely provide emotional benefits, they also offer certain cognitive advantages in that they help individuals simplify reality by categorizing objects and people. Social categorization leads to in-group – out-group distinctions, and the resulting in-group favoritism tends to create an atmosphere of competition and distrust between groups, at times escalating into violence (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

The good news is, however, that social identities are not set in stone, and that they can be reconstructed to allow for more positive and less hostile intergroup-relations. Identity politics can therefore play both a constructive and a destructive role. The challenge for those wishing to promote reconciliation in post-genocide societies lies in striking a balance between encouraging the former antagonists to revise those elements of their identity that call for discrimination of the former outgroup – which, as Kelman points out, is extremely sensitive for parties involved in an oftentimes protracted, existential identity conflict – all the while retaining the core of their cherished social identity (2008: 26). In this context, the creation of a new, superordinate identity incorporating all conflict parties is believed to be conducive to reconciliation (Ibid.: 24).

## *The role of inter-group cooperation*

How can the development of such a transcendent identity be encouraged? Cooperation seems to be the magic bullet. The idea is as simple as it is enticing: when people cooperate in order to achieve a shared goal which they cannot reach individually, they will come to like each other. Gordon Allport (1954) first articulated the notion that inter-group hostility can be overcome by fostering contact between social groups. However, not any kind of contact will do, some forms of contact may even exacerbate tensions. In later years, researchers therefore sought to refine Allport's contact hypothesis by adding a number of scope conditions, with Yehuda Amir (1969) arguing that contact must take place under conditions of equal status, as power asymmetries would likely heighten tensions, and Muzafer Sherif et al. (1961; see also Sherif 1958) demonstrating that cooperation toward superordinate goals must take place repeatedly, which will in turn foster a new 'we-feeling' among the former antagonists. Stephen Worchel, Virginia Andreoli and Robert Folger (1977) later found that Sherif's assumption only holds when cooperation is successful, and Thomas Pettigrew (1998) emphasized the need for an environment supportive of contact, especially support from in-group leaders. The latter condition in particular points to the need to take into account macro-level dynamics when studying reconciliation at the micro-level – the role of political elites, public institutions, the media, etc.

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Studies of mixed sports teams, cooperatives, and other joint endeavors across societal divides have supported the notion that cooperation towards superordinate goals will significantly ameliorate inter-group relations: Reuben Baron (2008: 288ff), for instance, describes how a rather dramatic change in social identity occurred when Jews and Arabs were playing on a mixed soccer team. He even enthusiastically suggests that, in order to reduce tensions in the Middle East, 'perhaps we need a regional team – imagine if there was a team consisting of Israelis and Syrians!' (Ibid.: 289). In order to further substantiate this point, he refers to an initiative called *Playing for Peace*, where Israelis and Palestinian teenagers play basketball on the same team, and which has yielded 'remarkable results' in terms of changing attitudes of the two groups towards one another (Ibid.: 290). Baron concludes by emphasizing that reconciliation depends 'on we-ness, on people acting jointly' (Ibid.: 295).

## *Cognitive and emotional changes*

Cooperation triggers changes not only at the cognitive level but also at the emotional level, because cooperation induces a we-feeling and thus generates positive emotions towards the former out-group. This is a very important point, as studies have found that 'when attitudes are formed in a process strongly grounded in emotion, changing attitudes is much more likely to succeed if the attempt at change is also made at an emotional level' (Milanovic

2016b: 1370f). It follows that reconciliation interventions – cooperation-based or not – are likely to be successful if they manage to evoke emotions in their addressees. Milanovic uses this insight in his analysis of how the ICTY has affected the Serbian population’s conflict-supporting narratives, arguing that persuasion was most effective when the ICTY did not confine itself to establishing ‘cold, hard facts ... in excruciatingly long, sterile, and plain boring trials’, but in addition used the power of the ‘visceral, emotional effect’ of the infamous Scorpions video, for instance (Ibid.: 1371). This video, which contains graphic footage of Serbian paramilitaries executing young boys from Srebrenica, left a ‘crack in the wall of denial’ (Petrovic 2014) still surrounding much of the Serbian population when it was first shown during the Slobodan Milosevic trial in 2005.

Apart from changes at the emotional level reconciliation equally requires cognitive changes in the ways individuals engage in social categorization. But again, actively inducing such changes is fraught with difficulties – witness the large-scale attempt at abolishing ethnic categories launched by the current Rwandan government or a similar campaign initiated by Burundi’s then-president Bagaza in the late 1970s. Asking conflict parties to relinquish their pre-existing social identities in favor of a new superordinate identity may be unrealistic because, as noted above, people have a deep attachment to these identities. Samuel Gaertner and John Dovidio (2000) therefore proposed the Common In-group Identity Model, which allows members to keep their initial in-group identity but at the same time subsumes the former antagonists in a new superordinate category. However, skeptics have pointed out that a sustainable (and not merely temporary) re-engineering of social identities outside of the laboratory situation is difficult when powerful segments of society continue to invoke group differences and cultivate out-group biases (Hewstone 1996: 351). On the other hand, proponents of the Common In-group Identity Model have demonstrated that this model holds even in situations of relatively intense social conflict such as Black-White relations in the United States (e.g., Dovidio et al. 2000). However, the scope conditions for an effective re-engineering of ethnic identities in the ‘hard case’ of post-genocide societies are not well understood.

## 5 Reconciliation Dynamics in Rwanda and Burundi

As we do not have a well-established theory of reconciliation after mass atrocities yet, this research paper will inductively derive new theoretical predictions about the factors promoting or inhibiting reconciliation, especially those relating to the reconstruction of group identities. Harff (2003: 60) has compiled a list of cases of genocide in the second half of the 20th century.



From this list, cases used to illustrate the theoretical arguments put forward in this paper were chosen based on the following considerations: as reconciliation takes time, ongoing as well as recently terminated genocides were not included in the sample. Secondly, case selection was limited to those countries that have experienced genocide as an ‘intimate crime’, a concept which refers to mass civilian participation in the genocide including neighbor-on-neighbor violence, and where the line between victim and perpetrator is often difficult to draw (Pouligny 2002). Not all genocides fall into this category – during the Holocaust for instance, atrocities were carried out (almost) exclusively by the state machinery and victims and perpetrators for the most part were not forced to co-exist afterward the genocide as most members of the victim group were either annihilated or emigrated. Naturally, cases where genocide was perpetrated as an intimate crime pose a comparatively greater challenge for reconciliation than cases such as the Holocaust, hence the present research paper focuses on the former form of genocide.

Out of the remaining cases of post-genocide societies, I selected Rwanda and Burundi. While Rwanda has received quite a bit of scholarly attention, Burundi has been largely ignored in the existing reconciliation literature (but see Ingelaere 2009; Rieder 2015; Rubli 2013; Schraml 2012; Vandeginste 2014) and therefore deserves closer scrutiny. Rwanda experienced genocide in 1994 (after several cycles of mass violence), and Burundi in 1972 and 1993. In both Rwanda and Burundi, the vast majority of the population are Hutus (84/85 percent), 15/14 percent are Tutsi, and about one percent belong to the Twa minority (World Population Review 2019; Central Intelligence Agency 2018). In Rwanda, the Tutsis were the main victims of the genocide (which also targeted moderate Hutus, however) whereas in Burundi, Hutus and Tutsis victimized each other in genocidal violence.

These cases were chosen to illustrate the theoretical argument developed above because they vary with regard to the factor of identity politics, with the Rwandan government imposing a superordinate national identity and a comprehensive reconciliation agenda on its population, whereas Burundi adopted a *laissez-faire* approach and largely avoided issues of identity and reconciliation. While Rwanda and Burundi thus vary on the crucial factor identity politics, they are otherwise extremely similar with regard to their history of colonization, cycles of violence, size, population density, ethnic make-up, culture, and economic structure (Rieder 2015: 5ff), which facilitates cross-case comparison.

In neither Rwanda nor Burundi should social identities be conceived of as ahistorical, objective and unchangeable group distinctions. Instead of being objectively given, they were socially constructed and exploited for political purposes. Over time, these social identities then became reified, i.e. they assumed a taken for granted quality, which, as Rogers Brubaker points out, is ‘central to the practice of politicised ethnicity’ (Brubaker 2004: 10). To this

day, ethnic distinctions determine who gets what and why in both Rwanda and Burundi. While in Burundi the ‘ethnic factor’ has been institutionalized and thus officially recognized, in Rwanda ethnic distinctions – all the while having been legally banished – still play a role in determining who has access to the highest circles of power. This practice of ‘politicized ethnicity’ has a long history in both countries. Ethnic distinctions have long been skillfully abused by political elites to rally their constituencies around specific purposes. Such manipulation was used by both the colonial and post-colonial elites and was highly effective in mobilizing large masses of people for inter-ethnic violence (Lemarchand 2004; Ndikumana 1998; Uvin 1999).

The historical origins of the Hutu-Tutsi distinction in Rwanda and Burundi are somewhat disputed. Peter Uvin, for instance, asks: ‘Did colonization, first by Germany and then by Belgium, create ethnicity *ex nihilo*, turning socio-economic stratification into essentialised ethnicity? Or did it simply codify an already highly unequal and undifferentiated relationship between Tutsi and Hutu?’ (1999: 254). The primordialist perspective, which characterized academic discourse before the 1970s, nowadays still enjoys some measure of support – especially in media circles, which tend to be drawn to the essentialist view of the conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda as being about ancient ethnic hatreds. In scholarly discourse, by contrast, the social constructivist perspective, which also underlies this paper, became dominant in the academic debate in the 1970s (Schraml 2012: 29f). Interestingly, however, some of those experts who nowadays belong to the constructivist camp, such as renowned Great Lakes scholar René Lemarchand, began their career as primordialists: in 1966, Lemarchand observed that what set Tutsis and Hutus apart were clearly discernible physical traits, with Tutsis possessing a tall and slender frame and Hutus being ‘short and stocky’ (1966: 404f). The essentialist view was inspired by the so-called ‘Hamitic myth’, according to which the Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa represent three distinct population groups, the Ethiopid, the Bantu, and the Pygmoid. According to this myth, the Twa were the group that had originally inhabited the region before the arrival of the Hutus, who in turn were conquered by the Tutsi invaders, whose allegedly ‘superior political and military abilities’ enabled them to outsmart the ‘far more numerous but less intelligent Hutu’ (Des Forges 1999: 36). Thus, according to the primordialist view, ancient hatreds between the Hutus and the Tutsis, who could be distinguished based on their physical appearance and intellectual capacities, fueled repeated cycles of violence.

Proponents of the social constructivist perspective, by contrast, object that there are ‘few linguistic, phenotypical, or social differences between Hutu and Tutsi’ (Waters 1995: 343), and maintain that it was the German and Belgian colonizers who institutionalized and thus cemented ethnic distinctions as the basis for their exclusionist practices (Scherrer 2002: 21). In fact, exclusion via ethnic differentiation has been a dominant theme in the history of both Rwanda and Burundi. Prior to their independence in 1962, both countries

were ruled as one territory (Rwanda-Urundi). The German and later Belgian colonizers used a divide-and-rule tactic, promoting Tutsi supremacy by granting important administrative posts and access to education to the Tutsi minority, all the while denying such privileges to the Hutu majority. In post-colonial Rwanda and Burundi, the ruling elites perpetuated this policy of division, resulting in various cycles of (genocidal) violence in both countries. Where Rwanda and Burundi part ways, however, is in the approaches taken by the current ruling elites to dealing with the legacies of mass violence, especially with regard to reconstructing the group identities that were used to mobilize for violence in the first place. Their diverging approaches will be explored in more detail in the following section.

### *Rwanda's comprehensive reconciliation agenda*

Very recently Rwanda commemorated the 25th anniversary of the 1994 genocide, which was unleashed when a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down in early April, killing both heads of state and providing the Hutu extremists with a pretext for launching their campaign of extermination against their fellow Tutsi citizens as well as moderate Hutus. Not even one year before had the Arusha Accords been concluded, which were supposed to end the civil war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the Tutsi rebel army, and the Hutu government, and which provided for a system of power-sharing between both groups. In practice this meant that the then-dominant Hutu majority had to cede significant political power to the Tutsi minority. This created a certain security dilemma, which was further exacerbated when in October 1993 Burundi's leader Melchior Ndadaye, the country's first-ever elected Hutu President, was killed by Tutsi army officers. The assassination of Ndadaye only served to confirm the notion prevalent among Hutus that Tutsis were not to be trusted (Prunier 1999: 200), a fear which was then exploited by radical elements of the Rwandan Hutu elite to rally the population around the mass killings of Rwandan Tutsis after President Habyarimana's plane was shot down in early April 1994.

While the international community stood by, unable to muster the empathy and the political will to rescue the tiny African nation from the worst carnage in its young history, hundreds of thousands of Tutsis as well as many moderate Hutus were slaughtered in a matter of only a few months. The genocide ended in July 1994, when the advancing RPF managed to take control of the entire country. After the genocide ended, the RPF engaged in reprisal killings of Hutus, for instance in 1995, when RPF soldiers attacked internally displaced persons in the Kibeho Refugee Camp, allegedly killing several thousand Hutus (Rever 2015). Even though in present-day Rwanda the security situation is relatively stable, subjective perceptions of security indicate that many Tutsi victims of the genocide still feel threatened by their fellow Hutu

citizens (Brounéus 2008: 55; National Unity and Reconciliation Commission 2010: 59).

Quite a bit has already been written about reconciliation politics in post-genocide Rwanda, albeit with inconclusive results (e.g., Buckley-Zistel 2006; Buckley-Zistel 2009; Eltringham and van Hoyweghen 2000; Hintjens 2008; Kanazayire et al. 2014; Longman and Rutagengwa 2004; Thomson 2011; Vandeginste 2014; Zorbas 2009). There are few known cases in history where a government engaged in a comprehensive attempt at re-engineering those ethnic identities that had given rise to the genocide in the first place. The government's suppression of pre-genocide group identities went hand in hand with the attempt to construct a new superordinate identity (Rwandité). Yet President Paul Kagame's reconciliation agenda included not only the outlawing of the Hutu-Tutsi distinction, but also the prosecution of génocidaires through the Gacaca courts (a traditional justice system that was used in addition to prosecution by the ICTR in order to cope with the vast amount of genocide suspects), and re-education camps for former perpetrators (see, e.g. Staub 2006; Zorbas 2009). Apart from the government's top-down campaign of reconciliation and identity engineering, grassroots cooperation has been promoted at the micro-level in so-called reconciliation villages, which have received hardly any scholarly attention, however (but see Mafeza 2013). In these villages, perpetrators and victims cooperate on a daily basis in the pursuit of superordinate goals such as farm work, the construction of houses, etc. Before discussing these bottom-up initiatives, however, I will take a closer look at the macro-level components of Rwanda's reconciliation agenda and discuss how it has affected social categorization and the relationship between the former antagonists.

Scholars researching identity-politics in post-genocide Rwanda observe that as a consequence of abolishing the Hutu-Tutsi distinction, these group identities have not disappeared but merely moved underground (Zorbas 2009: 130). Regarding the degree of reconciliation achieved through the government's policies, opinions diverge widely: one field study, for instance, quotes respondents as saying that 'if there were no laws against violence, the genocide would start again tomorrow' (Brounéus 2008: 66). In a similar vein, a 2010 survey found that almost 40 percent of Rwandans believed that certain segments of society would perpetrate genocide again, if given opportunity (National Unity and Reconciliation Commission 2010: 59). Scholars doing fieldwork in post-genocide Rwanda also detected resistance among their respondents to the imposition of the new superordinate identity, as Eugenia Zorbas points out in her study on 'hidden transcripts': even though some of her respondents greeted the government's promotion of Rwandité as a 'commendable aspiration' (2009: 142), others failed to respect the government's proscription of pre-genocide identities and were skeptical of the attempt at coercing Rwandans to feel differently about their ethnic belonging (Ibid.: 141f). Another study, by contrast, sees more grounds for optimism, maintain-

ing that ‘the policies of strengthening national identification while suppressing ethnic identities might have been efficient in promoting intergroup reconciliation’ (Kanazayire et al. 2014: 501). The authors acknowledge, however, that their study was not representative and moreover faced certain methodological difficulties (Ibid.: 500f). Sigrun Moss and Johanna Vollhardt – who equally recruited a non-representative convenience sample – in turn find that there is a lot of ambivalence in the ways Rwandans respond to the government’s engineering of ethnic identities; they discovered that among respondents there was ‘rarely pure support for or outright rejection of the single recategorization approach. Instead, participants provide a range of nuanced arguments discussing pros and cons of the policy’ (2016: 349). The authors consider the nuanced and varied nature of respondents’ views to be ‘surprising, given the strict norms and laws that proscribe a superordinate Rwandan identity and make it difficult to talk about group differences’ (Ibid.: 350). Philippe Rieder, however, is more skeptical. He acknowledges that even after months of in-depth field research, the salience of pre-genocide group identities in present-day Rwanda was very difficult for him to gauge. Rieder is rather critical of the government’s reconciliation agenda, identifying ‘the strong governmental focus on controlling the reconciliation discourse in Rwanda’ as the biggest hindrance to reconciliation (2015: v).

The impact of the macro-level politics of identity and reconciliation in Rwanda are thus strongly contested among scholars, even among those with intimate knowledge of the situation in Rwanda. It seems that superordinate identities cannot simply be dictated from above. There is, however, greater agreement in the literature when it comes to assessing the effects of micro-level cooperation initiatives on reconciliation, which seem to be almost unequivocally positive – at least this is what the limited number of studies on this issue suggests. Analyses of cooperation at the micro-level have shown that over time, through sustained collaboration towards a common economic goal, negative and dehumanizing attitudes towards members of the other social group were transformed into positive and trustful relationships, as Ezekiel Sentama finds in his study of coffee and basket weaving cooperatives in Rwanda (2009: 184). This happened not because those Tutsis and Hutus participating in the cooperatives deliberately set them up as a reconciliation measure; instead, they merely wanted to escape economic hardship and overcome isolation after the genocide.

In a similar vein, Jutta Tobias and Karol Boudreaux’s research on Rwanda’s specialty coffee workers (2011) discovers a correlation between repeated and meaningful work contact between Hutu and Tutsi respondents on the one hand, and an attitude of reconciliation on the other. The authors interviewed more than two hundred workers and the interview data yielded a significant correlation not only between economic satisfaction and life satisfaction, but also between repeated and deep work contact with members from the other ethnic group and an attitude of reconciliation (Ibid.: 1). Respondents report-

ed ‘high degrees of ethnic distance reduction and highly frequent social and work-related contact’ (Ibid.: 15). Moreover, longer-term cooperation seems to have contributed to perceived out-group variability in that interviewees from coffee washing stations that had been in operation for a comparatively longer period of time frequently expressed the conviction that the former outgroup was heterogeneous, that ‘they’re not all the same’ (Ibid.: 19). The authors found this to be an important predictor for reconciliation (Ibid.).

These findings are echoed by the – albeit extremely limited – research on reconciliation villages. In 2003, a large group of genocide perpetrators was released from prison, presenting Rwandan society with the daunting challenge of reintegration and co-existence. In this context, Prison Fellowship Rwanda launched the ‘Umuvumu Tree project’, bringing together genocide perpetrators and survivors ‘in order to find an innovative way of restoring their relationship’ (Mafeza 2013: 790). This involved not merely truth-telling and apologies, but also the joint building of houses as both survivors and perpetrators were faced with problems of poverty and homelessness. Faustin Mafeza interviewed 50 inhabitants of these reconciliation villages, who reported that prior to joining the villages, they feared, mistrusted, and hated members of the other ethnic group, with whom they rarely communicated (Ibid.: 792). Just as in the case of the cooperatives mentioned above, those who joined the reconciliation villages did not do so because their priority was reconciliation – they merely participated because they wanted to escape poverty and homelessness. ‘Solving these material problems greatly contributed to the restoration of party members’ relationships’ (Ibid.: 793). Yet cooperation not only re-established trust and helped forgiveness, it also affected the ways in which participants engaged in social categorization, helping them to ‘transcend the stereotypes formerly attached to conflicting parties and their respective family members’ (Ibid.: 795). Because of the intimacy of contact that comes with living in a reconciliation village, such a significant effect on reconciliation could be achieved. This squares with findings from the social psychological literature according to which ‘casual contact, even if frequent, is less likely to change attitudes than intimate contact’ (Yehuda 1998:174).

### *Burundi’s laissez-faire approach*

Just as its neighbour Rwanda, which has seen several episodes of mass atrocities between Hutus and Tutsis in its post-colonial history, Burundi also experienced various cycles of (genocidal) violence inflicted by Hutus on Tutsis and vice versa. Ever since becoming independent from Belgium, Burundi endured six episodes of civil war and seven coups or coup attempts (Nkurunziza 2018: 2). Interethnic violence between Tutsis and Hutus culminated in two genocidal episodes, one in 1972 and the most recent one in 1993, followed by a civil war that lasted until 2003. It was ended through the adoption of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi (Arusha Agreement) which

brought together Hutu and Tutsi representatives from political parties, civil society, the army, and the government, as well as the international community. Signed in August 2000, the Arusha Agreement entered into force roughly one year later, and succeeded in ending the longest episode of civil war. It also brought the Hutus into positions of power, thus ending Tutsi domination of Hutus in Burundi since the 1930s (Ibid.: 10). The Arusha Agreement established an elaborate system of power-sharing between Hutus and Tutsis, thereby explicitly recognizing and legitimizing ethnic distinctions. Burundi has been viewed as a model of inter-ethnic power-sharing, prompting one observer to note that the country comes ‘as close as any African state has come to implementing Lijphart’s consociational formula’ (Lemarchand 2006: 7).

Observers initially greeted the Arusha Agreement’s consociational approach as the solution to ethnic conflict that had plagued Burundi for so long. Filip Reyntjens, for instance, observed that rather than cementing ethnic cleavages, the institutionalization of the ‘ethnic factor’ had softened inter-group divisions (2016: 65). Peter Uvin also wrote that after Arusha, ethnic cleavages seemed to have lost their relevance, and instead, a ‘compromise-based and ethnically inclusive system of political governance’ had taken hold (2009: 172). With the establishment of the ethnic quota system in the Arusha process the dominant fault-line in Burundi thus seemed to have shifted from an ethnic to a political one (Ibid.).

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Others, however, notably Philippe Ntahombaye and Gaspard Nduwayo, lecturers at the University of Burundi, were considerably more skeptical, writing that ‘the last few years have been characterised by a major meltdown of the social fabric. The social and political problems are now manifested in the identity issue’ (2007: 247). Ethnic identity in present-day Burundi, the authors continue, has become a tool ‘that can easily be manipulated for all sorts of objectives: conquering power, expropriating neighbours goods, killing etc. ... A reciprocal, nurtured fear has become a permanent feature by creating a big psychological distance and an ethnic hatred that social contact should have eliminated’ (Ibid.: 248). Given this diagnosis, it is not entirely unsurprising that the Arusha Agreement unraveled more than a decade after its inception, as the new Hutu elite could not ‘resist the temptation of absolute power and, in some cases, the urge to avenge past humiliations’ (Nkurunziza 2018: 10). When in 2015 Burundi’s current Hutu president Pierre Nkurunziza sought a third term in office, violence erupted anew and the Arusha Agreement collapsed, plunging Burundi into another cycle of violence which has left more than 1000 dead and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Whereas Rwanda has instituted a comprehensive post-genocide reconciliation agenda, which includes the – albeit one-sided prosecution – of genocide-related crimes, Burundi’s ruling elite has shown little appetite for institutionalizing a transitional justice mechanism, probably fearing that its own crimes might be exposed in the process: ‘[N]one of the former opponents had an

interest in transitional justice. As many of them have blood-stained hands, their interests converge in having as little truth and accountability as possible' (Vandeginste 2012: 359). While the Arusha Agreement did provide for the establishment of a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission – a provision which one observer considered to be 'one of the most important for peacebuilding' (Nkurunziza 2018: 32) – the current government never sincerely intended seeking accountability for mass atrocities (Ibid.: 16). However, even though the Burundian government is in a position to control the extent to which past crimes will be dealt with domestically, it cannot control the international investigation launched by the International Criminal Court's (ICC) prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, who made use of her *proprio motu* powers to investigate crimes against humanity committed in Burundi after 2015 (International Criminal Court 2017). This prompted Burundi to withdraw from the Rome Statute establishing the ICC in 2017 – a move that will not, however, affect the investigation into the situation in Burundi that is already underway.

A prominent objection to transitional justice mechanisms – be they domestic, hybrid, or international ones – is that digging up the past would re-open wounds and inhibit reconciliation and peacebuilding. However, some experts on Burundi believe that the opposite is true, that it is precisely this lack of accountability for mass crimes that has emboldened would-be perpetrators and made repeated cycles of violence possible; and that, if left unaddressed, it will lead to further violence in the future: '(t)he argument that re-opening past wounds would not be appropriate misses the point that such wounds have never healed and will not heal unless 'historical silences' are broken as they do not serve the victims' (Nkurunziza 2018: 32). Yet this expert position is not necessarily shared by ordinary Burundian citizens, as Bert Ingelaere and Dominik Kohlhagen discovered after months of fieldwork in rural Burundi. According to the authors, many respondents were not interested in holding perpetrators to account and believed that it would be better for reconciliation to lay the past to rest (2012: 52). Even though this attitude was not universally shared among respondents, and even though the sample was not representative, the study does call into question the assumption that holding perpetrators to account and uncovering the truth about past crimes will necessarily be conducive to reconciliation.

Nonetheless, in 2014 the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) envisaged in the Arusha Agreement was finally established (Impunity Watch 2016: 2). The TRC's future had been in limbo for more than a decade, and only when the Burundian government – having consolidated its power after the 2005 elections and having gradually regained its sovereignty after extensive international intervention in the Arusha process – finally felt comfortable enough to launch a national truth-telling process (Vandeginste 2012: 361), was the TRC finally instituted. In 2016 it began to collect testimonies, yet given the large numbers of Burundians who left the country during the



most recent surge in violence since 2015, it is highly doubtful that the transitional justice process will be neutral and not skewed in favor of one party, that witnesses will be able to testify freely and not be harassed, and that the TRC will actually have a positive impact on reconciliation.

## 6 What Can We Learn From the Countries Under Scrutiny?

Even though Burundi and Rwanda share a history of genocidal violence between Hutus and Tutsis, they could not differ more in their respective approaches to post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation: whereas the Rwandan government has imposed a new superordinate identity, outlawing references to pre-genocide ethnic identities, and launched a comprehensive reconciliation program, in Burundi there is no official reconciliation agenda, and, rather than proscribing reference to ethnic identities, the Burundian constitution provides for a system of consociationalism and thus explicitly recognizes the Hutu-Tutsi distinction. Moreover, compared to the comprehensive approach to TJ adopted by Rwanda, in Burundi there has been no effective system of TJ so far, as the government continues to undermine the work of the TRC and obstruct the investigation by the ICC into crimes against humanity committed after 2015. The following table depicts these differing approaches:

*Table 1*

	Original identity conflict	Post-conflict identity politics	Governmental reconciliation agenda	Type of TJ, if any
<b>Rwanda</b>	Hutus v Tutsis	Abolition of pre-genocide identities, government-created superordinate identity. Ethnic identities continue to be salient below the surface, however	Maximalist	ICTR, Gacaca
<b>Burundi</b>	Hutus v Tutsis	Ethnic identities legally recognized (consociationalism), seem to have lost some of their salience in every-day-life, however	Non-existent	TRC, potential ICC indictments

Yet whereas in present-day Burundi, ethnic identities are out in the open, this was not always the case: President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, who ruled Burundi

between 1976 and 1987, attempted to do what Paul Kagame is currently undertaking in Rwanda, namely imposing a policy of national unity and thereby erasing the distinction between Hutus and Tutsis (Ingelaere 2009: 25). The fact that Burundi has experienced decades of violence after Bagaza's imposition of a policy of national unity indicates that simply imposing a superordinate identity on conflict parties may not be very conducive to reconciliation after all. Neither present-day Burundi, nor present-day Rwanda can be said to have achieved a significant degree of reconciliation. Considering the large numbers of Tutsi genocide survivors that nowadays still feel threatened by their fellow Hutu citizens, Rwandan society seems far from reconciled. Even though a handful of studies find ambivalent to positive effects of the Kagame government's reconciliation agenda, these findings must be interpreted with caution, as they were not based on representative samples. Neither can Burundi be considered a reconciled society. Interestingly, before the 2015 re-eruption of violence, many observers believed that Burundians were relatively reconciled in that ethnic cleavages seemed to have lost their saliences in every-day life as a result of the consociational approach adopted by the drafters of the Arusha Agreement. However, the relapse into conflict after President Nkurunziza controversially extended his tenure in 2015 casts doubt on this assumption, strengthening the position articulated by Burundian insiders such as Philippe Ntahombaye and Gaspard Nduwayo who did not trust the period of relative political stability following the Arusha Agreement in the first place.

Considering that the two countries have adopted such different approaches post-conflict, how can the similar outcome, namely the (relative) absence of reconciliation in both cases, be explained? Does it mean that the comprehensive efforts undertaken by the Rwandan government were entirely in vain? Certainly not; it merely means that these factors interact with other (unknown?) variables, and that future research needs to identify how these different factors interact with one another in promoting or inhibiting reconciliation. I will elaborate on this point below. Also, even though reconciliation in Rwanda has not been realized to a significant extent, the country is at peace, as compared to Burundi, which descended into violence after 2015. While negative peace is not the same as reconciliation, it is a precondition without which positive peace cannot be achieved.

It has been argued that reconciliation in Burundi requires that the perpetrators of past violence be held accountable. Again, the preceding analysis does not warrant the conclusion that TJ would necessarily contribute to reconciliation in Burundi: for one, even though it seems intuitively plausible that the culture of impunity emboldens perpetrators and breeds more violence, studies show that ordinary Burundians are not necessarily interested in holding perpetrators to account and prefer to bury the past. Secondly, the example of Rwanda demonstrates that even in a country with a comprehensive approach to TJ, involving both local and international elements, both restorative and retributive justice, nonetheless fear, suspicion, and anger continue to perme-

ate society. Thus, a comprehensive approach to TJ that is sensitive of the local context is not enough to reconcile the former antagonists.

This does not mean that TJ has no role to play in reconciling post-genocide societies – it merely means that if a country opts to seek accountability for past crimes, this measure *alone* will most likely not be sufficient to achieve reconciliation. What is of special importance here is not only that any type of transitional justice must be perceived as relatively even-handed, not prosecuting members of one party to the conflict only, as it happened in Rwanda; and secondly, that TJ measures must take place in a supportive political environment. Research on transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia, for instance, demonstrates that where there is no or little support from the highest political levels for TJ, and where the political climate continues to be one of genocide denial and the cultivation of pre-conflict ethnic cleavages, TJ is very unlikely to have a positive impact on reconciliation (Ford 2012; Milanovic 2016b). As Stuart Ford explained, while it is possible for courts to help break down conflict-supporting narratives cultivated by the different social groups, this will only work if courts receive support from a broad range of institutions representing the different segments of society, rather than having to work against the divisive messages sent by these institutions (2012: 466f). Regarding Burundi, it is thus rather unlikely that the TRC or the ICC investigation will have a significant impact on reconciliation, considering that there is no support for these mechanisms at the highest political level.

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The preceding analysis thus suggests that macro-level interventions aimed at reconstructing pre-genocide identities and achieving reconciliation require certain pre-conditions in order to have positive effects, and that these scope conditions are relatively rare in real-world settings. Now, while this sobering conclusion is bound to disappoint many, the analysis also suggests grounds for optimism regarding the effects of micro-level interventions on the reconstruction of antagonistic group identities. Intimate contact and regular cooperation towards superordinate goals experienced by the inhabitants of reconciliation villages had a significant impact on how they perceived members of the former out-group. Cooperation fostered both the emergence of a strong we-feeling across the ethnic divide, thus changing the ways participants engaged in social categorization, and re-humanizing attitudes among participants. This indicates that reconstructing ethnic identification through voluntary, regular, and intense cooperation at the micro-level may be more conducive to reconciliation than imposing a superordinate identity in a top-down, coercive process. While the studies on micro-level cooperation discussed in this paper were non-representative and thus their findings should be interpreted with caution, they do lend further support to the notion well established in the social psychological literature that cooperation toward superordinate goals may transform inter-group relations – even in the most difficult of all post-conflict settings. Yet one must keep in mind that even the best-designed and most

well-intentioned cooperation initiatives at the micro-level will not translate into broader societal reconciliation if at the macro-level, deep-seated social, political, and economic inequalities are being perpetuated and the different social groups thus continue to harbor grievances against one another. In neither Burundi nor Rwanda have these inequalities been sufficiently addressed, which does not bode well for these countries' future.

Overall, no sweeping conclusions should be drawn from this brief empirical sketch; rather, more systematic, rigorous, and comparative studies will be necessary before broader inferences about the identity-reconciliation nexus in post-genocide societies may be made.

## 7 Conclusion

This research paper hypothesized that identity politics are a key factor for explaining the successes and failures of reconciliation processes. Rwanda and Burundi were adduced as examples illustrating how the widely different approaches chosen by the respective governments have affected the reconciliation process. In neither case have antagonistic social identities been successfully transformed after genocide, even though a distinction must be made between the effects of macro-level interventions on the one hand, and micro-level initiatives on the other. Coercively creating a superordinate national identity, as attempted by Kagame in Rwanda and Bagaza in Burundi, was apparently not very successful. Cooperation at the micro-level, by contrast, which lacked this coercive character and which enabled intimate social contact between the former antagonists, seems to have been rather effective in reconstructing social identities and promoting reconciliation. The preceding analysis also indicates an ambivalent role for transitional justice in post-genocide societies. It seems that TJ can only be effective if perceived as being applied in an even-handed fashion, and if the political environment is supportive of accountability-seeking. Both conditions are rarely found in post-genocide societies.

However, as emphasized earlier, the empirical analysis carried out in this paper was merely intended as a first plausibility probe into the identity-reconciliation nexus in post-conflict societies. A full exploration of this nexus will require much more systematic, rigorous, and comparative analysis. One of the issues requiring further study is the question of material factors in the reconciliation equation. Preliminary evidence indicates that addressing people's material needs such as poverty and homelessness significantly contributed to restoring positive relationships with members of the other social group. Yet the question of the extent to which such economic variables are a necessary condition for reconciliation could not be answered conclusively and thus merits further scrutiny. Another unresolved issue regards the 'time factor', i.e.

the question to what extent younger people who have not been affected by conflict to the same extent as older generations are more inclined to abandon conflict-supporting narratives and enemy images, and are thus more amenable to reconciliation. A recent study on reconciliation in Rwanda suggests that age may indeed be a relevant variable (Moss and Vollhardt 2016: 252). In sum then, there are many pieces of the reconciliation puzzle that are still missing. This research paper has merely indicated where to look for those pieces.

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## Abstract

The question of how societies emerging from genocide manage to return to normalcy, restore social relationships and lay the foundation for sustainable peace, is a puzzling one. The guiding hypothesis underlying this research paper is that identity politics are a key factor for explaining the successes and failures of reconciliation processes. We still know very little about the causal mechanisms underlying reconciliation, one of the reasons for this being the near-total absence of interdisciplinary work on this issue. However, one cannot fully grasp reconciliation dynamics – which play out at the micro- and macro-levels – without synthesizing insights from different disciplines. The paper compares two post-genocide societies – Burundi and Rwanda – which have adopted extremely different approaches to identity politics and reconciliation. Whereas imposing a superordinate identity in a top-down process has not been very effective in either case, there is some evidence suggesting that bottom-up cooperation has been rather successful in promoting reconciliation in Rwanda. Transitional justice in turn plays an ambivalent role. It seems that TJ can only be effective if it is perceived as being applied in an even-handed fashion, and if the political environment is supportive of accountability-seeking. Neither condition is entirely fulfilled in Rwanda or Burundi.

**Keywords** reconciliation, conflict resolution, genocide, transitional justice, social identity theory, self-categorization theory, post-conflict, Ruanda, Burundi, micro-macro level

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