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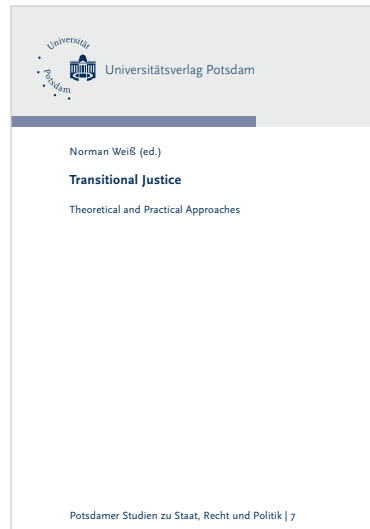
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The Misapplication of Western Conflict and Reconciliation Theories on New World Wars

Stephanie Verlaan

Abstract This chapter deals with the problem that theories of peace building, conflict resolution and reconciliation were predominately created in the West and, therefore, do not necessarily fit the understanding of peace, conflict, and resolution in non-Western societies and cultures. Within these societies, the acceptance of suffering may also be higher, which leads to different priorities of conflict resolution approaches. Furthermore, this chapter deals with the question of whether the current understanding of wars and the nature of conflict change the basis of established conflict theories. These theoretical approaches are then applied in Sierra Leone as a non-Western negotiation scenario.

1. Introduction

Theories of peace building, conflict resolution and reconciliation were predominately created by Western* theorists and therefore strive to create or restore societies to a state that embodies Western values. The reasons why theories characterising the conflict discourse are prevailing and the associated implications of this will be addressed throughout this paper. It will draw links between founding theories of reason and religion with examples of contemporary conflicts to tangibly demonstrate its impacts. Beginning with Christianity (in its broad sense), being the predominant religion of the West has therefore been a primary (albeit subconscious at times) influencing factor in the construction of these theories. Despite the West becoming increasingly secularized, the values derived from Christianity continue to endure within the folds of its societies¹. The value on

* The term 'Western', in the context of this paper refers to the cultures of the United States and Western Europe.

¹ Fukuyama, 'By way of an Introduction', in *The end of history and the last man* (2006), xi–xxiii.

which Christianity places the greatest worth above all others is that of peace and this weighting appears to be exclusive to Christianity². Salem argues that because of this other values such as justice or equality are not given the space they warrant by theorists with peace being somewhat overvalued. Despite democratic institutions denouncing allegiance to all religions, thereby proclaiming themselves representative of all its constituents regardless of faith, the values underpinning liberal democracy continue to be strongly emphasized even in societies in which Christianity is not and never has been dominant (e.g. Islamic states)³. This overvaluation has led to a rather black and white approach to conflict of: peace = good and war = bad. Such an approach leaves little flexibility to consider other possibilities, for example that communities co-existing peacefully may not necessarily be just, and who is to say that a peaceful society is better than a just society? Fukuyama's 'The End of History and the Last Man' postulates the notion that the West's societal model of liberal democracy has reached "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and that this is "the final form of human government"⁴. It is here that Fukuyama suggests the demise of earlier forms of government to be due to defects vital to its long-term endurance, but which modern democratic systems have learnt from and thus been able to eradicate. It seems to be a prevailing perception that if communities are able to co-exist peacefully under a democratic system, regardless of the presence of other negative factors (i.e. poor quality of life, high inequality), then the most important criteria has been fulfilled and there remains little argument for a system restructure. It is from this perception (i.e. that all governments should and do aspire to operate under the apparently superior democratic system) that peace and conflict theories were devised and are applied.

Also inherent within Western conflict theories, and conceptualized with a rather black and white lens, is the assumption that pain or discomfort is bad and pleasure or comfort is good⁵. From a Marxist approach, the industrial revolution significantly reducing occupations and tasks requiring hard or manual labor and the consequential minimization of physical demands on the human body supports the impression that Western societal models are the epitome. The extension of the average lifespan and reduction in situations of discomfort as measures of the West's evolutionary

² Salem, 'A critique of Western Conflict Resolution from a Non-Western Perspective', 9(4) *Negotiation Journal* 1993, 361-369.

³ Fukuyama (note 1).

⁴ Fukuyama, (note1).

⁵ Salem (note 2).

success, it is no wonder why the people were so willing to lay themselves at the mercy of the capitalist to continue this evolutionary process⁶. The resulting changes in expectations around minimal standards of living and what is considered acceptable levels of discomfort were dramatic, distorted even. The minimalization of discomfort and situations where one may experience pain or suffering became one of the primary drivers of the West's evolution. In a similar vein to peace and war, pain and pleasure have come to be viewed under the simplistic bilateral division of being all good or all bad. However, a mistake inherent to this notion is the tendency to overlook the prospect that experiencing pain could serve a constructive purpose. In taking the reductionist view, suffering caused by conflict, particularly that involving violence, is immediately pigeonholed as bad with no flexibility to consider that there may be justifications. That enduring suffering caused by conflict could be justified by the outcome, victorious or not, is not a concept conflict theories based on Western ideals are able to compute. In societies whose socioeconomic infrastructures lag behind the West, suffering is likely a more familiar and accepted component of life, therefore the need to resolve conflict-causing suffering does not carry the same sense of urgency. Within these cultural contexts, a just outcome is more likely to justify collateral suffering and is considered more important than simply ending conflict for the sake of stopping suffering⁷.

In addition to differences in cultural perceptions on what is and is not justified by conflict, theorists need to consider the changing landscape of the nature of conflicts as we transition into a new global era. Millar put forward the term, 'new world wars', referring to conflicts able to be conceptualised as *post-identity*⁸. According to Millar, the historical success of prevailing conflict theories was attributable to their disposition as being identity-based (i.e. Ireland, Israel/Palestine, Rwanda), meaning the end goals were to preserve sovereignty, reinforce a collective identity and assumed the desire for power and control to be the drivers⁹. In the traditional Westphalian state context, power refers to the ability to manipulate official government bodies and decision-makers (e.g. politicians, parliament, policy) and control refers primarily to the capacity to

⁶ Fukuyama (note 1).

⁷ Schmidt, "Peace, peace, they say, when there is no peace' (Jer. 6: 14) Revisiting Salem's Critique of a Western Ideology of Peace", JSPC 2014, 59–68.

⁸ Millar, "Our brothers who went to the bush": Post-identity conflict and the experience of reconciliation in Sierra Leone', 49(5) Journal of Peace Research 2012, 717–729.

⁹ Ibid.

influence mechanisms controlling and driving a state's economy. However, the reduction of state power as a result of globalization and migration (and consequently the allegiance of individuals to a State identity) has seen states' circumstances shift out of alignment with realism and control being placed into the hands of entrepreneurs, multinational corporations and cartels. This power shift has also resulted in the concurrent rise of intra- and interstate inequality, which Millar argues, has replaced the struggle for identity as the new primary driver of conflict.

By this token, many of the assumptions by which conflict theories attempt to guide negotiations are at of risk becoming obsolete. Hobbes's theory of social contracts serves as the foundation of logic on which these assumptions were previously able to be safely made. According to Hobbes, what prevents the outbreak of anarchy at any point as individuals strive to obtain what is necessary to survive is the existence of a social contract between parties, a "common master"¹⁰ or in modern terms, a government. The entire basis of society and the laws by which governments operate and enforce order is that of the social contract. The theory posits that members of a society surrender certain rights to the government in exchange for the protection of their remaining rights. All individuals and parties willingly enter, understand and agree to adhere to this contract for the sake of the common good. The key element, which must be present for social contracts to be effective, is trust. Each party to the contract must at some point trust in the good faith of the other to uphold the agreement. Further, before there can be trust in the other there must be trust in the efficacy of the process and, by extension, trust in the enforcer once the contract has begun¹¹. The problem with applying these principles to new world conflicts, particularly those involving non-state actors in power positions and which are often able to circumvent international and national laws, is that trust cannot be an assumed present element.

The application of such theories to state contexts that do not reciprocate the same values on which they are derived and attempting to establish makes very little sense and contributes little to the discourse. The evidence of this misapplication is clear in the likes of Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Haiti¹². These states' experiences of transitional justice did not adhere to the preferred recipe for democratization and had to advocate

¹⁰ Fukuyama, 'The Worldwide Liberal Revolution' in *The end of history and the last man* (2006), 39–51.

¹¹ Schmidt (note 7).

¹² Shaw, 'Rethinking truth and reconciliation commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone', USIP 2005, 1–12.

against certain mechanisms the international community believed to be essential to the process and attempted to impose. In Mozambique, for example, the people had to advocate to not have a mechanism for truth seeking. Due to the widespread practice by forces on each side of recruitment by kidnapping, victims were manipulated via psychological and psychotropic means into committing atrocities against their own family members. This led to the conception that reconciliation processes should occur privately within families rather than publicly and through formal mechanisms¹³. The conflict resolution community now understands that the blanket application of prevailing conflict theories is not realistic, however, there remains a great deal of confusion around why this is the case and uncertainty as to what the alternatives are.

The current paper aims to discuss the efficacy of peace, conflict and reconciliation theories which are predominately modelled on Western ideals when applied to societies that do not share these views. Examples of popular conventional conflict and reconciliation theories and why they are largely incompatible with 'new world' conflicts are used. The first chapter discusses negotiation tactics, which allow assumptions derived from Western influenced logical thought to be the primal points of reference. It consists of three subsections: 1.) discusses negotiation scenarios in which the primary assumptions of the social contract have not been met; 1.1) discusses the tendency for negotiation tactics to assume opposing parties cannot be simultaneously right in their claims; and 1.1.1) discusses how the rapidly evolving political landscapes and shifts in power systems from the State to private corporations are upturning the conflict discourse. The second chapter focuses on reconciliation theory and its primary components and assumptions, consisting of three subsections: 2) discusses the mistaken attempts to directly transpose components of successful reconciliation models across contexts; 2.1) discusses the increasing emphasis of performative truth telling within truth commissions and the tendency to assume its cultural appropriateness; and 2.1.1) elaborates on the assumed need to break down identity solidifying barriers preventing reconciliation. The third chapter discusses the misapplication of reconciliation theory and consequent repercussions in post-conflict Sierra Leone, also consisting of three subsections: 3) provides a brief summary of the war and explains its conceptualization as a post-identity conflict; 3.1) discusses the presence of the client-patron relationship and how the international communities

¹³ Mani, 'Rebuilding an inclusive political community after war', *36(4) Security Dialogue* 2005, 511–526.

failure to understand this dynamic resulted in the truth commission being largely ineffective; and 3.1.1) delves into the distinct missing presence of the ‘other’ concept within the Sierra Leone culture, also highlighting how the international community’s failure to understand this aspect of the culture rendered much of the reconciliation efforts ineffective, even counterproductive.

2. Negotiation scenarios

2.1 *Negotiating with “have-nots”*

Locke’s take on the social contract theory advocated for a liberal government as opposed to Hobbes’s authoritarian ideal. According to Locke, the rights needing protection under his ideal were “life, liberty and property”¹⁴ and it is on this assumption that modern negotiation theories operate. Negotiation theories assume that parties to the conflict are primarily concerned with preserving that which they already have. Complementing this, are the assumptions that parties also have something to lose and something to gain. By assuming that all three assumptions are true for both parties, it would appear the chips have been equally distributed, the playing field levelled and thereby the setting meets criteria for effective negotiation. The oversight of negotiation theories here is that there may be some parties that have nothing to lose, nothing to preserve but everything to gain¹⁵. What then, according to social contract theories, is preventing one party from abandoning protocol to seize by whatever means that which they need to leverage their standpoint? These are the situations in which many communities experiencing conflict are finding themselves and which negotiation theories are failing to resolve. The problem is that aside from pleading to the good will and conscience of the dominant party to allow the underdog the opportunity preserve at least some integrity; there is little space for real negotiation to occur¹⁶.

Communities residing under authoritarian government systems represent ‘have-not’ scenarios, of which there are many (Bahrain, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea as examples¹⁷). The conditions under

¹⁴ Fukuyama (note 10).

¹⁵ Salem (note 2).

¹⁶ Schmidt (note 7).

¹⁷ Salem (note 2).

which their governments have forced them to live leaves little worth in preserving their current situations. It is in these situations that collateral suffering and death are likely considered justified sacrifices; the fear of suffering being the last remaining tie of the social contract to be broken. These are circumstances where suffering is already prevalent and will inevitably continue, through physical and structural violence, regardless of the people's choice to allow conditions to prevail or to challenge the status quo: a 'catch 22'. If safety and well-being needs are not being met and are unlikely to ever be under one set of circumstances, there remains no reason to continue the way of existence and every reason to change it: nothing to lose, nothing to preserve and everything to gain. It is within these contexts that conflict theories do not fit and have been unable to successfully resolve conflicts.

2.2 *The zero-sum game*

The idea that the perspectives of two parties to a negotiation can be both right and contradicting simultaneously is not something modern conflict theories are currently able to decrypt. Aristotle's theory of logical deductive thought being the foundation on which Western thought processes have been predominately built informs current negotiation tactics¹⁸. The theory posits that something must either be "A or not A". In a post-modern context this would be more like 'it is A here, and not A there'¹⁹. This approach to critical thinking also attempts to reduce analytical processes to seek solutions on a "zero-sum" basis²⁰. Meaning that the extent to which one party is considered right, the other must be wrong. For every dollar that a car salesman relents to lose in a price negotiation, the purchaser is able to retain. Such black and white approaches to thought make it difficult to come to solutions that both parties feel to be fair and equitable, as it is inevitable one party will have been forced to forfeit some of its principles and therefore the integrity of its argument. A classic example is negotiating state borders, where for every meter one State relents, the other gains. Of course, it is more than simply just about the soil with historic and spiritual connections to an area fuelling the fight.

¹⁸ Ibid., 366.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

The Israel-Palestine conflict is possibly the epitome of this tug-of-war type conflict in the post-modern era. Kelman's [secondary citation] analysis supported a two-state solution proposal in which Jerusalem was shared, reasoning it to be the only solution that would meet the needs of both parties and preserve each peoples' identity²¹. The main determinant in formulating what each party would receive at the outcome was the United Nations recognition of each State's entitlements thus also deciding what the wider international community should formally acknowledge as sovereign. What Kelman's analysis appeared to overlook was that both party's claims to historical land rights could be legitimate and to compromise would be considered gravely detrimental to each State's collective identities. Moreover, had the representatives of each party accepted a solution compromising State identity on the behalf of its people it is likely conflict would have erupted internally, creating factions and further fracturing its identity. In this instance, a zero-sum approach completely disregards the possibility that both Israel and Palestine could be right, that both claims are legitimate, and that compromise would be as good as admitting claims to be false.

2.3 *Changing landscapes*

The conception of what is war requires constant re-evaluation within the quickly evolving landscape of State composition. Ruzza chose the following definition to describe the conventional idea of war:

“an armed struggle among states or coalitions aimed at resolving an international controversy, more or less motivated by true or false (but partial in any case) conflicts of interests or ideologies”²².

Noted by Ruzza was that all common definitions of war refer to the State, the intention here being to highlight the deep connection between the two. Mild deviations from a strict definition of the State are permitted such as insurgency groups or political party factions as they share State-like aspirations. These actors are termed 'para-states' and are accepted as

²¹ Al-Aberdine, 'Western Theories on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: A Critique', 3 (12) IJMAS 2017, 83–92.

²² Ruzza, 'Asymmetric war or post-Westphalian war? War beyond the state', Standing Group on International Relations Turin Conference 2007.

actors by common definitions of war. Under this conventional conceptualisation the State is able to legitimately wage war, monopolizing using the power of force within or across borders²³. Historical drivers of wars have centered on divides derived from religion, ethnicity and race, all serving to strengthen the divides between groups or States and solidify the collective identity. Carl Schmitt's 1932 work titled "The Concept of the Political" attempted to explain the friend versus enemy complex, positing enmity to be political and a publicly, not privately, occurring phenomenon. Schmitt ascribes this distinction to an "utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation"²⁴. The "utmost degree" of unity is one's readiness to fight with and die alongside one's group members whilst its polar of "utmost degree" of disassociation is one's readiness to kill others for no other reason than being a member of the opposing group²⁵. Schmitt's theory demonstrates how the creation of in-group and out-group dichotomies essentially encourages the "otherizing" of opposing sides²⁶. Within this frame, it becomes easier to dehumanize ones opponent and view them as unequal to the members of ones own group. It is from this angle that conflict and reconciliation theories operate, aiming to break down such divides by finding and reinforcing similarities between groups to promote empathy and tolerance of the 'other'.

There is a growing emergence of literature^{27,28} attempting to demonstrate that conflicts occurring in the modern world do not submit themselves to the definition of a war between States or para-states²⁹, such as a faction of a political party or insurgency group. For example, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group in Sierra Leone were considered insurgents due to their inception being due to dissatisfaction with the government at the time and its militant structure³⁰ (to be discussed further in the fourth section). That is, they are not characterized by the divides

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Schmitt, *The concept of the political: Expanded edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2008, 26.

²⁵ Vinx, 'Carl Schmitt: *The Concept of the Political* and the Critique of Liberalism', Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2010.

²⁶ Millar (note 8).

²⁷ Albert, 'On boundaries, territory and post-modernity: An international relations perspective', 3 *Geopolitics* 1998, 53–68.

²⁸ Benhabib, *Strange multiplicities: The politics of identity and difference in a global context*. 4(8) *MI* 1997, 27–56.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Millar (note 8).

within which war has historically been understood (i.e. religion). The rise of globalization has had the effect of eroding the relevance and power of statist systems with sovereignty carrying less and less weight as alternative systems of control gain power, such as corporations and cartels. Conflicts occurring within these new systems are rather characterized by inequality, poverty and stagnation. Take, for example the Sinaloa drug cartel in Mexico. Despite having no clear political ideology or genuine political interests, the cartel has colluded with the government numerous times in order to secure its trade position and protect against persecution³¹. This is indicative of the cartel's intentions to manipulate the political parties to pursue its own agenda, however the conventional approach to analyzing the cartel's movements remains a straight forward cost-benefit one³². Millar considers conflicts characterized by such drivers as 'post-identity' in that they are not about promoting, preserving or uniting a group under the traditional banners of identity. The effects of globalization has afforded opportunities for private businesses to expand into economic spaces that were not there before or were previously filled by the State. Relationships have developed between corporations and warlords resembling gangster-like operations, coming together under the shared goals of profit and power but creating a gray area for international law. Take, for example, the relationship between the US tire company, Firestone, and the Liberian rebel group of the National Patriotic Front (NPFL), known for its prolific use of child soldiers. Firestone, its largest rubber plantation being located in Liberia, entered into an agreement with the NPFL to allow its continued access to the plantation following its take-over by a large group of NPFL child soldiers in 1990³³. Desperate to regain control of the plantation (it provided 40% of Firestone's raw material) whilst the NPFL recognized it as an opportunity to finance its operations, the two parties entered an agreement despite repeated warnings by US diplomatic actors on the dangers (and immorality) of this. Firestone remains a significant foreign investor in Liberia even after the NPFL leader with whom Firestone struck the deal, was imprisoned for war crimes³⁴. Actors holding power equivalent to a State but without accountability to a people throws

³¹ Davila, 'Mexican Drug Cartels and the Art of Political Puppetry', The Huffington Post, 2017.

³² Duncan, 'Drug trafficking and political power: oligopolies of coercion in Colombia and Mexico'. *41(2) LAP* 2014, 18–42.

³³ Fry, 'When companies do business with warlords', *Fortune* 2014.

³⁴ Johnson, 'A critical examination of Firestone's operations in Liberia: A case study approach' (2010), 65–84.

out the balance created by and necessary for social contracts. Such actors are excluded from the jurisdiction of laws designed to maintain order between States (i.e. the Geneva Convention). Under these new structures of control, few safeguards exist able to manipulate these powerful actors into order. Consequently, as States have less and less regulatory power inequality has risen spurring this new genre of conflict³⁵.

Post-identity conflicts as described above, do not serve to create or reinforce in-group and out-group dichotomies because this is not what they are about. As such, conflict, peace and reconciliation theories designed to combat identity-based conflicts have suddenly become near obsolete. This much is clear however locating the next best approach is something the conflict theorists are yet to grasp.

3. Transposing reconciliation models

3.1 *Reconciliation theory*

Transitional justice discourse argues truth telling to be a form of justice in itself and that to allow wrongful acts to remain hidden is little better than the acts themselves. The literature often advocates for the right to truth to be recognized as a human right under international law³⁶. Reconciliation experts also argue the desire to know the truth to be innate to the human condition. However, similar to the assumptions described in the previous section this argument is also derived from what is considered important according to Western societies. Rotberg describes the trend for reconciliation literature to discuss the deep desire by people affected by conflict, such as the populations of Bosnia and Cambodia, to learn the truths about what happened to them and who was responsible³⁷. However, investigations into these cases actually found very little evidence that knowing the truth provided the people with additional closure or supported healing³⁸.

The overwhelming success of the Nuremberg trials, truth-seeking mechanisms and remembrance initiatives in supporting those affected by the Nazi regime in Germany, re-established the country as a respec-

³⁵ Millar (note 8).

³⁶ Millar, 'Performative memory and re-victimization: Truth-telling and provocation in Sierra Leone', *8(2) Memory Studies* 2015, 242–254.

³⁷ Rotberg, 'Truth commissions and the provision of truth, justice, and reconciliation', *PUP* 2000, 3–21.

³⁸ Ibid.

table partner State embodying peace and respect for its people. As a consequence of this success, this model came to be considered the archetype transitional justice model³⁹. The success of Germany's reconciliation appears to have given license to the conflict theorists to assume knowing the truth to be essential if a society is to remain stable and prosper post-conflict. Critics of dominant reconciliation theories such as Mendeloff, question this assumption, arguing that not all cultures benefit from or value knowing the truth about wrongdoing as do the West.

Mendeloff lists eight claims commonly purported by truth-telling advocates as to how truth telling promotes reconciliation.

1. *Social healing and reconciliation*
2. *Promotes justice*
3. *Establishes an official historical record*
4. *Serves to educate the public*
5. *Institutional reform*
6. *Promotes democracy*
7. *Pre-empts future atrocities*
8. *Deters future atrocities*⁴⁰

Included within Mendeloff's critique of reconciliation theory is the questioning of the most common assumptions that have the least amount of supporting evidence. First, the assumption that the principles of individual psychology can be applied to the collective is discussed. This assumption directs interpretation toward conceptualizing trauma sustained by an individual and which manifests as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to present itself as a similar pattern within a group context⁴¹. This interpretation extends to the notion of repressed memories; if a community does not correctly recollect memories of traumatic events then recovery is not considered possible. Simply understanding that theories devoted to understanding internal thought processes in order to enact cognitive change require the presence of a 'psyche' immediately raises the question of do nations have a psyche? In a sense, yes (for example the Jungian take on Freudian theories of the psyche) but not in the same way as an

³⁹ Rotondi & Eisikovits, 'Forgetting after War: A Qualified Defense', in Claudio Corradetti & Nir Eisikovits(eds.), *Theorizing transitional justice* (2015), 13–28.

⁴⁰ Mendeloff, 'Truth-seeking, truth-telling, and post-conflict peace-building: Curb the enthusiasm?', 6(3) *International Studies Review* 2004, 355–380.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

individual does⁴². Application of reconciliation theories based on such an asymmetrical comparison does not offer any validity to the assumption. Second, even if the above assumption was valid there is no consensus amongst the psychology community as to the best approach to healing victims of trauma. There are many methods used to support overcoming trauma in individuals each with their own grounding in theory, but to which each individual's response is unique. Determining which is the best approach for any given individual is a journey and decision therapist and patient must do together. From this perspective the individual and the collective are similar, in that no two are the same and a tailored approach is always required. Whilst there have certainly been successful truth seeking commissions (TRC), take South Africa for example, follow-up studies of these successes have found little evidence demonstrating long-term benefits of truth seeking. Mendeloff noted the tendency for literature to, despite finding little evidence of efficacy, conclude truth-seeking processes serve a significant and important purpose. "Assertions are frequently presented as empirical fact when they are merely untested hypotheses. In short, truth-telling advocates claim more about the power of truth-telling than logic or evidence dictates"⁴³. Third, assuming that both the above assumptions (a connection between truth and healing; and individual and national healing) are valid there remains no clear link that either necessarily contributes to peace building. Mendeloff points to the tendency for the terms 'peace' and 'reconciliation' to be used interchangeably within the literature but are in fact completely different concepts. The clear distinction is demonstrated in examples of nations that have emerged from conflict and have successfully established peace without there necessarily being reconciliation. A prime example again being South Africa as racism remains prominent within its society⁴⁴. Few studies on transitional justice case studies have examined the relationship between peace and reconciliation; hence the tendency for mechanisms on each to co-exist is based on an assumed correlative relationship⁴⁵. Is there a causal relationship between the two and if so, is one always the catalyst or is their order interchangeable? The fourth assumption follows closely, in that the discourse does not request evidence that truth telling or knowing is nec-

⁴² Zoja, 'Trauma and abuse: the development of a cultural complex in the history of Latin America' in Thomas Singer & Samuel Kimbles (eds.), *The cultural complex: Contemporary Jungian perspectives on psyche and society* (2004), 94–105.

⁴³ Mendeloff (note 40), 356.

⁴⁴ Mendeloff (note 40).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

essary for reconciliation. Again, the literature offers examples of emerged nations from conflict that have successfully established peace where truth telling was both a part of the healing and was not⁴⁶. That case outcomes resemble peace regardless of the design discredits the assumption that truth is essential for reconciliation. Assumption five, that justice is a prerequisite for peace also has minimal supporting (and often conflicting) evidence. Again, this is able to be demonstrated using case examples of where justice has been sought and achieved (El Salvador, Rwanda, South Africa) and where it has not (Namibia, Mozambique, Cambodia), and yet a society embodying a peaceful existence has emerged from the conflict in each case⁴⁷. In the latter examples, justice was sought only for those responsible in positions of high authority and the majority of perpetrators of low or no authority had their matters settled via informal or indigenous processes⁴⁸. The logic behind this assumption is that if formal justice is served, the desire to seek justice via acts of vigilante revenge by victims or their families should be reduced, and thus reducing the chance of a relapse into conflict. Whilst there is some sense in this claim, the case studies do not support its blanket application. Mendeloff's analysis demonstrates the tendency for peace and conflict theorists to mistakenly assume applicability of reconciliation theories to be appropriate regardless of cultural needs. This contributes to the broader argument that theories based on Western values have little relevance to cultures that do not identify with the West.

3.2 Performative truth telling

Early truth commissions were closed to the public, their primary purpose to investigate allegations of abuse and interview witnesses and victims to provide an official record to government. As reconciliation theory developed, increasing emphasis was placed upon the benefits of performative truth telling. This describes the process by which perpetrators and victims would make public testimonies of their experiences⁴⁹. The adjustments in theory were in concurrence with the growing belief that reconciliation required participation of the collective in some form of apology and forgiveness ceremony. The theory posits that this type of group catharsis

⁴⁶ Gibson, 'On legitimacy theory and the effectiveness of truth commissions', 72 *Law & Contemporary Problems* 2009, 123–141.

⁴⁷ Mendeloff (note 40).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Millar (note 8).

has a reversal effect on the psychological traumas inflicted on the group. Victims having their experiences publicly acknowledged and perpetrators admitting their actions to their fellow community members is somehow deemed to be of greater benefit than had it occurred privately.

Millar discusses the socially generative nature of performative truth telling and how reconciliation theory hypothesises its benefits. The generation of the self-concept is posited as constructed by responses to the person's projection of behavior onto their audience. A positive response reaffirms to the individual that they are behaving in an appropriate manner. Such feedback serves to build on this concept of the self as they internalize the norms known to exhibit this positive affirmation. The combined effect of individual performances generates a concept of the social collective, essentially characteristics that make each community unique. However, in order for any of this to occur the audience must be convinced that each performance is true, which first requires that it be understood. It is here that Millar connects the theory with performative truth telling, or conversely discusses the lack of connection within many cultural contexts where the process has occurred. Millar drew attention to examples of truth commissions (i.e. Sierra Leone) where performative truth telling occurred and did not receive the audience confirmation necessary to generate a new social concept of community post-conflict because the concept did not align with cultural norms or expectations. In some respects, performative truth telling processes can result in further harm by way of re-traumatizing the participants with experts retrospectively admitting the performative aspect was not necessary⁵⁰. Millar's argument adds to the discourse supporting an understanding that theories derived from Western values cannot be assumed to be applicable across all cultural circumstances.

3.3 *Otherizing*

Schmidt suggests four types of "energies"⁵¹ to be involved in reconciliation processes: truth, mercy, justice and peace⁵². These are recognized as often contradicting within conflicts, with advocates for each clashing in ideals. In particular, mercy and peace are thought to clash with truth and justice. Through these adverse forces clashing, when none can be agreed upon as

⁵⁰ Millar (note 36).

⁵¹ Schmidt (note 7), 66.

⁵² Ibid.

a priority or legitimate, a community is forced to divide itself creating a “false dichotomy”⁵³. Such a dichotomy is not actually present, but the passion each feels for that which they have chosen to value most reinforces the divide. Conflict and reconciliation literature refers often to *in-groups* and *out-groups*, where the in-group is one’s own and the out-group consists of those who threaten the in-group’s integrity. This is how opposing sides within a conflict are conceptually created. When the two groups do not share the same values, the in-group disassociates further from identifying with the out-group. The literature often terms this “otherizing”⁵⁴, removing the factors that allow identifying the self with the enemy from conscious conception makes it easier to dehumanize the out-group and pursue the goals of the in-group with little guilt, even if harm to the out-group results.

Advocates for truth telling argue that the process supports the deconstruction of in-group/out-group dichotomies post-conflict. By providing a mutual space within which both perpetrator and victim are able to verbalize their experiences, the in-group is supposedly better able to view the out-group as something else than the ‘other’. The discourse views this as something of a “collective storytelling therapy”⁵⁵. This performance, drawing on the socially generated concept of the self discussed in the previous section, as reconciliation theory posits should generate a new national identity and collective memory outside the former in-group/out-group paradigm⁵⁶. In turn, a new shared collective memory should minimize the capability of the public discourse to enable un-truths to continue in circulation, thus supporting greater transparency between community members and groups.

As is also discussed in the introduction of this paper, prevailing peace, conflict and reconciliation theories are wholly based on the assumption that conflicts are identity based and by much of the same token this also provides the rationale for truth telling. The literature frequently cites the South African TRC as the exemplar of truth-telling success. The conflict being about an apartheid fit nicely into the theories of both collective healing and the in-group/out-group paradigm. However, there are other factors which contributed to the South African TRC’s success and which cannot always be replicated in other state contexts. First, a com-

⁵³ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁴ Millar (note 8), 1.

⁵⁵ Millar (note 36), 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

mission must have the ability to attract the attention of the people. This is generally achieved by ensuring that it appeals to the people's perceived needs and convinces them that its purpose is to serve them. In the South African context, the presence and capability of the South African media to broadcast the proceedings and findings of the TRC to the nation ensured the people were well aware of its presence and purpose. The media succeeded in creating and projecting a powerful profile of the TRC to the entire population. Not only was the media able to organize itself to deliver timely and relevant updates but the people also had the ability to access and understand the information. It cannot be assumed that all states will have a well established media, that populations will have adequate literacy levels, have access to print media, television, the Internet, the radio or even that the necessary infrastructure is in place for any of this to be possible. In fact, many do not have any of these things⁵⁷. Second, it is necessary that the commission be perceived as legitimate, achieved mostly through the commission's propensity to be fair in its decisions⁵⁸. In the South African case, the wider population felt the strength in leadership of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu and came to hold the leaders in very high esteem. The vocal support of and participation in the TRC by Mandela and Tutu provided the TRC with a significant amount of credibility greatly supporting its perceived legitimacy by the people and therefore their willingness to listen⁵⁹. Again, not all states having emerged from conflict have done so with an established respected government or even a stable leadership figure with the necessary qualities to unite the masses. Furthermore, it also often happens that community elites participate in truth commissions or act as representatives of a community. This risks presenting a version of events, perception or belief that does not reflect that of the wider community. Further still, if a community elite is perceived negatively in any way by constituents and makes a contribution as their representative this will likely be unfavorably received by the majority. The lessons to be learnt here are that truth commissions need to ensure that they are actually serving the people, the whole community, and not just those with the loudest voice.

⁵⁷ Millar, 'Between Western theory and local practice: Cultural impediments to truth-telling in Sierra Leone', 29(2) *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 2011, 177–199.

⁵⁸ Gibson (note 46).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

4. Problems faced in Sierra Leone's reconciliation

4.1 *Sierra Leone—reconciliation theory's mistakes*

The Sierra Leone's civil war offers an excellent example of a post-identity conflict and which reconciliation theory was unable to successfully consolidate. The civil war spanned 11 years, the opposing forces consisting mostly of a rebel group called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Sierra Leonean military. The Sierra Leonean government had been characterized by deep corruption leading up to, during and after the civil war⁶⁰. The country's political elites had partnerships in private companies that exploited the country's rich natural resources (alluvial diamonds), and it was the elites alone who benefitted from these ventures leaving the remainder of the country in deep poverty. Ultimately, the mismanagement of funds resulted in the government's bankruptcy and being unable to pay the wages of its schoolteachers. With the forced closure of schools, the country's youth took to roaming the streets, crime and forming gangs. This also created a primary recruiting ground for the RUF. Additionally, many people who did not have access to land in order to farm or had lost access due to the mines opted to join the RUF for the convenience of opportunities to pillage whatever was needed to survive⁶¹. The literature often describes the war to have been disorganized but that the acts of violence as extreme. Opposing groups appeared to employ little strategy in their methods, attacks occurred without any obvious intention to gain control of an area or assert its authority over the State. Villages appeared to be targeted at random and were raided, destroyed and then abandoned within a few hours. The movements of each group appeared to be catalyzed by the failure of each party's leadership to subdue their infantry into order or provide a clear objective⁶². Disorganization was particularly obvious within the RUF, as its driver was dissatisfaction with the government's corruption and yet it did not assemble itself as a united front with a clear intent or strategy to establish a new government.

Following the conclusion of the war, the United Nations facilitated the establishment of two institutions to support peace and reconciliation, the Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the Truth and Reconcili-

⁶⁰ Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 'Historical Antecedents to the Conflict' in *Witness to Truth: Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 3* (2004), 3–31.

⁶¹ Millar (note 57).

⁶² Millar (note 8).

ation Commission (TRC). The SCSL was reserved for those who bore the greatest responsibility for acts and was supposed to provide “retributive”⁶³ justice⁶⁴. The TRC was designed to be a platform open to the public, its purpose to provide “restorative”⁶⁵ justice and reconciliation on both the individual and collective level⁶⁶. The work of the TRC occurred through “a series of thematic, institutional and event-specific hearings”⁶⁷ in the capital of Freetown, and four days of public hearings and one day of closed hearings in each of the twelve districts across the country⁶⁸. In each hearing, witnesses, victims and perpetrators presented their stories in the presence of a commissioner and leader of evidence with the support of a counselor. The purpose of these hearings was not the collection of data or evidence as this had already been completed through an earlier process, but solely to facilitate “inter-group catharsis”⁶⁹ and reconciliation. Each of these processes was based on the assumption that an in-group/out-group paradigm had been present throughout the conflict.

On investigation into the impacts of the TRC on the reconciliation process in Sierra Leone, studies generally concluded that very little constructive effects to have resulted^{70, 71, 72, 73}. This has been primarily attributed to a lack of understanding by international actors of Sierra Leonean culture and consequentially what factors would constructively contribute to reconciliation and those that would not. The concept of re-telling and remembering violence was contradictory to the Sierra Leonean indigenous methods of healing, which was more akin to “social forgetting”⁷⁴ and was the preferred method for the significant majority. Shaw drew attention to the fact that there was a small but very persistent minority of local elites that advocated for the telling of truth regarding the violence, who in

⁶³ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁴ United Nations Security Council, ‘Statute for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Article 1’, 2000.

⁶⁵ Millar (note 8), 6.

⁶⁶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, Part III: Functions of Commission, Sierra Leone, 2000.

⁶⁷ Millar (note 8), 6.

⁶⁸ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act (note 63).

⁶⁹ Millar (note 8), 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Millar (note 36).

⁷² Sesay, ‘Does one size fit all?: The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission revisited’, 36 Nordiska Afrikaninstitutet 2007, 5–54.

⁷³ Young, ‘Transitional Justice in Sierra Leone: A Critical Analysis’, 1 (1) United Nations Peace and Progress 2013, 3–17.

⁷⁴ Shaw (note 12).

the end got their way. Shaw highlighted that the “unspoken goal”⁷⁵ of the TRC was “to transform a population that preferred to heal through forgetting into truth-telling subjects who would, after adequate sensitization, recognize their “need” to talk about the violence.”⁷⁶ Not only is this an attempt to fit a context into a theory instead of molding a theory to fit the context (square peg, round hole) but it is also an example of international intervention where, despite being well intentioned, the outcome was not justified by the means to achieve it. The international community essentially pushed its own ideas of what was required onto a people whose own existing culture was already adequately capable of serving this purpose.

4.2 The client and the patron

Deeply embedded in Sierra Leonean culture is that of the client-patron relationship. This reciprocal system is characterized by a “big man”⁷⁷ (the patron), traditionally a chief, agreeing to provide material support (i.e. school fees, medicine) and protection to dependents (the client) in exchange for their submission to the big man’s authority. A dependent’s request to a big man is called “begging”⁷⁸ and it is something all Sierra Leoneans must do to meet their daily needs and which they are not shy about. The cultural manifestation of this dynamic is that a high value is placed on human labor and by extension there is an underlying concept of “wealth-in-people”⁷⁹. As long as the big man’s consumption of privileges is balanced by generosity, this relationship is considered to be within the construed cultural norms. However when a big man is perceived to “over do”⁸⁰ their privileges they are seen to be acting outside the acceptable parameters of the client-patron system.

In contemporary Sierra Leone the role of the big man is filled by politicians, religious leaders, businessmen, and representatives of non-government organizations. Within this frame, the TRC was also perceived as a big man. Therefore, when people who gave testimonies at the TRC were asked if they had any further comments at the end, they would often

⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁷ Millar (note 57), 188.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 187.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 188.

request material support from the TRC⁸¹. The people were suffering from living in a post-conflict dysfunctional state, and the TRC was seen as an opportunity for the community to “beg the assembled”⁸² patrons to help them. This would have been well within the standard Sierra Leonean construal of the client-patron dynamic. Such an exchange, information and participation for material aid, would have “represented the closing of the circle, the completion of the performative drama”⁸³. Unfortunately, the purpose of the TRC was solely to facilitate reconciliation, at no juncture did it ever intend to provide aid in material or monetary form to the Sierra Leonean people. In this way the TRC failed to meet the expectations of the people, thus the patron-client transaction cycle remained incomplete and left the clients, the people, feeling cheated.

In Millar’s analysis of the TRC, the role of the victim is also presented as a factor that contributed to the misapplication of reconciliation theory in Sierra Leone. A component required by performative truth telling is that the participants take on and internalize the role of the victim. This role applied not only to victims of the violence but also to perpetrators of that violence, who were victims of the circumstances that had been forced upon them by their corrupt government. The intention of the TRC creators was that the victim role be internalized on a national level, and succeed in this it did. Masses of people attended the hearings as part of the audience or listened to them via the radio and identified with the stories of those giving testimony, thus a national victim narrative was created. The socially generative function of performative truth telling succeeded, however not in the way the theory predicted. By all people identifying as a victim, no one was left to identify or play the “saviour”⁸⁴ and a vacuum was created. This led the people to experience the TRC to be rather provocative. It requested deep traumas be relived and yet did not offer any culturally appropriate justification for its request. Whilst a truth commission cannot be judged negatively for not providing that which it is not designed to, it is appropriate to criticize it for claiming its purpose is to help a bereaved people but failing to understand what culturally relevant post-war aid is required for it to actually be helpful⁸⁵. Misunderstanding or failing to recognize a significant component of a cultural system such

⁸¹ Millar (note 36).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Millar (note 57).

as the client-patron relationship and how this may interact with a foreign system demonstrates a clear lack of effort by actors to properly understand the needs of a population.

4.3 *Sierra Leone's lack of 'otherizing'*

The primary driver of the Sierra Leone conflict being inequality as a result of government corruption enables its categorization as *post-identity*. Despite the clear presence of two dominant and clashing parties responsible for the violence, that the conflict did not present as a tug-of-war for control of government systems makes difficult for conventional conflict theories to create a clear analysis. The concept of the 'other' discussed in previous sections of this paper is also relevant to the overall picture of Sierra Leone's post-war recovery. 'Otherizing' is a concept that is created within conflicts to support the reaffirmation of group-identity and boundaries between in- and out-groups, making clear toward whom aggression should be targeted. As also mentioned previously, the objective of reconciliation theory is to deconstruct in- and out-group dichotomies, to reunite factions and cease the tendency to perceive the perpetrator as the 'other'.

Researchers within post-conflict Sierra Leone found very little evidence of 'otherizing', leading to the question of whether conventional reconciliation processes (i.e. truth telling) were relevant and necessary⁸⁶. First of all, inherent within Sierra Leonean culture is a sense of togetherness that prevailed throughout the conflict. One particular group does not dominate neighborhoods and villages, there are no visual boundaries signifying where one neighborhood begins and ends, and everyone is referred to as a brother. Secondly, the starting point of conflict theories is to identify the opposing actors, by the factors that divide them and that which characterizes their group identity. Such factors would usually also have existed prior to a conflict, such as ethnicity or socioeconomic status. However, as Millar discovered dividers such as these were not present within the Sierra Leone conflict, with the conflicts described to be "Temnes against Temnes, Limbas fight[ing] against Limbas. Krios fighting against Krios" [secondary citation]⁸⁷. Here conventional conflict theories reach somewhat of a roadblock, unsure how to analyze a conflict where every actor is part of the

⁸⁶ Millar (note 8).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 11.

in-group. A further complicating factor was the “Sobel”⁸⁸ phenomenon, which referred to the tendency for armed individuals to alternate between being soldiers and rebels (i.e. fighting for or with the military vs. fighting with or for the RUF)⁸⁹. This also highlights the chaotic nature of the conflict, in that not even the oppositions were clear around who was in the in-group and accepted any mercenary without questioning how they were ideologically affiliated with the group. Moreover, many perpetrators who took up arms were civilians, indeed many were children (recall schools had been forcefully closed), who were simply gripped by fear and frustration at the instability. That it was against their fellow community members they perpetrated and the frequent changing of the banner under which they acted, clouded further the distinction of in-group/out-group memberships.

Millar noted a lack of language applying negative connotations to perpetrators by victims, even the opposite occurring. Victims were noted to refer to perpetrators as brothers rather than the enemy highlighting a distinct lack of “otherizing”. Consistent in the literature is the recognition of the highly forgiving nature of the Sierra Leoneans^{90, 91, 92}, the people readily accepted perpetrators back into the folds of the community, resuming collegial and neighborly interactions. An interesting note of Millar’s was the use of the term ‘rebels’ to refer to the RUF and ‘soldiers’ to the military, indicating civilians clearly recognized that two opposing parties existed and that their acts were wrong. Yet despite this, reference to members of either party was never accompanied by the intonation that the individuals belonged to a separate identity group, only that they had performed the actions⁹³. From this point, that the Sierra Leonean people did not even slightly identify perpetrators to be the “other” provides very little ground for the application of conventional conflict and reconciliation theories which assume an in-group/out-group dichotomy.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Gibson (note 46).

⁹¹ Shaw (note 12).

⁹² Millar (note 57).

⁹³ Ibid.

5. Conclusion

There is clear evidence of a growing trend for conflicts occurring in the modern world to be considered as *post-identity*. Under this new genre, conflicts do not embody the characteristics of a war pertaining to a collective whose identity is under threat. The erosion of the State as a system of power and concurrent rise in corporate power systems has flipped the drivers of conflict from being that of religion, ethnicity or nationality to inequality, poverty and greed. Conflict theories derived from Western societal and democratic values assumes the presence of a strong sense of identity to a group to be the source of division preventing peace. Conflict and reconciliation theories operate under the intent to breakdown such divisions and highlight similarities, reducing the strength with which opponents are considered to be the 'other'. For the most part, conflict theories applied to these contexts have historically been successful. However, the new conditions under which societies are finding themselves threaten not the collective identity but the collective well-being. Within this new framework, the applicability of conflict theories is diminished, assumptions non-sound and approach to analysis no longer contextually relevant.

The international community's understanding that new systems of control result in new types of conflict and therefore that new approaches to resolution are also needed, is slowly developing. The development of this understanding appears to be contingent on failed theory application attempts providing evidence, which unfortunately has been at the expense of recovering communities the theories are claiming to aid. Not only are conventional conflict theories failing to grasp the reality of new world conflicts but also the unique cultural contexts in which they are being misapplied. The most common mistake is the tendency for actors within the academic conflict community to be rather rigid in approach to following theoretical guidelines in application. The assumption that if a reconciliation model was successful in one context then it will be in another is possibly one of the most significant mistakes and carries the greatest consequences. This assumption is formed from the rather ignorant perspective of the international community that assumes Western values are given the same weight across all societies and cultures. That the configuration of priority values could differ from that in the West and the society still function effectively is not an option given serious consideration. A more likely consideration is that having a value configuration alternative to that of the West is catalyzing conflict and the correct configuration needs to be restored to achieve peace. Not only does this assumption waste val-

uable resources in establishing mechanisms doomed to fail even before inception but also carries great risk at causing further harm to an already extremely damaged people.

Reconciliation theory and the weight it places on truth telling demonstrate this well. The tendency to compare the recovery needs of an individual with the needs of the collective is rather asymmetrical with studies providing little supporting evidence that this comparison is valid. And yet, there are plenty of advocates for this conceptual way of thinking within the literature because it aligns with Western values and makes sense to those conducting the analyses. The assumption that the desire to know the truth is an inherent human characteristic and essential to lasting reconciliation provides the reasoning for the significant emphasis upon truth telling by reconciliation theory. However what this immediately disregards is that there may be other methods to reconciliation and that truth telling could have harmful effects. The discourse does not consider that a community may have developed their own methods of collective healing that do not involve truth telling and that this could be more appropriate for their context. It is a significant point of disappointment (and an indicator of a somewhat arrogant attitude) that international actors claiming to help people recover do not see the efficacy in putting in the time to listen or investigate what the people's needs and values are in order to support a culturally appropriate and effective reconciliation model.

6. Recommendations

1. Local data collection

Legitimately seeking the input and guidance of the local civil society in establishing models for reconciliation. Although the processes required for this are time consuming and would prolong the proceedings, the ultimate outcomes produced would be of greater long-term benefit.

2. Inclusion of civil society

Members from all levels of society should be invited to contribute the model's design. It is common for only elite members of the civil society to have input into large-scale operations. Respected members of the common population that do not enjoy elite status or privileges should also be included. This minimizes and counters the risk of obtaining cultural input distorted by experiences exclusive to the elite and creating a culturally disconnected model.

3. Ongoing thorough monitoring of model effectiveness

From the outset of proceedings, mechanisms must be established to monitor the people's responses. Adverse responses need to be identified as early as possible so as to allow the facilitators opportunity to make accommodating adjustments.

4. Empirical links between peace and reconciliation

Future research efforts on reconciliation models should aim to locate and analyze factors linking peace with reconciliation. The literature should take care to avoid the interchangeable use of the two terms to ensure they be understood as separate distinct concepts.

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