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Healing and reconciliation after violent conflict: the role of memory in South Africa and Rwanda

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Memory after violent conflict is a contentious issue. The way in which the past has been remembered has often been the impetus for renewed violence rather than healing and reconciliation. Exploring individual and collective memory in the Rwandan and South African contexts, this article argues that how we remember is more important than what we remember, if the process of remembering is to contribute positively to the post-conflict recovery process. This article considers some preliminary thoughts related to memory after violent conflict by comparing how South Africa and Rwanda have remembered their violent pasts. A significant difference between these two countries is that South Africa has allowed for contending narratives about the past to be in dialogue with one another, whereas Rwanda has chosen the route of preferring one narrative over others. Some possible implications of this will be explored in this article.

Genesing en versoening na gewelddadige konflik: die rol van herinnering in Suid-Afrika en Rwanda

Die aard van herinnering na afloop van gewelddadige konflik is 'n omstrede onderwerp. Die wyse waarop die verlede onthou word, is meermale die oorsaak van hernude geweld eerder as herstel en versoening. Hierdie artikel ondersoek individuele en kollektiewe herinnering in die konteks van Rwanda en Suid-Afrika en daar word geargumenteer dat die wyse waarop onthou word belangriker is as dit wat onthou word. Dit is veral van belang indien die proses van onthou 'n positiewe bydrae moet maak tot die herstelproses na afloop van die konflik. Enkele voorlopige idees met betrekking tot herinnering na 'n gewelddadige konflik sal oorweeg word deur 'n vergelyking te tref tussen die wyse waarop Suid-Afrika en Rwanda onderskeidelik hul gewelddadige verledes onthou. 'n Veelseggende verskil tussen die twee lande is die feit dat Suid-Afrika kontrasterende narratiewe oor die verlede toelaat om in gesprek te tree met mekaar, terwyl Rwanda een narratief verkies bo andere. Enkele implikasies hiervan sal in die artikel verken word.

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Healing and reconciliation are high on the international agenda as countries find it difficult to recover after violent conflict. Not only are countries embarking on reconciliation processes directly after conflict, but historical conflicts are also being revisited, as in Australia and Canada, where governments have made efforts at reconciliation with their respective country's aboriginal people (Brounéus 2008: 12). Remembering the violent past forms an important part of the reconciliation process, on both an individual and a national level. The way in which the past is remembered can either contribute to the reconciliation process or be the impetus for further violence (Minow 1999: 430, Volf 2000: 74).

Although the contexts of South Africa and Rwanda may differ vastly, the issues at stake in terms of remembering in countries recovering from violent conflict are somewhat similar. Both countries started their recovery processes in 1994, but have chosen different routes according to their unique contexts. In the case of South Africa, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was implemented which offered amnesty in exchange for the full disclosure of the truth. This allowed South Africans access to the information of what had really happened under the secretive system of apartheid. Perpetrators had to be accountable for what they had done, but those with economic skills could maintain their positions and contribute to building the country (Tutu 2000: 23). In Rwanda, the traditional justice system of *gacaca* was revived and has now tried over a million people. This approach has meant that there has been individual accountability for crimes committed, which was significant in a country that had experienced decades of impunity (Graybill 2004: 1117).

Beyond the TRC and *gacaca*, which have contributed to how the past is collectively remembered in the respective countries, both countries have taken various other steps in terms of remembering. These include memorials and monuments, the rewriting of history, educational initiatives, debate in the media, developing relevant government policies and laws, and the social discourse that has developed to come to terms with the past.

This article considers some preliminary thoughts in relation to memory after violent conflict from the perspective of personal and collective narratives. The routes taken by South Africa and Rwanda

will be compared and some tentative thoughts on how to remember after violent conflict in order to assist the reconciliation process will be discussed.

1. Memory and narrative

Over the past few decades, the term ‘memory’ has started to replace the term ‘history’ when referring to the past (Pakier & Str ath 2010). The primary reason for this is claims of legitimacy; scepticism has developed with regards to authoritative claims of knowing or mediating history. Instead, there has been a movement towards the multiplicity of stories from ordinary storytellers (Hunt 2010, Hinchman & Hinchman 1997).

Memories are first and foremost stories that people tell themselves and each other about the past. People are constantly in the process of writing and rewriting the stories of their lives, in order to make sense of the world around them. Their memories become part of this story and part of their sense-making efforts (Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992: 8). These stories or narratives that are shared with one another are complex, multi-levelled, fluid and dynamic, and are continuously being revised. Adding to this complexity is that people may simultaneously hold multiple contending narratives in tension (Cobely 2001: 2).

Although memories tend to be fragmented and incomplete, they are drawn together into personal narratives, in order to bring coherence to and make sense of them. Narratives are thus about coherence and sense-making or meaning (Hunt 2010: 10). The narrative of memories becomes part of the broader life story of individuals and informs who they are and the kinds of decisions that they make. Both personal and social factors impact on what is remembered (Hunt 2010: 28, Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992: 7).

This article adopts, in the tradition of Paul Ricoeur, Jerome Bruner and Anthony Kerby, what Hinchman & Hinchman (1997: xx) describe as a “strong version” of narrative, namely the view that reality as such has a narrative structure, and that people are compelled to form narratives within this context. This is opposed to the idea that narratives are imposed onto a chaotic, senseless reality.

Those who believe that narratives impose meaning and coherence on a fragmented and chaotic reality critique narratives for insisting on a rational and reasonable interpretation of reality (for example, François Lyotard and Hayden White). However, others believe in the role narratives play in contributing to a meaningful coexistence with others (for example, Anthony Kerby, David Carr and Steven Crites). Narratives, unlike the project of History, allow not only for multiple voices to remain in contention, but also for a degree of meaning and coherence that has the potential to facilitate shared understandings of the past, present and future (Hinchman & Hinchman 1997: xxix). This approach to narrative is relevant when considering healing and reconciliation in countries recovering from violent conflict.

2. Individual and collective remembering

In the same way individuals have complex narratives about their lives that incorporate their memories, it can be argued that nations have shared narratives and collective memories. The term ‘collective memory’ emerged in the 1980s, in critique of the totalising aspects of historiography (Pakier & Stråth 2010: 4). Maurice Halbwachs used the term ‘collective memory’ when referring to individuals situating themselves within a social context in which memory had been constructed. However, since then, Pakier & Stråth (2010: 7) argue that collective memory has been essentialised as a shared property by a social group.

Pakier & Stråth (2010: 5) are critical of this “essentialised” concept of collective memory, arguing that there is a thin line between the democratisation of history and the manipulation of the past for public relations or political agendas. They distinguish between memory as an individual experience and as a collective construction, arguing that individuals have memories, but collectives do not. As a collective phenomenon, they suggest, memories are discourses based on processes of social work and social bargaining. They (Pakier & Stråth 2010: 7) refer to Reinhart Kosellek who demanded that his memories of war not be subsumed in collective memories but remain his; he perceived it as objectionable that individuals should be told what to remember collectively. Pakier & Stråth thus argue that collective memory is a discourse that is socially and culturally constructed

through contention and debate, reflecting power relationships, whereas individual memory is not.

Those people who reflect on collective memory tend to equate it with individual memory, particularly in discussions about trauma, repression and other psychological models (Hamber & Wilson 2002). Hamber & Wilson (2002) and others, for example, Müller (2010) question whether individual psychoanalytical models can be translated into express collective experiences. For example, the memories of individuals who are suppressed due to trauma are often equated with the suppressed memories of nations. However, silenced narratives on the national level are not necessarily the result of suppressed trauma, but rather of political interference. Jansen, for example, speaks of the “politics of concealment” in which governments engage (Pakier & Stråth 2010, Jansen 2010: 276).

Although this article would agree that collective memories are often consciously constructed, or concealed, for political purposes, it would seek to problematise this in two ways. The first is to argue that, although individual memories are “lived”, the way in which they are narrated to oneself and others is also, to some degree, constructed (Hunt 2010: 47). The second is to point out that collective memories tend to take on a life of their own. However strong the political agenda is to construct a particular narrative, a movement that occurs within the collective memory process reminds us of the individual process in that it is dynamic and complex, holding contending narratives in tension. This is what differentiates collective memory from the project of recording History. An official history is written down by one or several experts with an authoritative voice, but collective memory describes a more complex and dynamic process that occurs somewhere between official history and individual memory.

In describing the relationship between collective and individual memory, there is an increasing awareness that a person’s individual memory is located within a particular historical context that needs to be taken into account (Hunt 2010: 5, Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992: 6). Although the processes of individual memory cannot be equated with those of collective memory, it must be noted that there is a continuous dialogue between individual and collective memory that significantly influences the development of each. As shared stories

connect individuals to the social world, they begin to take on a life of their own. Told and retold, they create the context in which narratives are constructed. However, within this, there is debate and contestation: “One can always contest and argue about the meaning of stories and try to reinterpret them so as to change policies and behaviour” (Hinchman & Hinchman 1997: xxv).

This article illustrates collective memory as a social construct and political instrument, as well as an organic process, beyond the control of political manipulations. Collective memory, as a site for contention and debate, liberates it from manipulation and also reveals the more complex psychoanalytic processes that might be taking place as a nation comes to terms with its past (Hinchman & Hinchman 1997, Hunt 2010: 126).

3. Memory, trauma, healing and reconciliation

This article is particularly interested in memory after violent conflict which, in psychosocial terms, may be referred to as ‘trauma’. Trauma disrupts the narrative coherence of our lives. In particular, if one’s personal narrative held beliefs that the world was good or that specific people were to be trusted, experiencing violence at the hands of a neighbour or family member would lead to a breakdown of social and personal structures and belief systems. Healing comes through integrating the traumatic event into an adapted narrative (Baerger & MacAdams 1999, Volf 2000). One’s memories of the traumatic event need to become part of a new narrative that helps to make sense of the world again. The more senseless the trauma, the harder it is to integrate the trauma into an existing personal narrative (Hunt 2010).

How memories are reintegrated and what new narratives are formed, on the level of the individual and society, are crucial in terms of identity formation and the relationship between people and the world around them. Healing comes not so much from the remembering itself, but from “interpreting the memories and inscribing them into a larger pattern of meaning – stitching them into the patchwork quilt of one’s identity” (Volf 2006: 28). The collective narrative thus developed will have to be such that it can be incorporated by individuals into their individual narrative. If this does not take place, individuals may reject the collective narrative;

if there are enough people who reject it, this may result in violence (Hunt 2010: 91, Minow 1999: 438). In instances where there is a history of violent conflict between different groups of people, how the past is remembered will have a significant impact on whether individuals in these groups will be able to reconcile or whether there will be a return to violence (Minow 1999: 439, McAdams 2006: 93). In the realm of the collective, what a nation chooses to remember or conceal can similarly have a significant impact on the identity of that nation and the direction it takes (McAdams 2006, Minow 1999). Volf (2006) writes that one's memories could lead to bitterness and revenge, or to a desire to ensure a better future for oneself and others. Volf (2006: 28) argues that this is relevant in terms of both individual and collective memories and that individuals and nations have choices that can be made in order to shape memories in such a way as to facilitate reconciliation.

4. Contending memories

In a nation, as Pakier & Str ath (2010: 8) suggest, collective memories and national narratives are developed within a particular political context. A dominant narrative tends to emerge and others become marginalised. It is not uncommon for some to reject the official social discourse and develop alternative narratives. Hunt argues that it is necessary for these alternative narratives to remain in dialogue with the dominant narrative, as this can lead to healthy social debate. Conflict and war can result where these alternative narratives are not allowed to be in dialogue (Hunt 2010: 92). How to allow alternative narratives to remain in dialogue with the dominant narrative remains a difficult question to answer, as will be understood in the cases of South Africa and Rwanda.

An ongoing debate in terms of remembering after violent conflict is whose memories are remembered, and whose version of the narrative is emphasised (Minow 1999: 438). It is not uncommon for the victor's version of events to be remembered, while that of the loser or perpetrator is forgotten (Hunt & McHale 2008: 47). Although memory is fragmented, distorted and subjective, there is perhaps a degree of truthfulness that needs to be maintained if memory is to lead to healing and reconciliation (Volf 2006: 74). In the psychological

context, it is commonly known that repression or distortion of memory does not lead to healing, as repressed memories do not disappear, but instead tend to interfere with healthy functioning, and may lead to a repeat of the trauma either as victimiser or victim (Volf 2006: 34, Minow 1999: 430). Hunt (2010) found the same to be true with his work with veterans from World War II. Hunt describes how directly after the war, the official policy was to forget the trauma that occurred and that veterans were encouraged not to talk about their experiences in the belief that these memories would ultimately fade away. As they became older, however, the memories of the war they suppressed did not soften, but instead became even more pervasive and difficult to ignore. Likewise, nations that suppress or conceal a particular aspect of their past may find that these memories persist and are often voiced in violent ways (Hunt 2010: 146).

After violent conflict, nations attempt to make sense of the trauma and integrate it into a coherent narrative which, they believe, will facilitate nation-building and reconciliation. After the demise of apartheid in South Africa and since the genocide in Rwanda, these countries have attempted to narrate their pasts. How they integrate the trauma, and the narrative that they develop as a nation will have a significant impact on the possibility of reconciliation and the kind of identity each nation develops.

5. Case study 1: South Africa

South Africa experienced forty-six years of racial segregation under the apartheid system. During this period, 18 000 people were killed and 80 000 opponents to the apartheid system were detained, with 6 000 of these being tortured (Graybill 2004: 1117). In addition, structural violence resulted in millions of people being undereducated, kept in poverty and stripped of their human dignity, while a small minority were privileged with superior jobs, education and standard of living.

Since 1994, South Africa has emphasised the route of dialogue and inclusivity in terms of remembering the past. This is evident in the TRC proceedings, the debate in the media, the approach to the history curriculum that was developed in 1999, as well as memorials and commemorations. As expressed in the slogan 'unity through diversity', there has been the intention to allow for multiple voices to

be heard and contending narratives to coexist. The inclusion of eleven official languages, a free and open media and other robust democratic institutions have contributed to the route of dialogue. However, this intention has not always been realised, and there have been various levels of critique regarding South Africa's approach to remembering its violent past.

Prominent leaders in South Africa such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu strongly subscribed to the idea of remembering in such a way as to foster a more inclusive national identity that would emphasise the human dignity of every South African. Tutu (2000: 21) describes how the desire to live out the precepts of the Constitution and have the reconciliation process be a shared one between all South Africans was fundamental in deciding on a truth-telling with amnesty route. Forgiveness played a central role in the TRC proceedings, drawing its meaning both from Christianity which is practised by the majority of South Africans and from the African concept of *ubuntu*.

Graybill (2004: 1116) writes that in South Africa's interim constitution "[t]here is a need for understanding but not for revenge, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization". *Ubuntu* is derived from the Zulu expression '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', meaning "People are people through other people". She quotes an example of a testimony at a TRC hearing that embodies this concept: "One of those supporting amnesty was Cynthia Ngeweu, mother of Christopher Piet (one of the Gugulethu Seven who was assassinated¹), who explained her understanding of *ubuntu*:

This thing called reconciliation [...] if I am understanding it correctly [...] if it means the perpetrator, the man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back [...] then I agree, then I support it all (Graybill 2004: 1118).

This was at the heart of the TRC, a rehumanisation of both perpetrator and victim, so that South Africans could begin to engage each other as equal human beings. The desire to remember the past in order

1 The Gugulethu Seven is the name of the group of seven young anti-apartheid activists who were killed in an ambush by the South African apartheid security forces in Gugulethu, a township outside of Cape Town, in 1986.

to create a positive shared identity was also noted in the kind of terms former archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela and others coined: the 'rainbow nation' and 'unity through diversity'. Baines (1998) describes how sporting events and the media have participated in building the image of unity amidst the many language and cultural groups, from the South African Broadcasting Association's '*Simunye*-we are one' slogan to the Castle Lager slogan of 'one beer, one nation'.

However, the way in which South Africans have remembered the past has not always resulted in the inclusive, shared national identity these leaders may have hoped for. Baines (1998) argues that the nationalism encouraged in South Africa has the danger of becoming exclusivist and tends to emphasise a political affiliation over affiliation to a community. Minority groups such as the Afrikaners fear that identities will become lost in the 'rainbow nation' (Baines 1998). In addition to this, the discourse of the 'new South Africa' has created a division between the elites and the 'masses'; a small group has benefited from the changes that occurred since 1994, whereas the vast majority of South Africans remain in poverty and unemployment (Reddy 2007). The narrative of a 'rainbow nation' that has successfully negotiated the transition into democracy and is reconciling, although in some respects true, does not allow much room for the voices of those who do not want to reconcile, do not want to be part of a unified nation, or are still suffering from the direct and indirect effects of racism and the apartheid system (Reddy 2007). According to Reddy (2007: 163), "the dominant narrative of democratic transition in South Africa produces a version of events that domesticates the messiness of the process of change".

Apart from the potential for marginalisation of certain groups and the inadvertent silencing of certain voices, another challenge in South Africa's approach to remembering its violent past is the tensions between personal and collective narratives, which are clearly illustrated by the TRC proceedings in South Africa. On the one hand, there were the personal testimonies of individuals who were sharing their trauma and, on the other, there was the collective story emerging out of the multitude of testimonies. Although the final five hundred-page report that materialised from the TCR proceedings included as many personal narratives as possible, individuals reported feeling lost in the larger project of national reconciliation (Bundy

2000: 10). Hamber *et al* (2000) undertook a study with twenty women who survived political violence during apartheid and testified at the TRC. His study reveals that these women had thought that they were testifying in order for the perpetrators to receive punishment, and that they were very angry that their perpetrators received amnesty. Hamber *et al* (2000: 39) write that, although the TRC may have had a role to play in the national process of healing and that telling their stories may have been cathartic for some, others believed that they were like 'pawns' in a national healing process, where their suffering was used to help the nation but that they themselves benefited very little from it.

However, for the many, in particular White South Africans, who claimed ignorance of what was really going on during apartheid or who still believed the justifications of the system, the TRC played a crucial role in revealing the truth of the past and changing destructive collective narratives pervasive in South African society. The most recent South African Reconciliation Barometer reports that 87% of South Africans believe apartheid to have been a crime against humanity.² This is a major revision, in particular for those who benefited from apartheid and whose friends and family died to support the system in the country's internal conflicts and border wars.

The TRC thus assisted in revising existing narratives in South Africa and contributed to new narratives. However, the TRC report shows an awareness that the work of the Commission was not complete, and encouraged the erecting of memorials and museums, in particular those that would emphasise the fact that all Black South Africans had been victims of apartheid. According to the recommendations made in the report, these memorials should be located within communities, and assist them in processing the trauma, especially for those who were not able to participate in the TRC (Weldon 2009).

Memorials and monuments in South Africa remain contentious spaces in terms of how the past is remembered (Saunders 2007, Weldon 2009). Partly because of the political compromises made in the South African context, former monuments and memorials were not destroyed in the way they often are in a post-conflict state. This

2 The South African Reconciliation Barometer is a nationwide survey that has measured socio-political changes in South Africa annually since 2003.

has made it difficult for the new regime to position itself visibly in the public space. Major monuments that were erected in South Africa, in particular under the influence of Thabo Mbeki, include Freedom Park in Pretoria, Robben Island in the Western Cape, the Apartheid Museum and the Women's Goal on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, and the Hector Pietersen Memorial Museum in Soweto. These have become sights where the post-apartheid ideology has been most boldly communicated in the public sphere (Saunders 2007, Verbeeck 2007). Weldon (2009) is critical of these, because she argues that it gives the message that one official narrative has replaced another and that debate about the past has come to an end. Weldon (2009: 187) describes how "local memorials located in vernacular culture can become sites of counter-memory" such as the Amy Biehl memorial in a Cape Town suburb. These local memorials, that express the complexity of memories in conflict, or memories that do not sit comfortably with the official narrative, help survivors of violent conflict to give voice to their own process of integrating trauma.

Some of the struggle that takes place in the development of shared narratives of the past is apparent in the process of developing school history curriculums. Gail Weldon (2009), in a comparative study of the development of history curriculums in Rwanda and South Africa, writes how both countries found it difficult to form their history curriculums when, in the past, history teaching was used as a way to create divisions in society.

In South Africa, immediately following apartheid, history was side-lined in terms of curriculum development. It was only in 1999 that a curriculum was developed by the influential Minister of Education at the time, Kader Asmal (Bundy 2000: 11). Where, under apartheid, history education was about teaching a dominant narrative that all South Africans should believe, Asmal strongly opined that the new curriculum should teach the critical skills necessary to observe why and how dominant narratives formed, and critique them in the context of the multiple voices present in South African public debate (Weldon 2009: 178). One official history did not replace another; rather "there was an attempt to provide for diverse memories, usually subjugated knowledge, recognizing South Africa's diversity. It did not reject the old narratives, but placed them in the context of a broader canvas of narratives from vernacular histories" (Weldon 2009: 179).

However, such an open curriculum enabled former perpetrators to avoid those parts of the history syllabus with which they are uncomfortable. In South Africa, education has been decentralised provincially, meaning the national education department has little power over what is taught. This means that some provinces may well implement Asmal's vision of teaching critical thinking, whereas others may revert to traditional ways of teaching history, even to apartheid-era curricula (Weldon 2009: 167).

One of the most difficult challenges to South Africa's dialogical approach to remembering has been whose version of the past is remembered. During the TRC, the issue of what truth and whose truth was recorded became an important factor in developing the final report. The approach taken was to adopt four understandings of truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or 'dialogic' truth, and healing or restorative truth. Bundy (2000: 13), however, critiques the report, saying that, on the one hand, it argues that the past is "a site of contending constructions and perspectives, a realm of subjective, partial truths", truths that may only emerge in time, and are dynamic, changing and multiple. On the other hand, the report argues that it is the final, factual truth of our past, and that "we should accept that truth has emerged". Bundy argues that the report makes no effort to negotiate the discrepancies between the forensic data and the many contradicting narratives of individuals.

Villa-Vicencio (2000: 27) writes that the stories that emerge in testimony are incomplete, as memory is incomplete. He poetically calls for a listening to the incompleteness, the silences, the body language, and the complexity of emotions that accompany telling narratives of the past. The important issue, for Villa-Vicencio (2000: 27), is not that one complete, coherent truth be told, but that new insight be gained into what happened, along with "an empathetic understanding of how a particular event is viewed by one's adversaries". The crux is not getting to the truth, but having people on opposing sides begin to perceive each other's truths with the kind of empathy and understanding that will allow for healing to begin to take place.

However, this does not mean that, for Villa-Vicencio (2000: 29), the truth does not matter. In fact, he argues that all stories need to be heard and that the reconciliation process is threatened when some are

subsumed or suppressed so that only a dominant narrative survives. This has become central to South Africa's approach to remembering the past: allowing multiple voices to coexist and to remain in dialogue with one another as South Africans attempt to integrate the trauma of the past.

6. Case study 2: Rwanda

In Rwanda, following two long dictatorships that favoured the majority Hutu over Tutsi, a civil war broke out in the early 1990s between the government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which was composed of refugees, mainly from Uganda, who wanted to return to their home country. While this was going on, in April 1994, the government set into motion a plan that resulted in the genocide of nearly a million Tutsi and moderate Hutu. In the short period of three months, Rwandans endured unimaginably brutal violence as people were massacred by machetes often wielded by their neighbours or friends.

As with South Africa, the recovery process in Rwanda started in 1994. However, the context was significantly different in that hundreds of thousands of people had died, over a million people were directly or indirectly involved in crimes related to genocide, and the resources of the country were devastated (Prunier 1995: 297). Apart from trying to piece together a functioning society from the debris of the genocide, a priority for the Rwandan government was countering the powerful ideology that had motivated such vast numbers of ordinary Rwandans to participate in the genocide. Unlike South Africa, the route to remembering has not been via encouraging dialogue between contending voices, but instead via integrating the past into one coherent narrative that has brought an end to direct violence and, it is hoped, will allow Rwandans to reconcile. The challenge to this approach has been the tensions between the official narrative and the many contending narratives that are not being heard (Reyntjens 2011, Pottier 2002).

In addition, as with the case of South Africa, there are tensions between individual and collective narratives, as can be illustrated by the *gacaca* process. Although many have reported that knowing the truth of what happened by means of the testimonies of perpetrators at

gacaca trials has given some sense of closure; for others, the process of testifying has reopened the wounds and resulted in retraumatisation. Karen Brounéus (2008: 56), in her research which focused on women testifying at *gacaca* hearings, found that testifying involved intense psychological suffering. Part of the reason for this is that during the hearing they were harassed by perpetrators who did not want their testimonies to be heard. Many had also lost most of their family, meaning that their social support systems were fragile. Like Hamber, Brounéus (2008: 56) comes to the conclusion that truth-telling at commissions and trials does not necessarily benefit the individual. In addition, apart from the effect on the survivors, perpetrators' stories and the contextualisation of their actions within the broader narrative of violence in Rwanda in the early 1990s have become lost in the *gacaca* process. Perpetrators take personal responsibility at a *gacaca* trial whereby the collective movement of the genocide, the pressure exacted on ordinary people to participate, and the prevailing chaos that influenced people to act with unusual violence was lost (Pottier 2002: 204). Yet *gacaca* played a necessary role in the national process of coming to terms with what happened and developing an official record of genocide crimes, which has contributed to the narrative of present-day Rwanda (Wielenga & Harris 2011: 24).

The tension between the collective narrative and individual narratives is also evident in the memorial sights, which include the Kigali Genocide Memorial Site, the Murambi Genocide Prevention Centre, the Ntarama national memorial site, the Bisesero site, and the Nyamata national memory site where bones have been preserved and are displayed. The month of April is annually a time to commemorate and remember the genocide. As with the case of South Africa, Ibrek (2010: 340) describes the tensions between the official attempts to remember, which are often situated in a particular political ideology, and the attempts by survivors themselves, who are not necessarily concerned with the political context as much as with their own need to process their grief and trauma. Ibrek (2010) describes the narrative of survivors as one that challenges the national narrative, reminding us that amidst the project of nationalisation, the suffering of those individuals who died and those who survived needs to be heard. Ibrek (2010: 341) writes:

For Rwandan genocide survivors, memorialization was a reaction to the genocide. It arose out of loss and trauma and became part of their everyday existence. The bereaved joined together to remember because they were grieving for the loss of loved ones and empathized with the losses of others [...] Their involvement was also purposeful, intended to expose the truth of the atrocities of 1994, to gain recognition and to prevent genocide. As such, survivor engagement in the construction of genocide memorials is distinct from, and sometimes at odds with, the state impulse to employ memorials to consolidate its power. Survivors' intrinsic concerns are in tension with efforts to instrumentalize genocide memory.

This would support Parkier & Stråth's argument that collective memory is constructed with a political agenda, whereas individual memory is a lived experience. The distinction, though, is not necessarily so clear in Rwanda, where organisations such as IBUGA, representing survivors, have become politically influential, and the government has a responsibility to facilitate individual healing and reconciliation processes.

In order to fulfil this responsibility, in 1999 the government formed the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), a body specifically concerned with the healing and reconciliation process in Rwanda. Clark (2010: 139) describes how NURC's approach is, to a large extent, didactic and educational, with the focus on rewriting Rwandan history and communicating this to all Rwandans. Prior to the genocide, Rwandan history was written with a destructive colonial bias that, it has been argued, created the very conditions for genocide.³ NURC's attempt to rewrite history has included situating the genocide in the colonial construction of ethnic identity and calls for a united Rwandan identity that transcends ethnic divisions. The term 'history' is used in this instance, as the efforts of the NURC are more than an attempt to allow different versions of the past to emerge and dialogue with one another. Rather, the previous version of history was rejected and a new version is being written (Pottier 2002: 202).

The education system communicates this new version of the past, and the government's vision for the future. Weldon (2009: 232) describes how the focus in Rwanda has been to centralise education and encourage conformity on the part of teachers in order to ensure that genocide ideology is not taught in schools, but that instead the

3 Cf Mamdani 2001, Pottier 2001, Chretien 2000, Prunier 1995.

message of national unity and reconciliation is heard. McLean-Hilker (2011: 2) describes the tensions that exist in curriculum development between “a commitment to introduce more democratic, student-centred teaching methods in schools (which would permit debate of multiple versions of the past) and the Government’s attempt to impose a singular ‘official’ narrative of Rwanda’s history”.

Not only has the trauma of the genocide required a revision of the existing narrative, but it has also changed the way in which people perceive themselves and others. The events that have taken place since the genocide have further shifted concepts of national identity. Pre-genocide Rwandan identity was, to a large extent, related to ethnicity. After the genocide, through active government intervention, there has been a move away from the concept of ethnic identity to a shared national identity. This shared identity has had to encompass more than contending ethnic identities. After the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans returned to Rwanda from exile in various neighbouring African countries. The influx of Rwandans carrying with them the experiences and cultures of these countries also impacted on Rwandan identity. Prior to the genocide, Rwanda was a relatively closed country and few Rwandans had travelled. With the influx of returnees, it was as if Rwanda was suddenly opened up to the world around it (Prunier 1995: 324).

Since the genocide, Rwanda has entered into the technological age and the global economy. It has shifted from being a Francophone to an English-speaking country. Information technology, computers and the internet are being introduced countrywide, development is booming and Rwanda is now an important country to consider in terms of East and Central African relationships. In less than two decades, Rwanda has transformed itself from an inefficient post-colonial state to an increasingly developing, modern society. This has posed a challenge to people’s sense of personal and collective identity. In terms of all these changes, how the past is remembered has a significant role to play in facilitating reconciliation processes.

The results of the recent Rwandan Reconciliation Barometer⁴ and other forms of measurement would suggest that on the whole NURC

4 The Rwandan Reconciliation Barometer is a nationwide survey to measure the effectiveness of the NURC in bringing about reconciliation. It was first

has been effective in developing a collective narrative that has ended violence and may facilitate reconciliation. However, there are some persistent silent narratives on the periphery, in particular from those in the diaspora who use the internet as their platform. As long as they are not integrated, they have the potential of disrupting the collective narrative. Some would also argue that the collective narrative that is developing in Rwanda may be too dominant and cohesive (Reyntjens 2011, Pottier 2002). It makes too much sense, thereby disallowing for the tensions and struggles that need to exist in the sense-making process. However, Rwandan officials maintain that a dominant narrative that encourages unity and reconciliation is necessary to counter the narrative that made genocide possible.

7. Discussion

These two case studies described different approaches to collective remembering after violent conflict in different contexts. Where South Africa attempted to allow collective memory to emerge within the framework of inclusivity and the multiplicity of different voices, Rwanda opted for one dominant narrative under which all Rwandans can be united. Although South Africa's approach can be critiqued, this article would nevertheless argue, along with many others, that allowing for contending voices to be in dialogue facilitates reconciliation processes.⁵

In the case study of South Africa, the challenge remains to include the voices on the margins, and to keep challenging the 'official' narrative of a reconciled and united nation that ignores the wounds, anger and trauma that individuals still hold. A further challenge is to know whose truth is heard and prioritised. Stolten (2007: 43) writes that there is a lack of concern for "the legitimate feelings of black communities and their need for counter-histories of the freedom struggle". Perhaps the support, in particular from young South Africans, for the former ANC youth league leader, Julius Malema, is an indication of the wounds and anger from the past that have been too easily side-lined in an attempt to promote the image of a united

implemented by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in 2010.

5 C/Hinchman & Hinchman 1997, Villa-Vicencio 2000, Pottier 2002, Stolten 2007, Parkier & Str ath 2010.

and reconciled nation. The struggle remains to hold together both the need for a unifying narrative that facilitates nation-building and for that narrative to remain inclusive and allow for contending voices to be heard (Weldon 1999: 274, Stolten 2007: 45).

In the case study of Rwanda, a large portion of the population was directly involved with violent crime as a result of a damaging and pervasive genocide ideology. As a result, the government opted for a dominant 'official' narrative, discouraging contending voices from being heard (Reyntjens 2011, Pottier 2002). The fear in Rwanda is that, if particular contending memories are allowed a voice, it may lead to renewed violence and division. The government has often referred to how, after World War II, the voice of the Nazi perpetrator was not allowed to be heard. Yet the late 1940s was a very different period in which the internet and global networks did not exist. The current danger is that the voices that are not welcome within the official narrative will continue to be heard, and if not in dialogue with the official narrative, then on the margins (McLean-Hilker 2011: 16, Hunt 2010: 91). As long as they remain on the margins, they remain a threat and cannot be integrated or challenged. Simon Turner (2008) describes this in the Burundian context, exploring the ways in which the Hutu in the diaspora used the internet as an alternative political space to air their views. I would argue that these voices on the margin need to be engaged, however dangerous or unhelpful their contributions are, in the hope that in the public discourse that ensues they will become less radical and marginalised and slowly be integrated into a deeper and richer shared narrative of which a wider group of people can become a part.

For our violent past to be remembered in such a way that it leads to reconciliation, it seems important that the collective memories that are formed are coherent and meaningful. However, a coherent narrative needs to remain flexible and complex to incorporate the many contending narratives of individuals (Singer & Rexhaj 2006). McAdams (2006: 215) writes that "Stories that succumb to a single dominant perspective, no matter how coherent they may seem to be, are too simplistic to be true; they fail to reflect lived experience". As nations construct collective memories and shared narratives, the challenge is to allow for flexibility and movement in those narratives. The inclusion of multiple voices and the space for those voices to be

in dialogue with one another seems to bring the necessary challenge to a potentially dominant narrative.

8. Conclusion

This article discussed memory in the context of the personal and collective narratives we develop in order to make sense of the world. When a traumatic event takes place, our personal and collective narratives are disrupted. Remembering the past involves integrating the trauma into our existing narratives. This article suggested that we can remember in ways that are healing and inclusive or in ways that lead to further wounding and revenge.

A cautionary note was made that we need to be careful when equating personal narratives, trauma and healing with collective and national processes. As Hamber & Wilson (2002) argue, nations do not have the same psyches as individuals. In fact, personal stories and pain are often lost in national projects of reconciliation, as happened to some extent in the case of both South Africa and Rwanda. However, these individual narratives also pose a necessary challenge to the construction of collective memory, ensuring that the narratives that develop are not too dominant or rigid.

The impact of memory on national identity was explored, describing how, in the case of South Africa, there was an emphasis on remembering in such a way that all South Africans might be rehumanised. In the case of Rwanda, the rapid changes since the genocide were discussed, resulting in Rwandans having to significantly transform the way in which they perceived themselves.

After nationwide trauma, narratives of the past need to be reconsidered in order to integrate the trauma in meaningful ways. This article discussed the importance of integrating all narratives, even those that are in conflict with the dominant narrative, so that the narratives on the margins do not become excluded and violent narratives but rather narratives that remain in dialogue and become part of the social discourse of a nation. This asks for individuals in a nation to remember together, sharing their stories, so that all the contending voices are heard.

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