

Moving on

*An interview study of
reconciliation practices
among war refugees*

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Master Thesis, Institute of Political Science,
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Moving on: An interview study of reconciliation practices among war refugees

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Institute of Political Science

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Oslo

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To my interviewees: Bon voyage!

To our beloved Emma Sophia, Sunniva Luna and Naomi Maria:

May you always find mercy, pursue justice and carry peace

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Summary

This thesis presents an interview study exploring reconciliation practices among war refugees to Norway from Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo and former Yugoslavia. Reconciliation is here understood as a process of (re)building relationship in which the identity and humanity of the other are acknowledged. Reconciliation is a key process on both a collective and an individual level after violent conflict, and has become the object of interdisciplinary scholarly attention. While most literature on reconciliation focuses on ‘the big picture’, on a system or principles level, this study is designed to give a ‘closer look’ on reconciliation as experienced and practiced by the individuals who make up society. The study applies social-psychological perspectives, including social identity theory and the common ingroup identity model, and methods informed by discourse analysis and phenomenology to answer the question of *what reconciliation practices survivors make use of to live on after war experiences*. This is linked to identity development and how survivors relate to ‘the others’ (the outgroup) today.

Some experiences are shared by all interviewees: Reconciliation is 1) important, 2) a long and complex process, and 3) both reflexive (an inner process) and relational (an interpersonal/intergroup process). The interviewees all differentiate between outgroup members and see some as guiltier than others, often leading to differential reconciliation. All have also, as refugees from ‘new wars’, experienced a troubling closeness to enemies, and tell about friends turned enemies and betrayals of trust.

Significant differences and contradictions are also found, however, drawing a complex picture of reconciliation. The main finding is that of three distinct reconciliation practices: Activism-expression, forgiveness-spirituality and distancing-avoidance. Reconciliation has different meanings when construed within different discourses, among them theological, psychological, legal, political and development discourses. There are also different constructions of ‘us’ (victims, misunderstood victims, nonvictims, purposed survivors) and ‘them’ (human/inhuman). Interviewees are positioned by ethnic background, but some position themselves more freely or creatively in relation to ethnicity; with a freedom of movement gained through experiences of complexity (e.g. the migration experience).

The complexity and different practices of reconciliation identified in this analysis can inform more realistic expectations to what reconciliation initiatives might achieve, and is an argument for a multi-level approach that acknowledges group and individual differences. The range of practices presented can also be viewed as a toolbox of resources for reconciliation.

Preface

In this thesis, my fascination for human togetherness and my naïve hope to contribute what I can to making the world a better place come together. The backdrop for my academic interest in reconciliation is a personal desire to relate to my fellow human beings in fruitful, forgiving ways. My own personal reconciliation processes are unfolding as I write.

Much of my inspiration for focusing on post-conflict reconciliation comes from people very dear to me. My grandparents' experiences from the Second World War combined with their values and faith to shape their life and active society involvement in a way that has inspired my own life profoundly. Friends with more recent war experiences and very different perspectives than those of an outsider have also nourished my curiosity.

Reconciliation is also important to me in its religious sense, central as it is in the Christian faith and life. The experience of the vital importance of forgiveness, grace and reconciled relationships in this context has motivated me to undertake the present study.

I am filled with gratitude as this project reaches completion. First, I thank my interviewees, who have enriched, humbled and impacted me greatly. I thank my supervisor, Inger Skjelsbæk at PRIO, for being so available and asking me the right questions. Her clear thoughts and empathetic advice have been a vital support throughout this process. My secondary supervisor, Nora Sveaass, has been a fresh breath of inspiration with her global perspectives from tireless human rights efforts. Stiftelsen Arkivet has supported this study with a master degree grant. I am grateful for my time in the dynamic environment at Arkivet, and would like to thank Kjetil Grørdum in particular for his feedback on my project. I thank all my wonderful colleagues at Ansgar University College, and especially Ingunn Folkestad Breistein, Antonio Barbosa da Silva and Ingrid Eskilt for comments on my papers and continuous encouragement. I also thank Paul Leer-Salvesen for reading and responding to my work. I am grateful to KiA, Vest-Agder Røde Kors, Liv Mørland and Birgit Lie for their helpfulness, and to my dear friend Randi Løvslund Olstad for 'walking with me' through this as well. And finally, I thank my family for their love and support: My parents for everything from their legacy of faith, hope and love to practical help with the kids, Morten and Helena, Thomas, Suelen and Stella, my family-in-law for long-distance care and encouragement, and the joy of my everyday life: Christoforos, Emma Sophia, Sunniva and Naomi Maria.

Hildegunn Marie Tønnessen Schuff
Kristiansand/Nodeland, Norway, May 2010

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1 Introduction

Our world is not only hurting from ongoing violent conflicts, but also from the wars and oppressive regimes of the past. It is not over when a peace treaty is signed. In societies that have gone through severe violence, reconciliation is a central task and a key to a peaceful future in which different groups can interact constructively. When such reconciliation is not achieved, the society might be marred by returning violence and a deeply divided population.

Also for individuals, reconciliation can be seen as the central process in coming to terms with war experiences and finding ways to live on and relate constructively to oneself and one's own life story, to former enemies and to the world. War refugees find themselves undergoing this process outside of their home country. In such transnational post-conflict lives, reconciliation processes might affect both host societies and countries of origin.

In sum, reconciliation is decisive for how the repercussions of war affect individuals, groups and societies. Acknowledging this vital role of reconciliation, I set out to explore reconciliation practices after civil war and genocide. The empirical basis of the study is interviews with twelve war refugees to Norway from DR Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and former Yugoslavia, as well as a written measure of their self-expressed identity. The material was collected and analyzed within a social-psychological theoretical framework, inspired by communication theory and cross-disciplinary perspectives on reconciliation, and a discourse-analytical methodological framework also drawing on phenomenology.

The purpose of the study is to add to the understanding of reconciliation practices and experiences, hoping this might contribute to post-conflict reconciliation in the lives of individuals and societies.

1.1 Research questions

Much of the present literature on reconciliation focuses on 'the big picture', on institutions and system level interventions or on abstract principles. This study, however, is designed to give a 'closer look' on reconciliation – as it is experienced and practiced by the individuals who make up society. Simply put, this is based on social-psychological perspectives on the human being as a social person, and on a phenomenological interest in phenomena as they appear to people. I therefore set out to explore the following main research question:

- What reconciliation practices do war refugees make use of to live on after war?

By *reconciliation practices* I mean practices¹ that contribute or are intended to contribute to reconciliation. As an elaboration of the main question, I will look at what reconciliation practices mean in terms of *post-conflict identity development* and how the war refugees *relate to ‘the others’* today. I will return to central concepts such as identity and relating to ‘the others’ in chapter 2.

At the outset of the study, I expected to find interaction between communication and identity processes (based on among others Dovidio et al., 2008). Relations might be influenced by the post-conflict conflicting identities, and identity development influenced by contact with former enemies. I have visualized my pre-understanding in figure 1.1².

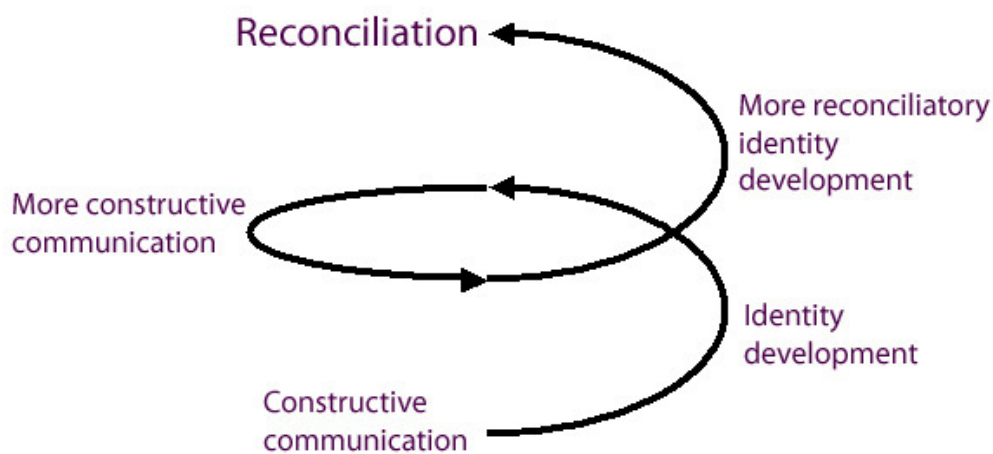


Figure 1.1: Communication/identity processes in reconciliation, pre-understanding

As I met with the interviewees, however, I found that there might be more roads to reconciliation than the one I had envisioned (cf. figure 1.1). Three distinct reconciliation practices emerged, linked to different forms of identity development and relating to ‘the others’, as well as to different constructions of the concept of reconciliation itself. Before turning to this nuancing of ‘reconciliation’, however, I provide a preliminary definition.

1.2 A preliminary definition of reconciliation³

Reconciliation has been thematized within a range of academic disciplines (cf. chapter 2), and not surprisingly, there is no canonical definition of the term. The etymological meaning of the word ‘reconciliation’, from the Latin ‘re-’ (again) and ‘-concil-’ (assembly, group of people, meeting), is *bringing (people) back together again*. This can be understood as a relational

¹ Practice includes discourse, as I see discourse as interwoven with (or as a form of) practice (cf. Edley, 2001).

² Reconciliation, here positioned as the outcome, can also be understood as the process itself (cf. 1.2).

³ This section draws on my earlier papers on the subject (Schuff, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b).

process (Lederach, 2001), and though no commonly established definition exists, there seems to be rather widespread consensus on this one point; namely, the relational aspect of reconciliation (Hjort & Frisen, 2006). I also consider the relational aspect central to reconciliation. On this basis, reconciliation can be defined as a restoration or (re)establishment of relationships that have been broken, violated or characterized by hostility – as a move from destructive to constructive relationship – between individuals or groups.

Reconciliation can be understood both as a process and as the outcome of this process. Among the elements that are most commonly mentioned as parts of the *process*, are

- truth seeking/telling
- acknowledgement of wrongdoing/regret/repentance
- forgiveness
- partial retribution/compensation/justice
- identity transformation
- contact/communication/possibly cooperation

There is an ongoing discussion about the place and interaction of these elements in the dynamics of reconciliation (see for instance Helmick & Petersen, 2001). For the present purpose it will suffice to say that all these elements, while also having intrinsic value, contribute towards reconciliation inasmuch as they lead towards reestablished relationship.

As an *outcome*, reconciliation in its fullest sense yields more than nonviolent coexistence; it facilitates positive mutual interaction (Kaufman, 2006; Schuff, 2008a). This claim, however, is somewhat disputed. Borneman (2002) defines reconciliation not in terms of permanent peace or harmony, “but as a project of departure from violence”, in an agreement “to render no longer opposed” (Borneman, 2002, p. 282). I agree with him that reconciliation cannot realistically be framed as a problem-free state of affairs, and that there will be conflicts also in what can be termed a reconciled society, but I would still argue that reconciliation means more than refraining from violence. Such a state, where relations between groups cease to be violent and destructive, without necessarily entailing a potential for positive interaction, can more precisely be termed ‘coexistence’ (Minow & Chayes, 2003) – a less ambitious and sometimes more realistic goal than full reconciliation after atrocities.

Reconciliation in relational terms then involves some potential for constructive interaction, and is a two-way process. It also, however, seems to make sense to many to speak

of a one-sided or reflexive form of reconciliation (Leer-Salvesen, 2009a)⁴. This would imply one of the parties reconciling with the past, accepting life as it became, possibly also extending potential forgiveness and goodwill ('will to embrace', cf. Volf, 1996) to the other – independent of the other's participation in the process, in order to 'go on with life' while reducing the destructive effects of the conflict.

A somewhat related perspective links reconciliation to identity change. After dehumanizing violence, the humanity of the 'enemy' needs to be restored, in a fundamental redefinition of the images held of self, other and the possibilities for relationship (Hjort & Frisen, 2006; Vetlesen, 2005). Similarly, the key element in Kelman's definition of reconciliation (2008) is mutual acceptance of the other's identity and humanity.

Whether relational or reflexive, reconciliation can be achieved to different degrees (Kaufman, 2006), as proposed by Sluzki (2003) in his 'multistage road to reconciliation':

1. Conflict ("Hostility is the only option")
2. Coexistence ("We are ready for hostile acts when needed")
3. Collaboration ("Hostilities are a fall-back option")
4. Cooperation ("Hostilities would be a major disadvantage")
5. Interdependence ("We need each other")
6. Integration ("We are one")

This sequential approach to reconciliation makes sense conceptually, but might complicate operationalization even further. Another factor in this is that reconciliation is necessarily contextual. Based on the relational definition above, any process towards reconciliation needs to address the specific obstacles to relationship in that context.

In sum, reconciliation is here understood as a process of restoring or (re)building a relationship in which the identity and humanity of the other are acknowledged. The completion of this process does not only imply nonviolent coexistence, but opens up the possibility of constructive and mutually beneficial interaction.

Operationalizing and measuring reconciliation

'Reconciliation' is a challenging term to operationalize and measure, both because of varying definitions, and because it is an intangible phenomenon. Reconciliation is also likely to be unevenly distributed in any given population, since it is an individual and subjective phenomenon as much as it is collective and intersubjective. For an academic discussion of

⁴ A similar distinction is made in psychological literature on forgiveness, between interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness (Gravås & Velund, 2008).

reconciliation, however, precise operationalization and measurement must be sought. Stover and Weinstein (2004, p. 340) underline the need to “develop empirical tools for defining and measuring reconciliation and how it unfolds at the individual, community and societal level”.

This challenging task has been solved in different ways, as a comparison of two studies on reconciliation after ethnic conflict illustrates⁵. Looking at reconciliation in South Africa, political scientist Gibson (2006) divides the term into four subdimensions to be able to operationalize and measure it; 1) interracial reconciliation, 2) political tolerance, 3) support for human rights principles, and 4) the extension of legitimacy to the political institutions⁶. In a social-psychological study of ethnic identity and reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the other hand, Hjort and Frisen (2006) relate reconciliation to cross-ethnic friendships, measured in terms of 1) number of cross-ethnic friends, 2) frequency of contact with these friends, and 3) estimated intimacy in the friendships. Additionally, their participants were asked to estimate how desirable and realistic they considered reconciliation to be. One might question whether these two measures could be considered to assess the same phenomenon.

Having linked reconciliation to relationship and identity above, I will argue that reconciliation is best explored as a both subjective/experienced and intersubjective/relational phenomenon. Reconciliation understood in this way is hard to pin down through outsider observation, and calls for a listening process to grasp the insider perspective as far as possible. In this study I therefore chose to conduct qualitative interviews, and to ‘operationalize’ and ‘measure’ reconciliation in dialogue with the interviewees. In addition to trying, in a general way, to capture the interviewees’ own experience of how the reconciliation process was unfolding, I looked at 1) willingness to interact with former enemy group members, 2) actual interaction with former enemy group members and 3) how relevant conflict-related social identities were perceived to be today.

Structure of the thesis

In the following, I will present the theoretical background of this study (chapter 2), the methods used (chapter 3), and the context of my interviewees, in terms of conflict and migration experiences (chapter 4). I proceed to present my findings and analysis (chapter 5) and discuss their implications (chapter 6), before I round up with my concluding reflections (chapter 7).

⁵ I first made this comparison in Schuff (2008b).

⁶ Naturally, these subdimensions also need operationalization, about which Gibson does not provide detail.

2 Approaches to reconciliation

Reconciliation is a concept that has been approached in many different ways, within several academic disciplines. Historically, it stems from the vocabulary of religion and theology (Kelman, 2008). In religious contexts it “designates the re-establishment of a broken relationship between man and a deity (God)” – with a “close connection between the admission of guilt on the one part and the offering of forgiveness on the other” (Vetlesen, 2005, p. 273). In Christian theology, reconciliation refers to the restoration of a life-giving relationship between God and human beings, through the forgiveness of sins granted in Jesus, through his incarnation, death on the cross and resurrection⁷. It has been argued that forgiveness stands out in the message of Jesus of Nazareth as a concept that can be of particular relevance for the wider society (Arendt 1959, Leer-Salvesen 2009). As part of this message, interpersonal forgiveness and reconciliation is also encouraged, and there are also a range of theological resources available to motivate and give meaning to social and societal reconciliation (Leer-Salvesen, 1998, 2009a; Schuff, 2008a; Tutu, 1999; Volf, 1996).

In recent decades, in the post-Cold War context, the concept of reconciliation has been adopted into a range of fields beyond religious studies. It has been argued that reconciliation is necessarily a multidisciplinary theme (Brown & Poremski, 2005). Philosophers discuss the true meaning and value of reconciliation, and whether it can take place collectively or only between individual agents (e.g. Vetlesen, 2005). In psychology, the connection between reconciliation and identity redefinition has been emphasized, as well as intergroup contact, trust and bias (Hjort & Frisen, 2006; Nadler, Malloy, & Fisher, 2008). Reconciliation has also been thematized within different subfields of psychology; in political psychology, with an emphasis on the interaction between individual and collective reconciliation processes (Lavik & Sveaass, 2005; Monroe, 2002); in positive psychology, as a virtue that helps individuals and communities overcome and flourish (Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). Within political science the societal mechanisms of reconciliation have been considered, e.g. in terms of the contributions of truth and justice to reconciliation (Gibson, 2006; Skaar, Gloppen, & Suhrke, 2005), as well as the fundamental question of how post-conflict reconciliation can come about and contribute to establishing a stable peace in a functioning polity. Related issues of guilt, victimhood and transitional justice have also been addressed in law and human rights studies.

⁷ Bible reference, as an example among several: “When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...” Romans 5:10.

Especially after the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South-Africa (1995-1998), attention to reconciliation within the social sciences increased drastically (Kelman, 2008). Over the course of the last two decades, a relatively broad academic consensus has emerged within the social sciences concerning the importance of post-conflict reconciliation (Helmick & Petersen, 2001; Kaufman, 2006; Long & Brecke, 2003; Nadler, et al., 2008). This generates a need for improved knowledge about reconciliation processes; as reconciliation has become a widely used, but still theoretically underdeveloped concept (Brown & Poremski, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). There is also a need for concretizations when it comes to how reconciliation can be created and supported (Kelman, 2008).

It is the intention behind this project to contribute to this knowledge development and concretizations of the reconciliation process, as I build on earlier theoretical approaches and tie these to empirical experiences of war refugees. Working within the multidisciplinary field of peace and conflict studies, my perspective will primarily be based in social psychology.

Within the field of peace and conflict studies, political scientist Kaufman (2006) has argued for the need for a focus on reconciliation in peace-building, particularly after civil wars, based on his symbolic politics theory. In his line of reasoning, symbolic action, communication and identity politics are central in both ‘war-building’ and peace-building. For full conflict resolution, hostility must be addressed by promoting “not just peace, but also reconciliation, addressing the emotional foundations of hostile political attitudes, and their symbolic expression, to help stabilize peace” (Kaufman, 2006, p. 202). Kaufman promotes both identity processes (reconstructing nationalist discourses) and reconciliatory communication processes, e.g. in the media, school curriculum and dialogue groups.

Long and Brecke (2003) conducted a broad comparative study, investigating 11 cases of civil war and 8 of international war in the 20th century followed by public reconciliation events. They conclude that reconciliation comes about differently after each type of war. After international war, negotiations in which the parties made concessions and signaled a will to compromise led to reconciliation, in line with mainstream rational choice models. After civil war, on the other hand, reconciliation attempts were successful (that is, violence did not recur) only when they followed the four steps of what Long and Brecke term *the forgiveness model*:

1. Truth-telling
2. Redefinition of social identities
3. Partial justice
4. Call for new relationship

Long and Brecke draw on psychology and neuroscience to argue that emotional dimensions in conflict must be acknowledged, moving beyond narrow understandings of rationality. Their forgiveness model underlines the importance of identity, relationships, narratives and moral in societal reconciliation processes after civil war – arguably relevant to this study, in which all interviewees have experienced civil war. Against this background we can complete the leap into psychology in this search for fruitful approaches to reconciliation.

2.1 The social psychology of reconciliation

Social psychology has long concerned itself with intergroup conflict and intergroup relations (e.g. Chrysochoou, 2004; Hogg & Abrams, 2001). The current focus on reconciliation within social-psychological theory and research since the 1990s is rooted in this tradition (Nadler, et al., 2008), with identity processes and group relations as common turning points.

In a recent volume that brings together a range of social-psychological approaches to reconciliation (Nadler, et al., 2008), Nadler and Shnabel (2008) distinguish between two types of intergroup reconciliation; instrumental reconciliation and socioemotional reconciliation. These are tied to changes in adversarial relations and changes in the adversaries' identities, respectively. *Instrumental reconciliation* involves an improved relationship between the parties; by finding ways to cooperate towards instrumental goals and coexist peacefully in the present and future. *Socioemotional reconciliation*, on the other hand, addresses the past and aims at restoring a secure and worthy identity for all parties by overcoming the emotional barriers of victimhood, guilt and identity threats that remain after the conflict.

This distinction between instrumental, relationship-related reconciliation on the one hand and socioemotional, identity-related reconciliation on the other is comparable to Kelman's (2008) distinction between conflict resolution (understood as relationship change) and reconciliation (understood as identity change). It also mirrors the significant difference political scientists Long and Brecke (2003) found between reconciliation processes after international and civil wars (cf. above). After international wars, improved relations and instrumental cooperation (instrumental reconciliation) might suffice for the parties to coexist peacefully. After civil wars, on the other hand, the parties are required to live together, and integration is the goal. In these cases, a forgiveness model, involving addressing emotional aspects and a redefinition of identities (socioemotional reconciliation), was found necessary.

Even though reconciliation as identity change and as relationship change can be distinguished analytically, Nadler and Shnabel (2008) recognize that the two processes are interrelated. I will now further examine identity (2.2) and relationships (2.3) in reconciliation.

2.2 Identity: Selves and others

Identity is a term used in many ways. It can refer to identification and categorization, self-concept and subjective location in the social world, belonging and a sense of attachment to a group (Prieur, 2004). As the origin of the word shows (from Latin, *idem*, ‘the same’), it has to do with sameness and difference; with our understanding and expression of ourselves as individuals and groups (personal and social identity, respectively). Identity is here understood as an organized, contextually activated set of self-concepts that both shapes and is shaped by our interaction with the world (Simon, 2004).

Identity is, as we have seen, a key element in several social-psychological approaches to reconciliation. As previously mentioned, the key element in Kelman’s (2008) definition of reconciliation is mutual acceptance of the other’s identity and humanity.

Identity development will also be influenced by life events and contextual changes; such as the migration experience that the interviewees in this study have had. Migrants may face identity challenges due to the ‘triple burden of trauma, uprooting and settlement’ (Lie, 2003), but can also find a new start which might hold a potential for reconciliatory identity change (cf. 4.2).

Nadler and Shnabler (2008), in their needs-based model of socioemotional reconciliation, focus on identity threats. They argue that threats to the parties’ identities constitute an emotional barrier to reconciliation. For victims of a conflict situation, the main threat to their identity is powerlessness – a threat to their identity as powerful actors. Perpetrators, on the other hand, suffer a threat to their identity as moral actors. Ameliorating these threats will restore the parties’ identities – in terms of the victims’ sense of power and the perpetrators’ moral image – which will increase the willingness of all parties to reconcile. Intergroup apologies, acceptance of responsibility (from perpetrator) and expressions of empathy (from victim) may ameliorate these threats. Often both parties will view themselves as victims, and such ‘double victimhood’ makes reconciliation more difficult.

A somewhat similar approach is pursued by Pratto and Glasford (2008), who focus on identity needs. According to them, basic identity needs such as the need for self-esteem, the need to belong and the need for self-integrity can add to intergroup conflict, but also motivate

reconciliation. The important difference lies in whether or not these needs are recognized and met, for those who have harmed and been harmed. One example is how the need to belong can be destructive when it causes people to turn to their ingroup and affirm their pride in it; which delineates group boundaries and can be perceived as threatening by other groups. If, on the other hand, this identity need to belong is met by an attempt at humanizing the other in the conflict – e.g. through information that helps victims understand the roots of intergroup violence and evil as a potential all humans share, or by appealing to a common ingroup – the need to belong might motivate a common identification that transcends old group boundaries and opens up for reconciliation (Pratto & Glasford, 2008). They here refer to Gaertner et. al. (1989)'s work on identification processes related to ingroup-outgroup distinctions. Their 'common ingroup identity model' argues for the benefits of recategorization, the formation of identities that transcend former group boundaries and are conducive to reconciliation.

Social identity theory and the common ingroup identity model

The common ingroup identity model is based on social identity theory⁸; an analytical framework for understanding processes surrounding group membership. The central idea of social identity theory is that "being categorized as members of certain groups provides an important part of the self-concept of individuals" (Brannan, Esler, & Strindberg, 2001, p. 17). Our self-concepts include both personal and social identity. Our social identity involves multiple aspects, related to our identification with several different groups (e.g. in terms of gender, nationality, ethnicity, organization membership, occupation and work place). During war the group identity as members of the contending sides of the conflict are highly relevant and can be considered more salient identity categories, activated by the conflict setting. Arguably, subjects in a war context are likely to be seen less as individuals and more as members or affiliates of the contending parties; what matters is primarily whether one is e.g. Hutu or Tutsi; Bosnian Muslim, Serb or Croat.

Social identity theory further sets forth three basic processes that are responsible for intergroup behaviour. Social categorization is the process through which we place people into categories that we are able to handle cognitively, by accentuation and contrast. Social identification happens when we categorize ourselves as part of certain groups, our *ingroups*, and link our self-esteem to this categorization. Finally, social comparison is the process through which we contrast our ingroups with other groups, our *outgroups*, favouring our own

⁸ This presentation of social identity theory is based on a section of an earlier term paper (Schuff, 2007a).

group. This ingroup bias is an expression among many of the human quest for a positive self-concept (Chrysochoou, 2004; Hogg & Abrams, 2001).

Building on this framework, some of the basic premises for the common ingroup identity model are the concepts of ingroups and outgroups, and how human cognition and emotion are biased by social categorization processes to favor ingroup members. These processes constitute a psychological basis for intergroup hostility and war. The same social identity processes can, however, also be targeted in the pursuit of intergroup reconciliation (Dovidio, et al., 2008). One such approach to promoting reconciliation is *deategorization*; emphasizing the individual qualities of others to make opposing identities (i.e., status as an outgroup member) less salient. This might turn out to be problematic because it goes against the human proneness to categorize and seek belonging⁹. An alternative strategy, then, proposed by the common ingroup identity model, is *recategorization*; “whereby members of different groups are induced to conceive of themselves as a single, more inclusive superordinate group rather than as two completely separate groups” (Dovidio, et al., 2008, p. 234). This can lead to a one-group representation or to a dual identity (‘two subgroups in one group’). Recategorization should lead to more positive attitudes and cognition and emotion towards former outgroup members, as they become beneficiaries of ingroup bias.

Gaertner et. al. (1989) first developed the common ingroup identity model through controlled experimental studies, and there were warnings that such a strategy might backfire in the natural context of real groups in society, because of threat to the distinctiveness of the groups (Dovidio, et al., 2008; Hogg & Abrams, 2001, p. 354). Consecutive findings have, however, shown the relevance of the model also in real-life situations; e.g. in Black-White relations in the United States of America, in a context of longstanding discrimination and hostility, but also with a potential to build common identity based on shared citizenship and centuries of common history (Dovidio, et al., 2008). The present study can be considered a contribution to the exploration of how well the model fits how identification, categorization and reconciliation processes play out in the ‘natural context of real groups in society’.

2.3 Relating across conflict boundaries

Contact and communication with outgroups will be affected by group boundaries, but also potentially challenge them. *Communication* is the process of intentionally making something

⁹ The pervasiveness of group identities can be explained by how they “may confer important psychological benefits in terms of maintaining personal self-esteem and wellbeing” (Dovidio, et al., 2008, p. 234).

common or known to others (Blakar & Nafstad, 2004) – a concept that can encompass a wide range of phenomena on a societal, intergroup or interpersonal level. Among the communication processes that have been mentioned as relevant for post-conflict reconciliation we find media discourse, political debate, public apologies, reconciliation ceremonies, school curriculum, dialogue meetings and informal contact in local communities and between individuals (Kaufman, 2006; Long & Brecke, 2003; Waldron & Kelley, 2008)¹⁰.

One of the basic tenets of communication theory is the importance of context and one's framing of the other ('sender' and 'receiver'). This implies that a context of conflict and ingroup-outgroup positioning will complicate communication, e.g. increase the incidence of misunderstandings and hostile attribution. The challenges a *post-conflict context* pose might include distrust, disrespect, negative emotions and negative attributions; factors that are likely to severely limit the possibilities of constructive communication. A history of hostility may for instance affect how a message from the other is received, and lead the recipient of the message to choose an oppositional reading of it, i.e. interpret it in a way that resists and opposes the sender's intentions¹¹.

There is a very limited amount of academic literature available which focuses explicitly on the role of communication in reconciliation. Still, one might see communication as conceptually linked to relational reconciliation; since such a 'coming together again' and restoration of relationships necessarily would include communication between those who come together. And indeed; communication, contact and dialogue are often seen as key factors in reconciliation processes (Føyn, 1996; Justad, 2005).

Within the cross-disciplinary academic field of communication studies, some attention has been given to the communication of forgiveness, notably by Waldron and Kelley (2008). Forgiveness and reconciliation are separate, but closely related concepts¹², and much of what is presented by Waldron and Kelley will also have relevance for the communication of reconciliation. I have drawn inspiration from their definition of forgiveness as a relational process, as well as their approach to communication as a tool for redefining relationships.

¹⁰ The interviewees in this study were asked if they have participated in or perceived any such expressions of reconciliatory communication.

¹¹ Stuart Hall differentiates between a preferred reading, a negotiated reading and an oppositional reading. The understanding that the sender may intend something other than what the recipient receives is basic in communication studies, and can be linked to Hall's concepts of encoding and decoding (Kolstrup, Agger, Jauert, & Schrøder, 2009). Meaning is not just transmitted 'untainted' or in some essential form; it must be encoded by the sender into some language or symbol system, and later decoded by the recipient. These encoding-decoding-processes are influenced by identity, conflictual histories and other contextual elements.

¹² Reconciliation can be seen as a possible, but not necessary outcome of forgiveness. The two processes are often intertwined, and share some features, e.g. that emotional transformation from negative to positive is central to the process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Waldron and Kelley propose that “reconciliation is facilitated by communicative processes that cultivate more adaptive emotional expressions” (Waldron & Kelley, 2008, p. 145) and mention the relational rituals of long-term married couples as an example. In addition to this emotional transformation, reconciliation entails the renegotiation of values and a reestablishment of meaning in the relationship. Based on their research on long-term married couples, Waldron and Kelley (2008, pp. 147-149) share some advice for staying together after serious transgressions: 1) Acknowledge wrongdoing, 2) apologize sincerely, 3) address emotion explicitly, 4) request outside assistance, 5) forgive and remember, 6) use time to advantage, 7) invoke spiritual values. Even though these tips stem from interpersonal communication in quite a different setting than post-war contexts, there is a great deal of potential transference here. This can be seen by comparing this list to models of societal reconciliation that include many of the same elements (Long & Brecke, 2003; Tutu, 1999).

Drawing on dialectics and uncertainty management, Waldron and Kelley also propose that ‘forgiving communication’ needs to address tensions, paradoxes, uncertainty and trust issues to succeed. Within communication theory, there are also perspectives that link communication to identity management. Identity management theories of communication hold that transgressions are “potential threats to the identities of the offender and the victim” – consequently, communication strategies are more or less successful “because they vary in the extent to which they protect the identity of the offended party” (Waldron & Kelley, 2008, p. 55). Communication strategies that protect and support the identity of the other will in light of this contribute more to reconciliation than those that threaten the other’s identity.

Within most social psychology that deals with reconciliation, identity and intergroup relations, ‘communication’ is much less frequently used than the related term *contact*. According to the contact hypothesis, arguably a classic of social psychology (Chrysochoou, 2004; Hogg & Abrams, 2001), contact between different groups (e.g. ethnic groups, former enemies) can contribute towards improved relations and reconciliation if certain conditions are met. Among the decisive factors are equal status for the groups, social and institutional support, cooperative interdependence and acquaintance potential. These factors can also be framed as constituting a context conducive to communication.

Relating across conflict boundaries and other barriers, be they cultural, ethnic or socioeconomic, may to some appear to be a modern phenomenon to be found in a newly globalized world. Conflict, however, is arguably as old as humanity. Several scholars have noted the many historical, religious and cross-cultural sources of inspiration to draw from in order to pursue communication that transcends conflict boundaries. Models for conflict

resolution among Native Americans and the African concept of ubuntu are but a few of many examples of this (Lee, 2001). Desmond Tutu has developed what he calls ubuntu theology, drawing on the indigenous ubuntu concept ('I am because you are', 'We belong together') and on universal dimensions of Christian theology: That all are created by God, and therefore we should not accept the treatment of anyone as less than a child of God (Battle, 1997; Tutu, 1999). This was his fundamental motivation for chairing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa and his message to the South African people. A well-known South-Asian example of such universal identification that made a difference in world history is Mahatma Gandhi's insistence that "all men are brothers", his goal being "friendship with all the world" (Gandhi, Kripalani, & Galtung, 1999, p. 165).

Tschudi (2006) argues that the use of such indigenous concepts and tools is a key to be able to motivate whole populations towards reconciliation. A dimension many of these local cultural and religious inspirational sources have in common is the possibility of universal identification: In other words, a humanization of former enemies (or in social-psychological terms, of outgroup members); an acknowledgement of the human dignity of the other. The question is then how communication processes can support the development of a more universal identity, which would entail a new relationship with 'the other'.

I have here tried to summarize some of the pre-understanding in terms of theoretical approaches and premises I brought with me to the interviews in this study. More specifically, I have attempted to identify identity dynamics as outlined above when asking interviewees about their contact and relations with the groups that were parties to the conflict, and what groups they identify with today. At the same time, a fundamental quality of qualitative research interviews is that knowledge is constructed in the meeting between interviewer and interviewee, and this implies openness to letting the project and its approaches change and take other turns than what was originally planned. The relevance of the proposed connections between identity, group relations, communication and reconciliation must be tested against the empirical life-world of the interviewees – and other dimensions might come to the fore in the process of these inter-view meetings, to which we now turn.

3 Methods

Kvale (1996) presents two metaphors for the research interviewer’s role, based on differing epistemologies; the interviewer as a miner and as a traveler. The interviewer-miner attempts to unearth the valuable buried metal she understands knowledge to be from the interviewee’s interior; nuggets of already existing data, ideally pure pieces of meaning, unpolluted by leading questions. Contrary to this the *interviewer-traveler* explores a landscape, entering into conversations with the people she encounters, listening to stories from their life worlds. Knowledge is constructed as “the potentialities of meaning in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4).

The present text is a traveler’s tale, in which I will outline the steps I have undertaken (table 3.1), why I have chosen them, and validity issues and other dilemmas I faced along the way, in an attempt at assessing how the present findings analysis might contribute and be useful in a larger context.

Table 3.1: Overview of methods in the present study

Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of literature • Qualitative research interviews with 12 war refugees to Norway from the Balkans and the Great Lakes region of Africa • Twenty Statements Test (TST) from the 12 interviewees
Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription, with reflections and preliminary category development • Case descriptions • Discourse analysis of interview transcripts and TSTs • Check of understanding with interviewees • Drawing implications of case findings for theory and practice
Data presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description/analysis of findings with selected quotes and summarizing tables • Discussion of findings and their implications

3.1 Choice of methods

My choice of qualitative research interviews as the main method of data collection in this study follows from my understanding of reconciliation as a largely subjective/experienced and intersubjective/relational phenomenon. As argued above (1.2), reconciliation processes are difficult to grasp through outsider observation, let alone to quantify. The sheer complexity of the matter also invites a qualitative approach. The necessity of exploring reconciliation ‘from within’, as much as possible, implies that the voice of those involved must have primacy. Based on this, I chose as my empirical basis interviews with war survivors.

The decision to conduct interviews is also inspired by phenomenology. It is a goal of this study to grasp the meaning people ascribe to their experiences of the phenomenon of reconciliation, and it can therefore be situated within the field of phenomenological approaches. Simply put, this makes *listening* a key activity of the research process. In keeping with the phenomenological emphasis on experienced meanings and the primacy of the life world as it appears to subjects, the qualitative interview is usually seen as a suitable method of data collection (Postholm, 2005), because it “gives a privileged access to our basic experience of the lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 54). This also implies that reconciliation *as it appears to the interviewees* is a valid element in an academic understanding of reconciliation, and “not merely a few entertaining curiosities in addition to some basic scientific quantitative facts obtained by experiments and questionnaires” (Kvale, 1996, p. 54).

Reconciliation can be analyzed at different levels; at the individual, interpersonal, intergroup or societal level. The different levels or systems meet and are intertwined in the experience of the individual¹³. In line with the phenomenological approach I have let the interviewees’ accounts determine which levels of reconciliation are brought up, and gone on to treat several levels in my analysis. In my concluding discussion, however, I attempt to separate individual from society-level implications.

In preparation for the interviews, I conducted a literary review about reconciliation, to situate this study within the field and relate to other findings and approaches in the ongoing academic conversation that the present study aims at being a contribution to. Steinar Kvale refers to this situation of interview studies in a wider context as participating in ‘conversations about conversations’ (1996, p. 295):

In current philosophy there is an emphasis on validity of knowledge to be constructed through a discourse. In this view (...) conversation permeates the entire process of social science inquiry. Research is conceived as conversation, with the subjects of a study, with the scientific community, and with a wider public. Social research becomes one mode of expanding the historical conversation of humankind.

In the process of reviewing literature I also found a way of accessing identities or self-attitudes that I chose to use to supplement the semi-structured interviews. The Twenty Statements Test (TST) was chosen to give the interviewees a more open and decontextualized opportunity to express aspects of her/his identity, by answering the open question “Who am I?” twenty times, without any suggested categories.

¹³ In this I draw on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, in which the individual is seen as interwoven in systems on multiple levels, all of which influence her development and life world.

The TST was developed to identify and measure self-attitudes (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). Developed in the field of sociology, but later also used in psychological studies, it has been seen as a fairly direct way of assessing a subject's overt attitudes towards herself, her conscious view of her own identity¹⁴. In my application of the TST, I choose to view it in discourse-analytical terms, as an assessment of how a subject positions herself and represents herself in discourse (cf. Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). I consider the open-ended TST measure useful in exploring whether my participants choose to represent themselves in terms of e.g. ethnicity, citizenship, religion or refugee status; in other words, what ingroups they express identification with. The choice of this procedure is also related to my theoretical conceptualization of identity as consisting of several aspects that are contextually activated (Simon, 2004). Even though self-measurement can be elusive, and the TST has been found to not necessarily measure the same construct as other measures (Grace & Cramer, 2003), it is commonly used and will hopefully serve my purposes here, as I am not trying to capture the 'self' in any essential way, but a self-representation of my interviewees' identity.

The approaches to data analysis I have chosen follow from related theoretical and methodological foundations, inspired by phenomenology and discourse analysis. Since my data material is textual, I found it useful to draw on methodological resources from the broad and relatively diverse field of discourse analysis (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999), with particular emphasis on discursive psychology. I consider this approach complementary to the aforementioned impulses from phenomenology, in that phenomenology leads to *acknowledging* and *trusting* the subjects' expression of their experience, while discursive psychology implies *questioning* experience and its verbal expression. Discourse analysis, particularly in the form of discursive psychology, is a way of reading text that implies an understanding of language as performative, and of talk and text as social action (J. A. Smith, 2008) – in other words, as strategic means of representing oneself and the world in particular and positioned ways (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999).

3.2 Design

In a qualitative research project such as the present study, the different tasks of the research process – that conventionally have been understood as different stages that unfold in a certain

¹⁴ Kuhn and McPartland (1954, p. 74) originally designed the TST to obtain "general self-attitudes rather than simply ones which might be idiosyncratic to the test situation", looking at consensual and minority/majority affiliations. Later, the TST has been used in several studies on ethnic, national and cultural identities (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Kinket & Verkuyten, 1997; Saeed, Blain, & Forbes, 1999).

chronological order – will necessarily be intertwined, and each ‘stage’ will be revisited at many points throughout the process (Flick, 2002; J. A. Smith, 2008). I will nevertheless – for the sake of simplicity and clarity – describe my research design in the order outlined in table 3.1; moving from data collection through data analysis to data presentation. Within these three modes of the research process, there are different tasks to tackle, and I used Kvale’s (1996) ‘7 stages of interview research’ as points of reference: 1) thematizing, 2) designing, 3) interviewing, 4) transcribing, 5) analyzing, 6) verifying and 7) reporting.

3.2.1 Data collection

While thematizing and designing this study, I started my data collection with a literary review – primarily of literature from psychology and the cross-disciplinary field of peace studies. I also included selected readings from communication theory, philosophy, ethics and theology. Important keywords in my literature searches, apart from ‘reconciliation’ itself, were related concepts such as ‘forgiveness’, ‘peacebuilding’ and ‘transitional justice’. I then focused my search by combining these with ‘identity’, ‘communication’ and ‘contact’¹⁵.

During this textual journey through library search engines and reference lists pointing me onwards to other scholarly works, I formed a multilayered understanding of reconciliation informed by a range of perspectives and disciplines. Based on this, I formulated the theoretical backdrop of the study (chapter 2), my research questions (chapter 1), interview invitations and interview guide (cf. attachments). I also reviewed literature on conflict backgrounds and research methods. The literary review continued throughout the study, and will in reality never be complete, seeing that the multidisciplinary of the field combines with ever new publications to make any exhaustive overview unattainable.

The interviewees

I have chosen to interview refugees with a background from war or genocide, establishing as a first selection criterion that war affected them enough to cause their migration to Norway. I term all my interviewees ‘refugees’, seeing them as “subject to forced migration due to political, ethnical or religious persecution, conflicts, wars and natural disasters” (Lie, 2003, p. 10)¹⁶. Exactly half (6 out of 12) had become Norwegian citizens at the time of the interview.

¹⁵ The main challenge turned out to be finding literature that combined insights about reconciliation and communication; a combination that seems to largely have been left unexplored up until now.

¹⁶ I have not checked how they were defined by the authorities upon entry to Norway, but rely on their stories.

As a second criterion for selection I decided on a geographical focus, consisting of two different regions; the Balkans and the Great Lakes region (for specifications and background, cf. 4.1). I wanted to interview people from different sides of the same conflict, in order to collect polyphone data, which I see as a strength or even a necessity when dealing with a phenomenon such as post-conflict reconciliation, in which different subjects are likely to be positioned quite differently according to their group affiliation in the conflict. A limited geographical focus also made assessing the sociopolitical context of the interviewees more manageable. In short, this element of the selection process gave me two groups of interviewees with each their shared regional context, as well as differing positions within it.

The Balkans and the Great Lakes region of Africa emerged as feasible and interesting options early on in the process. A main reason for this was the availability in Norway (and through my contacts) of refugees from different sides of the conflicts in both these regions. The two conflict clusters also share certain characteristics (cf. chapter 4): Ethnicity was a central aspect of the conflicts, the wars have had regional, cross-border effects, and the time frames are comparable, seeing that the conflicts there peaked in the 1990s.

The selected time frame, then, consisted in that the interviewees had migrated after the conflicts erupted in their country of origin in the 1990s. I found that the interviewees from the Balkans had come to Norway in the 1990s, and mainly had attained Norwegian citizenship (5 out of 6). The interviewees from the Great Lakes region, on the other hand, came to Norway in the first decade after 2000, and only 1 of 6 had become a Norwegian citizen. I had not set an age criterion, other than only seeking out adult participants. The interviewees were between 22 and 51 years old at the time of the interview. The youngest participant thereby has childhood memories of war, while the oldest has a longer conflictual history to relate the events of the 1990s to; something which became evident during the interviews in question. Both, however, related to the concept of reconciliation in meaningful ways.

Interviewees were recruited through schools that teach Norwegian as a second language, organizations that attend to immigrants, international meeting spots, colleagues and acquaintances, and through other interviewees. The recruitment process took twice as long as expected, and several contacts told me that many potential participants could not find the time or simply did not want to talk about these issues¹⁷. I eventually reached my goal of interviewing 12 participants. I never reached a point where I could be very picky in my selection of interviewees. I did, however, increasingly target my efforts to find interviewees

¹⁷ This was particularly notable in regards to finding participants from the Balkan region. I had conducted all 6 interviews with participants from the Great Lakes region before I arranged to meet my first Balkan interviewee.

Table 3.2: Overview of interviewees

	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Countries of origin</i>	<i>Ethnicity^a</i>
The Balkan region				
Total number of interviewees: 6	3	3	3 from Bosnia-Herzegovina 2 from Croatia 1 from Yugoslavia ^b	1 Croat 1 mixed/Croat ^c 1 Bosnian Croat 1 Bosnian Muslim 2 Serb
The Great Lakes region				
Total number of interviewees: 6	1	5	2 from Burundi 2 from Rwanda 2 from Congo	3 Tutsi 1 mixed/Tutsi ^d 1 Hutu 1 Bavira 1 Murega

a. I refer to the ethnic categories as they were stated by the interviewees themselves.

b. This interviewee had lived in several parts of Former Yugoslavia and feels more connected to the country as a whole than to either of its republics/present-day countries: "I come from a country that no longer exists."

c. Mother is Croat, father is Serb. The interviewee defined herself primarily as Croat.

d. Father is Tutsi, mother is Hutu. With this background, one is traditionally counted as Tutsi after one's father. The interviewee, however, mentioned this mixed background in response to the question about ethnicity.

as the project progressed, in order to find 6 interviewees from each geographical focus, and to supplement with the ethnic backgrounds and genders that were least 'covered' among the existing interviewees (cf. table 3.2). The interviewees were given written information¹⁸ about the study (attachment 1), and all signed a declaration of consent (attachment 2).

The resulting selection of interviewees allows for a look at different positions and perspectives within certain specific reconciliation processes; while the general understanding of reconciliation worked out from this material is best understood as on a more abstract level.

The interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, conducted with an interview guide (attachment 3) based on my research questions, and each lasted for about one hour. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian or English according to each interviewee's preferences, using selected phrases in other languages as found useful¹⁹, and recorded on a digital voice recorder. Location was chosen by the interviewees: At home, at their workplace/school or in a borrowed room I arranged for²⁰. The interviewees included two married couples, one of which was interviewed together, while I met with all other interviewees individually.

Qualitative interviews involve openness to their subject and the twists of the process. Interviews may well take on a life of their own, and lead elsewhere than the interviewer had

¹⁸ Some of the interviewees recruited through acquaintances received part of this information orally.

¹⁹ Other languages were mainly introduced while discussing the key term 'reconciliation'.

²⁰ In a borrowed room at a university/public library/the Arkivet foundation.

in mind, seeing that they literally unfold *inter views* – so that “knowledge is created between the views of the two partners in the conversation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 296). In keeping with this, I started with a trial interview to adjust my approach. This led me to expand my geographical focus from one to two regions. I also revised my interview guide slightly later in the process, finding that certain formulations did not serve the intended purpose in actual conversation.

Post-conflict interviews touch upon very sensitive and painful issues, and I wanted to take this dimension of my act of interviewing seriously. I had therefore made arrangements with the coordinator of an open discussion group for people with war and refugee experiences located in the part of Norway where the interviews were conducted. During the closure of each interview, I presented the interviewees with a written invitation to this group.

I also took notes about the interview setting following each interview, on the same day. These notes included descriptions of the general atmosphere, body language and emotional expressions of the interviewee, stress factors (e.g. time limitations, delays because of a snow storm, a minor emergency caused by a flat battery in the voice recorder), and my own spontaneous reflections about the conversation and how it had impacted me.

The Twenty Statements Test

The TST was administered directly before the interview and filled out in writing²¹. This simple procedure involves inviting the subject to answer the question “Who am I?” twenty times; to finish twenty sentences starting with “I am...” (cf. attachment 4). I chose to administer the TST *before* the interview started, to later be able to compare this expression of identity with the interviewees’ answers to my interview questions, which I suspected would lead the interviewees to think more in terms of certain (e.g. ethnic/national) identity aspects.

3.2.2 Data analysis

The process of analyzing the data that had been anticipated in the note-taking following each interview came more to the fore as I started transcribing the interviews. Transcription, rather than being a merely mechanical task, is in itself an interpretative process which entails methodological decisions (Kvale, 1996). It also provides a valuable opportunity for re-listening and beginning analysis; a good reason for the researcher to transcribe one’s own interviews rather than delegating it to an assistant (Postholm, 2005).

²¹ The first interviewee filled out the TST a few months *after* the interview and sent it to me by e-mail, because the first trial interview was conducted before I had introduced the TST in my design. Another interviewee completed the TST orally because of a hand injury, and his statements were recorded and transcribed.

With this benefit in mind, as well as for practical reasons, I transcribed the interviews myself²². My strategy was to transcribe verbatim (word by word), but not overly exact – not e.g. counting seconds in pauses, but noting those pauses, emotional tones, and non-verbal sounds (e.g. laughter, sighs, snapping of fingers) that were understood as potentially relevant. I also omitted my own confirmative statements (“Yes”, ”Mm”) during interviewee turns, since these can be considered part of a general expression of active listening rather than inputs of additional meaning. These reductions were based on my focus on social and psychological dimensions rather than a detailed linguistic analysis. During the process of transcribing, I noted my reflections and potential categories as they occurred to me in the material.

Next, I turned to the main phase of the discourse analysis, and coded²³ the material in three steps inspired by thematic coding (Flick, 2002), former TST analyses (primarily Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), discursive psychology (Edley, 2001; Willig, 2008) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig, 2008). I started by reading through each interview to develop a description of each case, which was later checked throughout the coding process. Each case description contained a typical statement (motto of the case), a description of the interviewee and the central topics mentioned during the interview (as in thematic coding, cf. Flick, 2002).

Second, I proceeded to reread the interviews and TSTs more closely and code passages and statements for their main content, as considered potentially relevant to the research questions. I also referred to my notes about the interview setting at this point. In coding the TSTs, I noted the numeric order of the statements, considering “that the ordering of responses is a reflection of the make-up of the self-conception” (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), or in my understanding, of the *self-representation* of the subjects. I established specific TST codes to map whether identity aspect references were made in terms of ethnicity, citizenship, universal categories, religion, traits/skills etc. The top reference in each category was noted and added to each case description.

In a third step of the coding process, I more specifically drew on discursive psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) as described in Willig (2008). I used this framework to seek to map the relationship between the interview discourse and the larger context of social practices and societal context. To this end, I identified discursive constructions, positioning and practices (Willig, 2008) in an additional ‘layer’ of coding, building on the key codes developed so far, e.g. the three reconciliation practices (cf. 5.3).

²² I transcribed the interviews using HyperTRANSCRIBE software.

²³ I used the HyperRESEARCH software in the coding and analysis process from here on.

To identify *discursive constructions* I read the interviews looking for the ways in which central discursive objects ('reconciliation', 'us'/'them') are constructed in the interviewees' statements, and what different wider discourses these constructions can be linked to. Identifying *positionings* involved examining what subject positions are offered by the discourses in question. Subject positions can be understood as "positions within networks of meaning which speakers can take up (as well as place others within)" (Willig, 2008, p. 176). The methodological task of identifying subject positions is here closely linked to the theoretical and empirical exploration of identity. These positions may lead to different *practices*; as discourse opens up certain opportunities for action and closes others.

I found it useful to use the 'practice' term about three distinct *reconciliation practices*²⁴. One might argue that what I have access to in my material is discourse about practice, not practice itself (e.g., I have asked about their contact with people of other ethnicities without checking their statements against reports from others). However, seeing discourse and practice as being "inextricably bound up with one another" (Edley, 2001, p. 192), and language use as a form of practice, I will argue that the way the participants position themselves and others in discourse is an essential part of their reconciliation practices; since relating to self and others are core issues in reconciliation. When it comes reconciliation, 'talking about it' is not separate from, but part and parcel of 'doing it'²⁵.

The verification process that started during the interviews (continually interpreting and checking through follow-up questions) reentered center stage as I sent each interviewee their case description and quotes, requesting feedback to check my understanding. I did not, however, send my entire working text at the time, since certain aspects of such an analysis are meant to go beyond subjects' own understandings (e.g. critical interpretations from discourse analysis). These might be difficult to make sense of for lay persons (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999), and in any case, the overall responsibility for the analysis rests with me.

The development of three reconciliation practice categories was inspired by grounded theory development (Flick, 2002; J. A. Smith, 2008). In the initial phase (first and second coding steps) I labeled the distinct patterns that emerged activism, forgiveness-spirituality and avoidance²⁶. In the conceptual-theoretical phase (second and third coding steps), text passages and memos were sorted according to these emerging categories, refining and defining them

²⁴ Overview tables of different practices and the discursive elements/criteria they involve, as well as of different discursive constructions of 'reconciliation', are provided in the presentation of findings in chapter 5.

²⁵ The concept of *interpretative repertoires* (Edley, 2001; Willig, 2008) is closely related to and overlap with what I term reconciliation practices here, as expressed in the terms and metaphors used by the interviewees.

²⁶ These labels later developed into 'activism-expression', 'forgiveness-spirituality' and 'distancing-avoidance'.

more systematically. I then, in the confirmatory-selective phase, coded more selectively and looked for evidence confirming the relevance of the categories (third coding step). On this basis I set out to discuss and draw implications of these findings for theory and practice.

3.2.3 Data presentation

I present my findings, analysis and implications thereof in this thesis. I anchor my analysis with quotes by my interviewees, translated into English by me where the original was in Norwegian. Though I transcribed verbatim, quotes have been adjusted from oral to written language ‘in harmony with the specific subjects’ general modes of expression” (Kvale, 1996, p. 170), to do justice to the interviewees and how they would have wanted to formulate their views in writing²⁷. Differences between oral and written forms are often neglected in the transcription process following social science interviews, as is the position of language in general (Kvale, 1996). I hope to avoid such neglect, out of respect for my interviewees, a love for language and a desire to create a readable research report.

3.3 Contextual and ethical challenges

One of the basic assumptions of qualitative research interviews is that all interviews, interviewers and interviewees are essentially embedded in their contexts (Kvale, 1996; Schuff, 2007a)²⁸. This in itself implies that a post-conflict context will necessarily influence an interviewing process conducted within it. For an understanding of the specific post-conflict contexts of my interviewees, I conducted a literary survey on each conflict (cf. chapter 4). Here I will address general post-conflict contextual challenges to the interviewing process.

3.3.1 Non-transparency: Understanding subjects as psychosocial

Challenges that arise in a post-conflict context can be seen as an example of a more general context-specificity and non-transparency relevant to qualitative research interviews. The qualitative research interview is a professional, structured conversation, which is strengthened by the interviewer’s use of commonsense communicative competence, such as context-specificity, subtlety and continuous evaluation and interpretation of what is being said.²⁹

²⁷ I have had all quotes verified by each interviewee in this ‘more written’ form (in the round of feedback).

²⁸ The following sections (3.3.1 and 3.3.2) are based on my previous work in Schuff (2007a).

²⁹ Since we all continuously adjust to the each other and the context, and thereby make communication ‘non-transparent’, one might certainly ask why communication in research interviews would be any different.

Hollway and Jefferson emphasize that the narratives resulting from interviews are always a product of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, making the feelings of the interviewer and the dynamics of the interview relationship relevant factors for how the data are produced. In relation to this, the notes I have taken after every interview, in which I refer to my emotional state, have proved valuable.

Hollway and Jefferson go on to claim that interviewers using qualitative methods too commonly assume that their participants are ‘telling it like it is’, an assumption with two major flaws: The *transparent self problem*; the assumption that participants know themselves and why they do what they do; and the *transparent account problem*, assuming that participants “are willing and able to ‘tell’ this to a stranger interviewer” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 3). In a more appropriately questioning approach, I should acknowledge non-transparency and systematically use my everyday communication competence – the subtlety and complexity with which we interpret each other’s accounts rather than taking them at face value – in evaluating what interviewees say about reconciliation. This calls for taking contextual, psychological and social factors into account in interpretation. Discursive psychology addresses these issues by reading statements as socially situated actions (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999) and as expressions of subject positions (Wetherell, et al., 2001).

Even though I view the relationship between people’s experiences and their accounts as complex and non-transparent, I still see it as real and relevant (Schuff, 2007a). Based on this ‘critical realism’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and in much the same way that people understand each other in everyday communication; I see my interviewees as psychosocial subjects; that is, as shaped in profound and relevant ways by their own life history (e.g. war and refugee experiences) and personal and social identity (e.g. ethnic positioning).

In a democratic spirit one could certainly ask why the interviewer should know any better than the interviewee what makes her say what she says. Still, even if a researcher wants to express the interviewee’s perspective as directly as possible, one cannot actually have direct access to that perspective (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). What we have access to is a processed and verbalized account of that perspective – in other words, we have access to discourse. Hollway and Jefferson claim that “if we wish to do justice to the complexities of our subjects an interpretative approach is unavoidable. It can also be fair, democratic and not patronising, as long as this approach to knowing people through their accounts is applied to the researcher as well as the researched” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 3).

Hollway and Jefferson thereby emphasize that interviewers, as much as interviewees, are psychosocial subjects, who cannot fully know themselves and how subconscious material

affects their behaviour. Hints of the researcher’s own history relevant for the interview situation are often more accessible through feelings than words. I recognize that strong sympathy and overidentification with my subjects can endanger the necessary critical distance (Kvale, 1996), and admit that these post-conflict interviews often left me deeply moved. I therefore tried to acknowledge my emotions during interviews as well as become more aware of them by verbalizing them later, in the interview memos. Frequently mentioned emotions here can be clustered around “empathy” and “inspiration”; see examples in table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Interviewer’s emotions and reactions to interviews

<p><i>Expressions of my emotions, evaluations and state of mind from notes taken same day as interviews. Direct quotes from notes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - very, very exciting, very interesting - inspired - intrigued and touched - a bit more confident - emotionally, I was impressed with this combination of peace and cheerfulness - encouraging - impacted by the immense scope of his loss, and at the same time, by his peaceful and gentle manner and insistence on forgiving and moving on - curiosity and involvement
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3.3.2 Post-conflict ‘biases’: Trauma and salient social identities

These interviews were conducted in a post-conflict³⁰ context. The post-conflict context is, naturally, not *one* specific context, but rather a *type of context* characterized by a shared circumstance: The past occurrence of violent group conflict that presently holds real life relevance for the people in question. This study, although not conducted in the countries where the conflicts took place, takes place in a post-conflict context since the relevance of conflict is set as a criterion for participation. I will now turn to two post-conflict context-specific challenges to the interviewing process, posed by two common characteristics of violent group conflicts: Frequent incidence of trauma and the salience of conflict-activated group identities during and after conflict.

³⁰ ‘Conflict’ is used in a generic sense for practical purposes in this study, while I acknowledge that it may be seen as much too weak an expression to use for genocides and brutal wars. I do not in any way intend to downplay the severity of these atrocities, nor would I label e.g. the Rwandan genocide anything less than ‘genocide’. In Rwanda’s case, such a modest expression might ring particularly false, in light of the failure of the international community to recognize the genocide as such and act accordingly, and of later revisionist attempts at redefining the genocide as a ‘civil war’ (Clark & Kaufman, 2008). A Rwandan interviewee also corrected my use of the generic term ‘conflict’: “It was genocide, it was more than a conflict or a civil war”.

The psychological effects of violent conflict “are widespread and profound. Frequent confrontation with death, proximity to bombardment, shelling and shooting, witnessing death or injury, loss of, or separation from family members, and the prolonged fear of invasion, capture, injury or abuse result in widespread post-traumatic-stress disorder” (Deely, 2005, p. 126). An increasing number of people suffer depression and substance abuse and commit suicide during war times. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance, increased suicide rates were found among elderly people under siege, as well as among young women victim to rape.

Among the vast psychological and social consequences of war, *trauma* and its effects on memory and relationships is an issue that may directly affect the subjects’ capabilities and manner of participating in qualitative research interviews. “Traumatic experiences and their consequences often constitute the core of the life stories told by those who have survived (...) war, or other kinds of social, state or interpersonal violence” (Rogers, Leydesdorff, & Dawson, 1999, p. 1). Trauma can have significant effects on memory (Axelsen & Wessel, 2006). The interviewees’ memory is essential for the accounts of their experiences; the very accounts that comprise ‘the stuff of the research’ here. All memory is selective, and naturally limited by capacity and brain functions. The ‘traumatized memory’, however, can be located at the far end of a continuum of cognitive avoidance, where the more painful the event, the more ‘traumatized’ and fragmented memory will be. Disturbing and uncomfortable effects of trauma may keep people from talking about their past. On the other hand, telling their story can be therapeutic. When traumatized people tell their stories, whether in a research interview or a therapeutic interview, or for that matter, to the press or a court, they are often ambiguous about their decision to tell (Axelsen & Wessel, 2006). I noted this ambiguity in several interviews, as well as in the process of finding interviewees.

In cases of traumatized interviewees we may encounter the limits of experience as well as the limits of language. Recognizing that trauma can play the role of bias (Schuff, 2007a) in that it may affect the memory, categories, verbalization abilities and general cognitive processes of the interviewee, I sought to identify signals of trauma³¹ in the accounts provided by my interviewees; and noted some (long silences, avoidance of questions) that I drew on while writing the case descriptions and analysis. Generally, I interpreted such signals as pointing to a lesser degree of (reflexive) reconciliation in the interviewees in question.

³¹ Such signals may include ‘hidden’ events (which were at first not narrated, but come up during a later probing stage), long silences, both loss of emotional control and emotional detachment/numbness, repetitive reporting, ‘flashes’ of intrusive images, change of voice and of body language (Rogers, et al., 1999).

Another ‘post-conflict bias’ relevant to these interviews is the salience of and investment in social identities that war usually implies. As argued in social identity theory (cf. 2.3), the perspectives of subjects from different sides are commonly quite different. Consequently, I have chosen to explicitly look at the interviewees’ positions in terms of conflict-relevant group membership (ethnicity) to be able to analyze the interview material, even when interviewees themselves have underlined that ethnic affiliation is ‘not important’.

Remembering that the interviewer is also an interrelated subject in the process makes it necessary to clarify my own position. I have no direct connections with any of the ethnic groups in question, beyond friendly relations with all – with one indirect exception; a link to the Serbian Orthodox environment through a family member being an Orthodox (though not Serbian) priest. Two Serbian interviewees were recruited through this connection. Personally, inasmuch as I am capable of searching my own depths, I have no desire to side with any group. I acknowledge, however, that my previous impression of the Serbs as the main aggressors of the wars in former Yugoslavia was somewhat challenged when I made my first Serbian friends a few years ago. These experiences did not fundamentally alter my understanding of the geopolitical course of events, but gave me new insights to the life worlds of some ‘lay Serbs’, involving experiences of victimization and stories of loss and grief. This was for me mainly an inductive and personal experience of *the primacy of listening*.

In sum, both ‘trauma as bias’ and ‘salient social identity as bias’ can be dealt with by identifying, acknowledging, and as far as possible understanding the potential bias at hand. Acknowledging biases can transform them from disadvantages into potential resources, as Kvale (1996, p. 286) argues: “Unacknowledged bias may entirely invalidate the results of an interview inquiry. A recognized bias or subjective perspective, may, however, come to highlight specific aspects of the phenomena investigated, bring new dimensions forward, contributing to a multiperspectival construction of knowledge.”

3.3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations have been dealt with throughout the entire research process (Kvale, 1996). The main ethical considerations throughout this study can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Thematising: Considering the theme ethically sound; it might improve lives/situations
- (2) Designing: Providing information to participants and obtaining their informed consent, receiving the approval of the Privacy Ombudsman for Research, securing confidentiality, considering the possible consequences of the study for the subjects

- (3) Interviewing: Being sensitive and actively listening during interviews, considering possible consequences of participation, and inviting to open discussion group
- (4) Transcribing: Securing confidentiality, transcribing loyally to statements, with a consistent strategy
- (5) Analyzing: Considering how deeply and critically the interviews can be analyzed, checking descriptions/understanding/quotes with interviewees, integrating their feedback
- (6) Verifying: Securing and verifying the knowledge as well as possible
- (7) Reporting: Securing confidentiality, reporting procedures to secure transparency, considering consequences of publishing results for the interviewees and the groups they identify with

In all research involving human beings, its impact on participants' lives must be considered. To ensure that the study would comply with guidelines, I reported it to the Privacy Ombudsman for Research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, and received a letter of project evaluation and their recommendation that the project be carried through. Basic criteria for this approval were the provision of written information and obtaining of written free and informed consent, explicitly making clear that participation is voluntary, ensuring the interviewees' confidentiality, and deleting stored information that could be traced to individual participants after the completion of the project.

Other ethical considerations are particular to studies in a post-conflict context; such as the risk of reviving traumatic memories, so that interviewees might get flashbacks and have to relive their pain in ways they may not be ready to handle. This may threaten and trouble the interviewees' identities and cause great affliction. It is not given that it is always right to talk about trauma, not even in therapeutic conversations (Rogers, et al., 1999), and even less so in research interviews. This danger of retraumatization calls for cautiousness and making follow-up mechanisms available (Skjelsbæk, 2007; J. A. Smith, 2008). I therefore tried to make very clear that participation was voluntary and that the interviewee could choose to not answer questions or to stop the interview at any time, in addition to giving all interviewees an invitation to the aforementioned group for war sufferers and refugees.

One interviewee said he was not sure talking to me was the right thing to do, because he had not slept well before the interview. Several interviewees, on the other hand, expressed that the interview had been a positive experience. It is the experience of many researchers as well as therapists that those who tell their story may benefit from the opportunity to unburden themselves, which can contribute to healing (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983; Herman, 2001)

Research involving vulnerable groups, such as ethnic groups, raises specific concerns. The consequences of the study should be considered both on an individual and a group level (for the ethnic groups mentioned). The research should benefit the group as a whole insofar as possible (Ingierd & Fossheim, 2009). Research dealing with immigrant groups can also suffer from a ‘political correctness’ that mutes controversial findings and inhibits the drawing of potentially valid conclusions that might present the researcher as holding an anti-immigration stance (Brox, 2009). In the case of the present study I do not consider these problems very pressing, since so many groups are represented, and with very few interviewees from each group – making it fairly evident that the findings cannot be generalized to the ethnic groups in question. In this presentation, I rarely label quotes and analyses with ethnic categorizations. My design entails that findings and conclusions address reconciliation processes on a more abstract, general level, and not so much specific groups and countries.

Another consideration raised in research with ethnic groups is what to call them; making sure that the chosen terms will not offend anyone (Ingierd & Fossheim, 2009). I have chosen to adhere to the terms used by each individual interviewee about his or her ethnic affiliation (cf. table 3.2). As an example of this, the ‘Croat’ and the ‘Bosnian Croat’ are both from Herzegovina. The Croat, however, felt that a label as ‘Bosnian Croat’ would be misleading because her sense of belonging is tied to the Herzegovina geographical region rather than to the Bosnia region. The Bosnian Croat, however, who was from the same place and ethnic group, said he had been treated as ‘less than a Croat’ in Croatia. This may be tied to his self-categorization as a ‘Bosnian Croat’ rather than ‘Croat’.

These precautions, related to both general and specific ethical considerations as outlined above, cannot ensure that this study will benefit all and offend none – and that is not the goal. But my hope is that they have contributed to making the present study an ethically sound project with some possibly beneficial consequences; including some scientifically valid contribution to the knowledge accumulation of humanity.

3.4 Issues of validity

What validity is to mean within the field of qualitative research has been widely debated over the past decades. Since the goals and theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research are different from those of quantitative research, the traditional positivist understanding of concepts such as validity, reliability, generalizability and objectivity that have been applied to quantitative methods cannot be transferred to apply to qualitative methods (Kvale, 1996; J. A.

Smith, 2008). Ignoring these issues altogether, on the other hand, can lead to an extreme "subjective relativism where everything can mean everything" (Kvale, 1996, p. 229). How, then, can the validity of qualitative research such as this study be assessed?

Seeing that validity has to do with whether the claims of a study actually reflect the phenomena of interest, the question of validity raises the philosophical questions of what truth is and what reality is. As we have seen, discourse analysis argues that humans have no direct, unpositioned access to reality. This and related theoretical positions within postmodernism and social constructivism argue for the social construction of knowledge, in a move "from knowledge-as-observation to knowledge-as-conversation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 239). These theoretical and philosophical strands, which have informed qualitative methods in a general sense, make the conversation of the scientific community a crucial process for assessing and constructing knowledge as valid. Validity can then broadly be linked to defensible knowledge claims (Kvale, 1996); to "the degree to which [research] is accepted as sound, legitimate and authoritative by people with an interest in research findings" (J. A. Smith, 2008, p. 235).

In practice, the quality of craftsmanship and the credibility of the researcher then become essential for validity. In this present study, my two main emphases to verify my findings and strengthen their validity are to be *sensitive to context* (cf. 3.3 and chapter 4), and to seek to make the research process as *transparent* as possible (cf. the present chapter).

Following Kvale (1996) I have sought to validate the study through checking, questioning and theorizing. That *to validate is to check* has meant checking for and identifying possible biases; working validation into the research process by drawing on the grounded theory approach, especially for the coding and discussion; and checking my understanding and their quotes with the interviewees. That *to validate is to question* has implied questioning the interviewees' statements about their identities by comparing them to their TSTs; comparing the interviewees' accounts to other accounts about the conflict area; and posing different questions to the texts, i.e. from both a phenomenological as well as a discursive-psychological starting point. That *to validate is to theorize* has implied working the analysis into an attempt at theory development inspired by the grounded theory approach.

In addition to the post-conflict biases discussed above, I have considered the possible selection bias stemming from volunteer participation (by ethical necessity). Those who volunteer to participate in such a project in the field of peace and conflict studies are likely to conceive of the project as normative and favoring reconciliation; seeing that the field as a whole is normative. This may have led me to connect with the most 'reconciliatory'. Even as I explicitly underlined that negative experiences and critical view points were welcomed, the

interviewees may still have tried to provide socially desirable reconciliatory answers. This is not necessarily a problem, since I am not trying to measure the level of reconciliation in itself, but rather to understand how reconciliation unfolds as a process. Being able and willing to address the issue is then not an unreasonable condition for participation in this study.

I also ran into a particular challenge concerning language. The interviewees were interviewed in a language non-native to them. My plan to simply ask what ‘reconciliation’ meant to them stranded as they often returned the question – the word was just not very familiar to them. I soon approached the task a bit differently; asking the interviewees how they would say ‘reconciliation’ in their own language, while referring to other languages and inviting them to relate the term to stories, until we reached a shared understanding.

This meaning negotiation exemplifies a broader dimension of the interview process – namely, the *inter view* dimension. I had to give up on uncovering a preexisting meaning supposedly stored within the interviewee (cf. the interviewer-miner), and instead embark on a joint venture where we circled the meaning of the term together (cf. the interviewer-traveler). The interview process itself thus taught me something about what knowledge one can hope to reach through interviews; and about possible paths to get there.

The lesson learned here connects to other considerations of biases, and the question of whether ‘truth’ is anywhere to be found in interviews with traumatized or otherwise heavily invested group members. Will the account given even be their own truth, when interpreted by the researcher? One answer to this is that it will be interactional ‘truth’; relationally produced knowledge (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Kvale, 1996). Once again, the importance of making knowledge production processes transparent can hardly be overstated. My critical-realist stance here implies assessing the interviewees’ psychosocial backgrounds as far as possible, interpreting their accounts in light of this – and still, tell their stories, as they have become.

Such a process may well produce contradictory data. Contradictions and inconsistencies should be carefully examined and tested (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), but do not necessarily constitute non-truth. Assuming that we live in an often contradictory world, the coherence criterion for truth or validity is challenged (Kvale, 1996). Should not our interview data be as contradictory as the social world we are trying to gain knowledge of?

4 Background:

Reconciliation in context

Reconciliation always unfolds in the context of a specific conflict, and in this study, also in the context of migration. As with other psychosocial processes in post-conflict settings, reconciliation is not merely individual; it is part of shared, collective experiences, and it is important to situate it in its wider social context (Holt & Monstad, 2006; Lavik & Sveaass, 2005; Monroe, 2002). This situation in context is the purpose of the present chapter³².

4.1 Two conflict clusters

The interviewees in this study are from two regional conflict clusters; the Balkans (former Yugoslavia; more specifically the current Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia) and the Great Lakes Region of Africa (more specifically DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi).

4.1.1 The Balkans

The Balkans in Southeastern Europe have long been a meeting place between ‘East and West’; a fault line of religions and cultures (Mønnesland, 2006). Different ethnic groups in the region trace their history centuries back, and situate themselves in different positions in relation to former empires – notably, the Austrian-Hungarian empire and the Ottoman empire, and before that, Byzantium – and religions; Catholic and Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

These many diverse impulses were united in Yugoslavia; a unifying state project that started as a ‘Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’ after World War I in 1918, became the federal republic of Yugoslavia under Tito in 1943 – and ended in bloodshed in the 1990s (Mønnesland, 2006). The end of Yugoslavia was the beginning of the wars that have impacted the lives of half of the interviewees in this study. The six republics in the federation of Yugoslavia – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia – were meant to be the homes of its respective ‘nations’; Slovenes, Croats, Muslims, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians (Mønnesland, 2006). In reality, all nations had groups outside

³² I will mainly refer to the *ethnic groups* and their conflictual history, leaving out most names of political parties, rebel groups and individual leaders; seeing that my interviewees almost exclusively identified their former enemies in ethnic terms. Each conflict presented here could be described and discussed in detail in several volumes, far beyond the scope of this thesis. What I am attempting to sketch out here is the historical-political background for the ethnic enemy images that reconciliation relates to in this study.

the home republic, as well as other minorities and ethnic groups not acknowledged as 'nations'. This made Yugoslavia a patchwork of ethnicity; and ethnic boundaries were politically mobilized when the federation collapsed and the battle over borders began. Yugoslavia had been ruled from Belgrade, with Serbs as the dominant group in the federation as a whole; and they would vigorously oppose the prospect of becoming minorities in the respective republics that started claiming independence from Yugoslavia from 1991 onwards.

Croatia

Croatia and Slovenia were the first republics to declare independence in June 1991. Later that year Serbs backed by the Yugoslav National Army captured one-quarter of Croatia's territory, claiming to be protecting ethnic Serbs from 'genocide' and to be claiming 'Serbian areas' (Mønnesland, 2006; Paris, 2004). The international community was initially opposed to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but as a consequence of the brutality of the war, support for Croatian independence increased. The war continued over where the border between Croatia and Serbia would be drawn. A UN-brokered cease-fire was in force from early 1992 to mid-1995. The Croatian army then launched a series of attacks on Serb positions, causing a large-scale flight of ethnic Serb refugees to neighboring Bosnia and Serbia. At the 1995 Dayton peace conference, Serbia abandoned claims to 'Serbian areas' in Croatia, and local Serb leaders in Eastern Slavonia gave the territory up to the Croatian government (Paris, 2004).

Croatia's transition was followed up by a UN peacekeeping mission (1996-1998). The internationally sponsored democratization process is considered a success (Paris, 2004). The task was simplified by the fact that one of the warring parties – the Serbs – had been largely eliminated as a political force, since many fled, and the remaining, ageing Serb community of Croatia had no external support from its former Belgrade sponsors. After the war, Croatian political culture was at first characterized by nationalism, and the Tudjman/HDZ regime after the 1992 elections was criticized for its authoritarian tendencies. In the 2000 elections, however, more moderate forces won (Mønnesland, 2006). Paris (2004) argues that the political traction of ethnic nationalism seems to have been reduced because the Serbian community is no longer a serious political threat in today's Croatia, and concludes that "the prospect of lasting peace seems favorable" (Paris, 2004, p. 111). Tolerance across ethnic and religious boundaries has been found to be relatively high in Croatia, but lower than in other

parts of former Yugoslavia, possibly due to the fact that Croatia is less ethnically mixed and there is less cross-ethnic interaction than e.g. in Bosnia- Herzegovina (Papa, 2007)³³.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Bosnia-Herzegovina had a unique position in Yugoslavia, with no ethnic group comprising more than half of its population (Mønnesland, 2006). This ‘microcosm’ of Yugoslavia as a whole historically exemplified both peaceful coexistence and cyclically reoccurring ethnic conflicts (Bose, 2007). In 1991, there were 44 % Muslims³⁴, 17 % Croats and 31 % Serbs. Muslims and Croats soon strongly favored independence, while Serbs opposed it (Paris, 2004). These ethnic divisions stem from “Bosnia’s history as a frontier society on the fault line first of contending empires and then of competing nationalisms” (Bose, 2007, p. 115).

When the Yugoslav framework that had kept ethnic differences in check crumbled, Bosnia-Herzegovina exploded. From 1992 to 1995, a brutal war raged between Muslims, Croats and Serbs, with changing alliances, external support (most notably from Croatia and Serbia/Yugoslavia), and even divisions within each ethnic group. The Bosnian Serb army, with officers and weapons from the Yugoslav National Army, was the strongest through most of the war, seizing up to two-thirds of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Muslims and Croats cooperated almost from the outset, but fought between themselves in 1993-1994, before their alliance was renewed with US assistance in March 1994 (Mønnesland, 2006). All three warring parties were guilty of brutal acts such as torture, rape and ambushes, impacting civilians on all sides immensely. ‘Ethnic cleansing’ was the strategy at least for Serbs and Croats. It has been argued that the atrocities committed by Bosnian Serbs “were on a larger scale and more systematic in nature” than those perpetrated by Muslims and Croats (Bose, 2007, p. 127).

After several mediation attempts from the somewhat hesitant international community, a peace agreement was finally reached towards the end of 1995³⁵. The Dayton Accord was a complex and ambitious settlement that laid out a multitiered constitutional framework for postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina: A confederation with two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muslim and Croat-held areas) and the Republika Srpska (a radically

³³ Papa (2007) notes the possibility that her personal affiliation with Croatia may have allowed for the expression of more intolerance from Croats than from her other samples. Her finding that tolerance is more prevalent in Bosnia-Herzegovina has, however, been confirmed in other studies.

³⁴ Muslims are referred to as Bosniacs in current ethnic terminology, but I follow my interviewees’ use of terms.

³⁵ In the Dayton talks, Bosnian Serbs were represented by president Milosevic of Serbia, Bosnian Croats by president Tudjman of Croatia, and Bosnian Muslims by president Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a composition that clearly shows the war’s regional dimension (Bose, 2007; Paris, 2004).

autonomous Serb Republic). The accord arranged for detailed power-sharing, with a three-member presidency (one Bosniac/Muslim, one Croat, one Serb) and a bicameral parliament (Bose, 2007; Paris, 2004). International troops and observers were to oversee the transition.

The post-war democratization process has reinforced the power of the most extremist, nationalist parties (Paris, 2004). Noting this trend in the 1996 elections, international agencies actively sought to encourage moderates and diminish the nationalist influence – seeing this as necessary for future reconciliation, while problematic in pure democratic terms (Paris, 2004). Nationalism is, however, still going strong in Bosnia-Herzegovina politics (Mønnesland, 2006). Later reforms institutionalized the representation of Croats and Muslims in the government and parliament of Republika Srpska, and of Serbs in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This reinforces “the paradigm of governance based on ethnonational group membership” (Bose, 2007, p. 150); which is problematic, but necessary for such a fragile state that has had large groups in opposition to its mere existence. In a society so deeply divided by civil war, a confederal and consociational arrangement like this has difficult prospects – yet alternative paths to peace-building are hard, perhaps impossible, to find (Bose, 2007).

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the warring parties remained and continued to pose a threat to each other after the war (Paris, 2004), the peace process has made significant progress, but is still incomplete 15 years after Dayton. Several small-scale reconciliation initiatives have been set in motion, and transitional justice has been sought in the legal system, notably through the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (Booth, 2003; Mønnesland, 2006). Studies have shown higher multiethnic tolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina than in other parts of former Yugoslavia, suggesting that traditional Bosnian multicultural attitudes may have prevailed even after such a brutal war (Papa, 2007).

4.1.2 The Great Lakes region

The political core of the Great Lakes region can be defined considered to be the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania (Lunn, 2006). This study involves interviewees from Rwanda, Burundi and DR Congo, countries linked by cultural contact and trade, a colonial past, and recent ethnic conflicts – that have more than once spilled over from one country to the next. National borders in the Great Lakes region can be considered porous, since political loyalties as well as ethnic identities frequently transcend state boundaries (Ottmann, 2008).

Burundi and Rwanda have a similar ethnic composition, with 85 % Hutu, 14 % Tutsi and 1 % Twa (Lunn, 2006). DR Congo's much larger and more diverse population includes groups related to the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa in neighboring Rwanda and Burundi. Hutu and Tutsi refugees from Rwanda and Burundi have played a central role in the Congo wars (Lunn, 2006; T. Turner, 2007). In effect of regional spill-over effects and interlocked civil wars (Lunn, 2006) the war in Congo has been termed "Africa's World war" (T. Turner, 2007)³⁶.

Rwanda

Pre-colonial Rwanda was ruled by mainly Tutsi kings, but the aristocracy involved some Hutu chiefs (Lunn, 2006). Pre-colonial designations as Tutsi and Hutu were somewhat flexible identities, and primarily a political and economic distinction³⁷ (Ottmann, 2008). Conflicts followed geographical rather than ethnic divisions. Ottmann (2008) views the 'mentality of colonialism', with racial segregation and the treatment of humans as means rather than ends, as a premise for genocide in Rwanda. German and Belgian colonial masters consolidated their power by cooperating with the Tutsi leading class; regarding Tutsi as a 'superior race' of non-African origin. As a result, the elite became more narrowly Tutsi (Lunn, 2006), and the Hutu suffered more systematic discrimination. Ethnic boundaries had solidified³⁸.

Towards the end of the colonial period, there was considerable Hutu frustration and aggression towards the Tutsi. In the 1950s, Belgian administrators and progressive priests had growing sympathy with the deprived Hutu population (Clark & Kaufman, 2008; Lunn, 2006; Ottmann, 2008). A 1959 violent Hutu uprising overthrew Tutsi kingship and established a Hutu political hegemony that was to last until the 1990s. The colonial ideology had turned against the Tutsi, now seen as 'alien invaders' who for 400 years had subjugated the Hutu, the 'majority and rightful inhabitants of Rwanda'³⁹ (Kayigamba, 2008). After the 1962 independence Hutu leaders dominated government. Tutsi suffered repeated violence and many fled the country. Tutsi counterattacks were met by further Hutu violence. It has been argued that continual impunity in these years paved the way for genocide (Kayigamba, 2008).

³⁶ The regional dimension was confirmed by my interviewees: "People from Burundi, Rwanda and Congo talk a lot, because these questions concern us all". Rwanda-Burundi comparisons were particularly frequent.

³⁷ Traditionally the Tutsi were herders, the Hutu farmers and the Twa hunters/gatherers. The Tutsi's cattle were a source of power and wealth. Hutus that acquired cattle could be redefined as Tutsi (Ottmann, 2008).

³⁸ Identity cards were introduced by the Belgians in 1932, classifying people as Hutu, Tutsi, Twa or naturalized citizen. ID cards made ethnic identification easier during the genocide (Larson, 2009; Ottmann, 2008).

³⁹ The ideology of the Belgian colonial masters is described with these words by Tutsi and genocide survivor Jean Baptiste Kayigamba, stating that his account 'is not neutral, but deeply personal' (Kayigamba, 2008, p. 33).

In 1990 this vicious circle reached a new stage when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), formed by exiled Tutsis, started ‘liberating’ or ‘invading’ (depending on perspective) Rwandan territory (Larson, 2009). In a context of land shortage and economic crisis, the civil war was intense. In 1991 the government started training a Hutu civilian force and launched an anti-Tutsi campaign, as planning for genocide had begun (Melvern, 2008; Ottmann, 2008).

Hutu president Habyarimana meanwhile set out on a path towards multi-party democracy, signing the Arusha Accord in 1993 (Lunn, 2006). On April 6 1994, however, the president and his Burundian counterpart were killed in a plane crash that both Tutsi and Hutu extremists (among others) have been blamed for. As word spread that the Tutsi RPF had shot the plane down, genocide against Tutsis and killings of moderate Hutus started on the same day. An estimated 1 million were killed and more than 2 million dispersed (Ottmann, 2008) before the RPF fought back and ended the war by military victory in July (Larson, 2009).

An RPF-dominated transitional government with a Hutu president was established. The following years saw periodic outbreaks of violence within the country, as well as Rwandan military engagement and violence against Hutu refugees in DR Congo. Any emphasis on ethnicity (e.g. on identity cards) was outlawed, and press censorship is now strict. Rwanda’s recovery towards peace and stability has largely been considered remarkable (Lunn, 2006). The RPF/Kagame regime after 2003 has been said to have a ‘genocide credit’ (Lemarchand, 2008) of international goodwill, however, and has also been criticized for authoritarian tendencies and its military involvement in Congo, for enforcing Tutsi memory as the only officially sanctioned memory, and for having shifted power from Hutu to Tutsi hegemony; creating a long-term risk of renewed violence (Lemarchand, 2008; Lunn, 2006).

The Rwandan government also established a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 1999 (NURC, 2009; Reyntjens & Vandeginste, 2005). In legal terms, the transitional justice process in Rwanda has been played out in three arenas; in the national court system, in gacaca processes based on local conflict resolution traditions, and in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

Burundi

The pre-colonial kingdom of Burundi was organized in a way similar to that of Rwanda⁴⁰; but was arguably more inclusive (the king was neither Hutu or Tutsi) and stable (Uvin, 2009).

⁴⁰ In Burundi, there was also an aristocratic class, the Ganwa, in addition to Hutu, Tutsi and Twa (Uvin, 2009).

During colonial rule, “political, social and economic relations became more rigid, unequal, and biased against Hutu” (Uvin, 2009, p. 8), and ethnic sentiments hardened (Lunn, 2006).

Around the time of the 1962 independence, politics became increasingly ethnic and extremist. The winner of the 1962 elections, whose relations with both Hutu and Tutsi were good, was assassinated. A Hutu coup d'état attempt in 1965 was repressed, and from 1966 to 1993 Burundi was under Tutsi military rule. After an uprising by Hutu and Congolese rebels in 1972 the army committed ‘selective genocide’, systematically killing all educated Hutu throughout the country. After this, Hutus lived in fear and discrimination (Uvin, 2009).

In 1993, international and internal pressure led to multiparty elections. The elected Hutu president Ndadaye introduced many Hutu into government and state bureaucracy. In reaction to these rapid changes, the president and other leaders were killed in a coup d'état in October 1993, and civil war broke out. Thousands of Tutsi were first killed; the mainly Tutsi army answered to stop the killings, but went on to kill Hutu indiscriminately (Uvin, 2009).

In 1995-1996 violence escalated and several Hutu rebel groups emerged (Lunn, 2006). The capital, Bujumbura, was divided into ethnically homogenous zones as thousands fled. Political stalemate made for slow progress in Tanzania/South Africa-led peace talks, but in 2000 the Arusha Accord was signed by the government and several Hutu and Tutsi groups. Power-sharing was to secure multi-ethnic political representation as well as multi-ethnic armed forces, the general formula being 60% Hutu/40% Tutsi (Lunn, 2006).

Hutu rebel movements not included in the Arusha negotiations continued the violence. The hurting stalemate had lasted for years, however, and support for continued fighting was meager in a population tired of war and hard pressed by poverty. Ceasefires were reached with the final rebel factions in 2003. The government elected in 2005 adhered scrupulously to constitutional ethnicity and gender requirements, and demobilization has been largely successful. The transition in Burundi can be seen as a major success story – while crime rates are still high and government and judicial systems fragile (Lunn, 2006; Uvin, 2009).

In line with the power-sharing along ethnic lines, and in contrast to Rwanda, ethnicity has been more openly addressed in Burundi following the peace agreement (Uvin, 2009). Tutsi-Hutu relations in the war-tired population seem to be improving (Lunn, 2006). A domestic Special Chamber for War Crimes has been established, and the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to clarify and rewrite Burundi's history. A recent study implies, however, that many Burundians do not necessarily desire prosecutions or truth-telling mechanisms, but seem to prefer silence, focusing on their day-to-day struggle (Uvin, 2009).

DR Congo

DR Congo's colonial history includes the brutal and exploitive personal rule of king Leopold of Belgium, and later a period of co-administration with Rwanda and Burundi. The time around independence (1960) was characterized by unrest and political and armed competition for power. Longstanding dictator Mobutu Sese Seko took power in 1965 (Lunn, 2006).

In the 1990s Mobutu reluctantly embarked on a process of democratization, and internal chaos increased (T. Turner, 2007). After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, more than one million Hutu fled into eastern Congo⁴¹. From there they attacked Rwanda, as well as Tutsi in DR Congo. In October 1996 the Banyamulenge, a Kinyarwanda-speaking Tutsi group in Congo, attacked the Hutu-ruled town of Uvira, and set off the first Congo war (1996-1997). Rwanda's post-genocide government supported or even orchestrated this 'rebellion' (Lunn, 2006; T. Turner, 2007), which has also been termed a Rwandan invasion (T. Turner, 2007). After seven months of warfare, a coalition including Rwandan troops and Banyamulenge overthrew Mobutu, and coalition leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila took power in 1997.

Relations between Kabila and his supporters among Rwandan and Congolese Tutsi soon deteriorated. In 1998, the second Congo war started. Again, Rwanda was an active party in launching the war – this time, to overthrow Kabila and his new dictatorship in cooperation with Uganda. Their attempt at this was stopped by troops from Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia. The situation developed into a stalemate, and the war dragged on until 2002 causing massive numbers of casualties. Internal and external actors in shifting alliances fought, pillaged, raped and killed in what has been termed 'Africa's World War' (T. Turner, 2007).

The succession of Kabila by his son Joseph Kabila and international pressure finally made lasting settlements possible in 2002-2003. These arranged for power-sharing and for all rebel factions to be integrated into a national army. The 2005 constitution and 2006 elections were important steps forward, while also setting off new waves of violence, revealing the great difficulties with which DR Congo is moving towards a stable peace (Lunn, 2006; T. Turner, 2007). Congo remains divided between east and west; power is very unevenly distributed; and there is still a destabilizing presence of non-state actors (T. Turner, 2007).

Impunity is another severe problem, with a low-capacity, weak and politicized judicial system. Three Congo warlords are currently on trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague, and a warrant of arrest has been issued for a fourth warlord (ICC, 2010).

⁴¹ At the time, DR Congo was known as Zaïre. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to the country as 'DR Congo' or just 'Congo' throughout this text, regardless of time period.

While ethnic loyalties are still strong, there is now increasingly a discourse on national unity in DR Congo. Extensive surveys show that the identification of Congolese with the Congo state has become stronger over the last decades. However, this Congolese identity excludes one particular group; the Rwandophone peoples, perhaps surprisingly including both Hutu and Tutsi and related groups such as the Banyamulenge. Their citizenship rights have been contested on several occasions. This exclusion of Rwandophones from the ‘Congolese’ category might have serious consequences for future state-building (T. Turner, 2007).

Table 4.1: Overview of conflict backgrounds

Region	Country	Peak years	Main basis for peace	Transitional justice/reconciliation
The Balkans	Croatia	1991-1992, 1995	Croat military victory Serb marginalization	Democratization ICTY trials
	Bosnia-Herzegovina	1992-1995	Negotiated agreement Complex power-sharing International presence	Power-sharing, democratization ICTY trials Small-scale reconciliation work
The Great Lakes Region	Rwanda	1990-1994, 1994	Tutsi military victory	Ethnicity ‘ban’, media restrictions Unity and Reconciliation Commission ICTR trials Trials in national courts Gacaca courts Small-scale reconciliation work
	Burundi	1993-2005	Negotiated agreement Power-sharing along ethnonational lines International presence	Power-sharing, democratization Special Chamber for War Crimes Truth and Reconciliation Commission Small-scale reconciliation work
	DR Congo	1996-1997, 1998-2002	Power-sharing Democratization International presence	ICC trials Democratization Some small-scale reconciliation work

4.1.3 Reconciliation after ‘new wars’

An overview of the conflict backgrounds presented so far is provided in table 4.1. In spite of the unique aspects to each conflict, some aspects are comparable among the conflicts in question. Both the Congo wars and the post-Yugoslavia wars, for instance, can be viewed as civil war and as international war; as a result of state collapse; as war over resources/territory in which ethnicity was instrumentalized; and as part of an international trend of conflict in the wake of the withdrawal of external great-power support after the Cold War (T. Turner, 2007).

All the conflicts in question peaked in the 1990s, which makes for a comparable time frame for reconciliation for the two groups of interviewees. I note, however, that my interviewees from the Balkans came to Norway the decade before the interviewees from the Great Lakes Region (in 1993-1998 and 2000-2006, respectively). One might also discuss

whether the situation is more ‘post-conflict’ in the Balkans than in the Great Lakes Region, where there seems to have been less closure to the conflicts, most notably in DR Congo (Lunn, 2006). There are, however, also still tensions in the Balkans.

Also in terms of international legal response, there are parallels. The first international criminal tribunals since Nuremberg were those for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, established in 1993 and 1994, and the two were closely related (Booth, 2003). As previously mentioned, the Congo wars have also been taken to the ICC, which at its establishment in 1998 drew heavily on the experiences from the ICTY and the ICTR.

As far as cruelty and suffering can be compared in any meaningful way, these Balkan and Great Lakes wars were all very brutal. Rape was employed systematically as a weapon in all of them (Lindner, 2006; Skjelsbæk, 2007; T. Turner, 2007; Uvin, 2009), and it has been claimed that this was a relatively new tactic in these wars, in terms of the extent and strategic orchestration of rape, with humiliation of the other group as the goal (Lindner, 2006).

These conflicts have also all been referred to as ‘ethnic’. It can be discussed whether ethnicity can be understood as a driving force of conflict in its own right, or if ethnic boundaries have rather been mobilized in an instrumental manner, in what is essentially a conflict about territory, power or other resources (cf. e.g. Bose, 2007 for a discussion on Bosnia-Herzegovina; T. Turner, 2007 for DR Congo). In any case, ethnic identities became more salient and divisive during conflict. Illustrating this cross-regional trait, one of the interviewees refers to growing ethnic tensions in Burundi in 1994-1995 as ‘Balkanization’.

To summarize the above comparisons, these wars can all be termed ‘new wars’⁴², a term referring to current political violence that is more omnipresent and more directed at civilians, wars that are about claiming identity rather than territory (Kaldor, 2006; Østerud, 2009). New wars are not waged between states, but often take place in a context of state collapse (cf. former Yugoslavia and Mobutu’s Zaïre), involving different rivaling groups that often cross state borders and operate throughout a region. These conflicts are often called ‘civil wars’ or ‘internal wars’, but Kaldor (2006, p. 2) emphasizes that they “involve a myriad of transnational connections so that the distinction between internal and external (...) [is] difficult to sustain”. In new wars, the line between political and criminal violence can be hard to draw, and consequently it is also often hard to distinguish clearly between a state of war and a state of peace. New wars are not necessarily fought by people in uniforms, as combatants intermingle with civilians in an often confusing landscape of paramilitary groups,

⁴² Both Kaldor (2006) and Østerud (2009) refer to the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a prototypical ‘new war’. Østerud also specifically identifies the wars in Rwanda and Eastern Congo as new wars.

privatized sections of the military and armed civilians. In line with this, Rupert Smith, commander of the UNPROFOR force in Bosnia-Herzegovina, has referred to these wars as ‘wars amongst the people’ (R. Smith, 2007; Østerud, 2009).

New wars can also be seen as taking place along the fault lines of old empires (Münkler, 2005). The history of the conflicts in question here can be traced back to the debris of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires and colonial empires in Africa. History is recycled as a tool for identity politics, e.g. to present the ingroup as the rightful people of an area, or as the historical victim of outgroup aggression. The identity politics dimension central to new wars (Kaldor, 2006) is evident in all the ‘ethnic wars’ involved in this study: “Even where people have lived smoothly side by side for decades in multicultural, multi-ethnic communities – as in Bosnia, for example – the outbreak of open violence turns ethnic and religious divisions into fault lines of a friend-enemy-definition” (Münkler, 2005, p. 6).

New wars seem likely to form a different context for reconciliation than ‘old wars’: The enemy may not be distant, uniformed strangers, but neighbors and other familiar faces.

4.2 Migration as a context for reconciliation

The interviewees in the present study share *the refugee experience* as a significant life-event. Even though refugee experiences can differ immensely, there are certain common dimensions. In this case, there is also the commonality of having Norway as a host country.

The reception of asylum-seekers into Norway increased sharply with the outbreak of the war in former Yugoslavia in the beginning of the 1990s. A large group of Bosnian refugees came to Norway and were collectively granted temporary protection. Later all who applied were granted permanent residence on ‘humanitarian grounds’ (Lie, 2003). The Balkan interviewees in this study came to Norway between 1993 and 1998.

While most refugees from the former Yugoslavia came to Norway during the 1990s, most refugees from the Great Lake region that were in Norway as of January 1st 2009 had arrived during the first decade of the 21st century (SSB, 2009). They are also much fewer in number than those from the former Yugoslavia. The African interviewees in this study came to Norway between 2000 and 2006.

Migration can provide a chance for new beginnings, but is also a psychosocial challenge, especially when migration is forced, as for war refugees (Sveaass & Hauff, 1997). According to Lie (2003), refugees suffer a ‘triple burden of trauma, uprooting and settlement’.

She found that refugees in Norway⁴³ suffer from a considerable amount of posttraumatic symptoms, and that their war and relocation experiences have impacted their psychological functioning and well-being significantly. In therapy with refugees, psychologists find that here-and-now challenges, e.g. discrimination, may be as important (and feasible) to deal with as trauma (Holt & Monstad, 2006). Reconciliation, especially reflexive reconciliation, can be seen as integrated in a refugee's psychosocial functioning and well-being, which is strengthened by the presence of family and involvement in meaningful activities (Lie, 2003).

After violence and uprooting refugees will need to restructure meaning; to overcome their shattered basic trust and sense of coherence and create, once again, a coherent narrative about their life in the world (Sveaass, 2000). Processes of justice and reconciliation can form an important collective part of post-conflict meaning-making. The interviewees' participation in this study can be framed as a step in their personal meaning processes, as they developed and shared their own conflict-migration-reconciliation narrative in the interview situation.

In the process of restructuring meaning, the refugee's identity can change and take on new and complex forms. Migration often leads to new and combined, 'hybrid' or 'creolized' identities (Prieur, 2004), as the transnational connections and practices a migrant takes part in may widen the space for action and make complex identities possible (Fuglerud, 2004). This might also open up possibilities for reconciliation understood as identity change. On the other hand, identities can also become more rigid in Diaspora communities (Chrysochoou, 2004).

Refugees are in a different context than those who stayed behind. They may find new settings in which they can meet the former enemy group, in a shared refugee position; while they are likely to be cut off from the opportunity to confront many of their specific, individual former enemies, being geographically distant. Migrants have varying degrees of contact with their country of origin; and these links may have political and economic as well as interpersonal dimensions⁴⁴. Conflicts and dividing lines from the country of origin may also live on in migrant communities; a phenomenon mentioned by several interviewees in this study. This confirms the relevance of reconciliation also for refugees; and it is to the specific experiences of this we now turn.

⁴³ The majority of participants in Lie's study came to Norway as a result of the war in former Yugoslavia. 74 % were from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 11 % from Kosovo and 4 % from other parts of former Yugoslavia (Lie, 2003).

⁴⁴ This *transnational* perspective on migrant lives is prominent in current migration research (Fuglerud, 2004).

5 Findings and analysis

After talking to the twelve interviewees in this study, I was struck both by the commonalities across such different backgrounds, and by the very different positions and approaches that appeared in the material. In this chapter, I will first present *commonalities* across the interviews (5.1), proceed to present selected *differences* in discursive constructions and positionings (5.2), and finally, summarize three distinct reconciliation practices (5.3).

5.1 Commonalities: Reconciling with life and the Other

Many of the understandings and phenomena I present as ‘commonalities’ in this section were expressed explicitly by all interviewees; and all were identified in statements by interviewees from both conflict clusters, suggesting cross-cultural or cross-regional relevance.

5.1.1 The relevance and importance of reconciliation

Reconciliation is considered relevant and important by all interviewees⁴⁵; definitely so for post-conflict societies – and to a more varying degree also for themselves. The term ‘reconciliation’/‘forsoning’ (in Norwegian), however, was not very familiar to most of the interviewees. In our dialogue about the meaning of ‘reconciliation’, I used all available languages to make sure the interviewees had a term to associate something with. Towards this end, I asked the interviewees how they would say ‘reconciliation’ in their mother tongue (table 5.1). The different terms used for reconciliation have different etymological origins and core meanings, and one might ask if they actually refer to the same phenomenon⁴⁶. My perspective on this is that different terms may emphasize different aspects of the phenomenon, as it is understood and experienced within different languages and the cultures they are intertwined with. I will return to this in chapter 6.

Even when the term ‘reconciliation’ was not familiar, however, the interviewees show by their accounts that the *phenomenon* is understood and has relevance for their situation. One interviewee says that he is not familiar with the word, but when he thinks he understands “a little”, he goes on to tell the following story⁴⁷ about his own process as a refugee from Congo:

⁴⁵ This is not surprising, given the design of the study and the overriding normativity of the peace studies field.

⁴⁶ Leer-Salvesen (2009a) discusses the difference between the English/Latin ‘reconciliation’ and Scandinavian/German ‘forsoning’/‘versöhnung’ along similar lines, as briefly referred to in table 5.1.

⁴⁷ The narrative has been abbreviated slightly for presentation purposes, and checked with the interviewee.

Table 5.1: Terms for 'reconciliation' in different languages

<i>Language</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Core meaning, as explained by native speaker*</i>
<i>Norwegian</i>	forsoning	from Middle Low German: refers to the process of something being atoned for; make whole again
<i>English</i>	reconciliation	from Latin: join/come together again
<i>French</i>	réconciliation	
<i>Swahili</i>	kustahamahanyana	interaction, cooperation
<i>Kirundi</i>	kuwabararnira	forgiving each other
<i>Kinyarwanda</i>	ubwiyunge	joining something together, coming together
<i>Croatian</i>	pomirenje	Forgiveness
<i>Serbian</i>	Помирење	former enemies 'shake hands' and become friends again

*In Norwegian/English/French (no native speakers here), I paraphrase Leer-Salvesen (2009a) for core meanings.

I was a child when the war broke out, and we all fled. It was the first time I had fled my home like that and didn't know where I was going. I was in a no man's land, and didn't know where I would sleep or what I was to eat. And then I thought: This has happened to me and our country because of people from Rwanda. And if I had seen a Rwandan now, I would have killed him and eaten the meat. That's what I said; I was very young, nine or ten, I wouldn't have said that today. After that I hated people from Rwanda, because they had done many cruel things. I didn't want anything to do with people from Rwanda. We fled to Burundi, which is almost the same, they share the same mindset. And I didn't have anything to do with them. I hated them. After coming to Norway, I have met a lot of people from Rwanda, but then I have thought that this cannot continue. I must be able to forgive. I cannot hate an individual just because their government has done horrible things in another country. It's not that person, it's politics. I cannot hate them. And to be able to live on with them I must forgive. That is what I think, and now I have friends from both Burundi and Rwanda.

This narrative also shows that even those who say they have come a long way in reconciling and forgiving have struggled with bitterness and hatred; there are no shortcuts.

In the beginning it was difficult to understand that you can forgive someone who killed your wife, your parents, your brother, little sister – see him free. It took me a lot, a long, long time.

After reaching a shared understanding of reconciliation, the terms that the interviewees most frequently proceeded to use to refer to their process were 'move on' and 'forgive'. These concepts were often seen as connected, and as important in the art of living after war:

What has helped me is to realize that to move on I must be able to forgive. And to get established, I must also forgive. Because it is all about forgiveness. If you don't forgive, you will end up alone, right? You will be hated and you will hate everybody who wrongs you. And that is no good.

5.1.2 A long and complex process

Reconciliation is clearly understood as a long and painstaking *process*. There are no accounts of one-time events that changed everything; only stories of slowly learning to live with the

past and with former enemies, stories that involve many different elements: Forgiveness, justice, questions of punishment and impunity, therapy, interaction with other challenges in life, individual and collective dimensions, passing the story on to one's children, etc. In fact, most interviewees (9 out of 12) express that they have not completed the reconciliation process⁴⁸. Their answers to the question about the degree to which they personally have experienced reconciliation can best be summarized as 'underway' – expressing that reconciliation is neither complete nor completely absent:

I feel that I have forgiven those people who have killed my people. It's a process, and I feel like I'm getting there. I feel that I have reconciled. It's something that I'm soon to accomplish. It's a process, but I'm beginning to get to understand more of that. But when incidents come up, I still go back to the feelings and still have these nightmares. It's something that I think is a process. But I would like to teach my children that they are all the same. I would like them to know that they are children of God and they should not live in the past, so that what happened will not happen again.

I used to think I would never get rid of this thing. But right now, I think I am pretty much over it.

The complexity of reconciliation is seen in several dilemmas and paradoxes that are frequently mentioned, often indirectly, in the form of stating opposing goals or principles at different points of the interview. There is an often implicit dilemma of remembering and forgetting: The interviewees say they want to forget as much as possible – but they also need to remember, to make sure that such violence never takes place again. Still, remembering, even when well-meant, can hinder reconciliation. An example of this is the Rwandan memorial week held every April, both in Rwanda and abroad. This memorial event has proved problematic for several exiled Rwandans:

Of course it is very important to have memorials, but I want to move forward, and when I hear the debates that are being had and who is invited, and some people were being told not to participate because of their ethnicity - and I wasn't very much supporting that idea. Personally it made me feel bad and remember what I had lived through before, so I felt it was not something I could gain strength from.

In spite of these complex challenges, an interviewee who does unambiguously say that he has reconciled, underlines that it is worth the time and effort:

It takes time, and you have to work a lot with yourself. But when you eventually get there, it is amazing. Then you are free.

⁴⁸ This might not come as a surprise, seeing that reconciliation after World War II is still an emotional issue e.g. in Norway at the time of writing this thesis, 65 years after the end of the war. The interviewees in this study will have had no more than 15-17 years, some much less, to struggle towards reconciliation. Reconciliation takes time (while there is little evidence that time in itself brings reconciliation).

5.1.3 Reconciliation – both reflexive and relational

Reconciliation was primarily framed as a relational⁴⁹ phenomenon in the interviews. However, reflexive reconciliation – reconciling on one’s own, with life, one’s past, and sometimes also with one’s former enemies in absentia – was also confirmed as relevant:

If you are, like, psychologically over it, then you don’t have to wonder whether or not you will hate someone or forgive someone – then that’s just the way it was.

I have forgiven those people who have killed my people even if they have not come to me to ask for forgiveness. And I have come to terms with what happened. Because I don't want to relate to reconciliation just as it is put forward by the politics of the government, I want to reconcile in myself and to reconcile with God and forgive them - and try to move on. Otherwise I feel like I have a big burden in my heart.

These quotes show no conflict between reflexive and relational reconciliation; the two dimensions rather mutually support each other. In some cases, on the other hand, there is a dilemma between these types of reconciliation. Ideally, reconciliation is relational and two-sided, as one interviewee puts it: “It is hard to reconcile with someone who doesn’t want to.” Relational reconciliation would require some sort of acknowledgment, repentance or apology from the perpetrating party (or both parties). This is, however, not always realistic:

I don’t think I will experience that anyone apologizes. So, if you are to be able to live on, you must forgive without anyone asking forgiveness; for your own sake, to be free.

Reconciliation ‘within’ is also understood as an attitude, a ‘direction of heart’, that can be extended to other areas of life than the specific war experiences thematized here:

Reconciliation can be to accept – unlike some Bosnians who were crucified between their home country and Norway, whether or not to return – and to reconcile with life as established here.

Everywhere, [reconciliation] is really important. Because you ‘hit the wall’ very often as an African in this town. To not be in a bad mood all the time, I need to think like that. There is no use in, well – (knocks on the table)

5.1.4 Differential guilt – differential reconciliation

In the interviewees’ accounts of the conflicts they have been impacted by, there is consistently a differentiation as to who were to blame. Most importantly, the interviewees clearly distinguish between political leaders (held responsible) and ‘ordinary people’ (seen as less responsible). In almost all cases the conflict was understood as a power game where

⁴⁹ By ‘relational’ I here mean related to *interpersonal* or *intergroup* relationships (i.e., relations to other human beings), even if it could be argued that all reconciliation is in some way relational, as it concerns relationships between the present and the past, one’s relationship with oneself, etc.

leaders manipulated certain markers of difference⁵⁰ to mobilize the population and to justify and energize the violence:

It is merely a political game, because there have never been any big problems between us and them.

This leaves ‘ordinary people’ who somehow participated in the war less guilty; they are rather portrayed as manipulated, sometimes as unwise or even stupid, but most of all, as having been at the wrong place at the wrong time. The same differentiation is found in some statements about how reconciliation plays out; in the words of a Serb:

It's not so difficult when we talk about people. If I am to meet Croats here in Norway, new people, I accept them as other people. Like, give people a chance. But when it comes to politics, I don't believe a word they are saying. Because I have experienced it before, that it is just manipulation. (...) The Croats I know are married to Serbs, and they are ordinary people, who just think war is all wrong.

The differentiation of the outgroup is also linked to the experience of group boundaries as less clear as they were made out to be – as in the case of former Yugoslavia:

There is not a single individual, I think, who does not in some way, by way of either family or friends, have access to the other group. So it is wrong to say that there are pure environments without influence on and access to the others.

What was so hard was that we lived in the same country for so many years, and there was actually a lot of mixing within families. Serbs were married to Croats, and had children together, and suddenly they are supposedly at war. So many families were destroyed by the war, because unless you fled the country, you had to be on one side or another, and somebody is always on the wrong side. Everybody had somebody on the wrong side.

5.1.5 Closeness to enemies and broken trust

All interviewees confirm that friend/enemy boundaries changed when the conflict escalated. Most were surprised by the extent to which this happened, and express a sense of broken trust. This also means that the enemy could be someone very close; people they knew – enemies with familiar faces and shared histories (as implied in the concept of ‘new wars’, cf. chapter 4.). There are stories of betrayals by neighbors, co-workers, relatives and friends.

My father was murdered, and that is why we came to Norway. He had good friends who were banyamulenge⁵¹. They would come to our home and my mother would cook for them. They used my room when they spent the night, and I slept in the living room. So there was never a problem. But then he was betrayed by one of his closest friends. One of the people who actually slept in my room betrayed him.

⁵⁰ In all cases ethnicity, in the former Yugoslavia also religion.

⁵¹ Banyamulenge was the main enemy group of the interviewee in the DR Congo conflict, cf. chapter 4.

Closeness to enemies makes it harder for some to forgive and reconcile, because the betrayal of trust is so profound. In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina:

Reconciliation is easy if not very much wrong has been committed. Everything is wrong if we have lived together, we were neighbors, and then you've gone to the other side and are fighting your own country. So it would be hard to forgive. I'm not saying it's impossible, but at least very difficult for me, 'cause I've had very painful experiences.

Interviewees also refer to how the enemy boundaries were increasingly reflected in public discourse (the media, jokes) as intergroup tension grew. An area where intergroup tensions are expressed, mentioned in both African and European contexts, is sports – more precisely, soccer. In the Balkan post-conflict context today these boundary markers are still referred to as relevant for some, and this is here seen as a sign of lacking reconciliation:

They [Serb nationalists in Bosnia-Herzegovina], their leaders, they still don't support the national [Bosnian] soccer team, they route against it. It's not their national team, you might say. Even if there are both Serbs and Croats on the same team. It just doesn't disappear, that nationalism.

Moving on from commonalities to differences, we shall now see that those who praise reconciliation may not always be talking about the same thing or wanting it in the same way.

5.2 Discursive constructions and positionings

Ingroups/outgroups are constructed in multiple ways in these interviews; overlapping with the participants' positioning within the discourse – how they locate themselves in the social landscape that discourse offers. The post-conflict discursive landscape has available subject positions as victim, perpetrator and survivor; positions that often intersect with specific ethnic identities. I will first explore these constructions and positioning of 'us' and 'them', before I present different discursive constructions of the term 'reconciliation' itself.

5.2.1 'Us' and 'them': Discourses of difference and oneness

The use of the pronouns 'we/us/our' as opposed to 'they/them/their' delineates the ingroups and outgroups of the interviewees. Almost all say they do not differentiate by ethnicity now. Most still structure their statements around 'us' and 'them' separated by ethnicity or religion:

Bosnian Muslim Interviewee: *Mediators from many countries have tried to find a solution, but they always put their brakes on. They want their things and that's it.*

Interviewer: *They – the Serbs?*

Interviewee: *Yes.*

The construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is more complex when categories do not fit or tell the full story, in cases from the former Yugoslavia when ethnicity and home country diverge (e.g. Serbs from Croatia), and in cases of mixed ethnicity. A mixed Serb/Croat, who positions the Serbs as ‘them’, explains that she feels more Croat and less Serb as time goes by:

The Serb part of me falls away, and I feel I become more and more different from them down there. They think the whole world is against them. And that is not me.

Some construct a greater ‘we’ than the ethnic group. Four interviewees emphasize the need to strengthen a common national identity (in DR Congo, Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina).

The thought that we at least have a common nation, that we all love Congo as our country, that is what keeps us together. So it is very important to start or continue reconciliation work all over Congo, and create a strong national identity, so that what happens in Uvira concerns those who live in Kinshasa or Bandaka or Lubumbashi, and if there is a problem in Matadi, which is far away, it is also my problem.

At an even more inclusive level, the interviewees who explicitly draw on religious (Christian) and pacifist discourses at times apply a universal ‘we’:

When I read the Bible and get closer, I feel that we are all the same.

To me, human beings are equal and all are born free. There is not a human being without values, not one. But it is the moral, and unfortunately religion, ideology, darn ideology that comes between us.

Still, there is even here a subtle delineation of ingroups and outgroups, expressed in the use of ‘they’ as human and created in God’s image (possibly implying ‘they’ as those who might otherwise be the outgroup, as an ‘even they’ are created in God’s image), and of ‘us’ as positioned outside the conflict as opposed to ‘them’ who are more involved in it.

I also asked explicitly about former ingroups and outgroups. When asked who their enemy was during the war, most have a clear answer; in other words, enemy boundaries were relatively clear-cut. The enemy was “Tutsi”, “Hutu”, “Banyamulenge”, “Rwandans”, “Serbs”, “Croats”, “Serbs and Muslims, of course”. Some, on the other hand, add complexity to the picture by underlining that all outgroup members were not equally involved, or that they personally had no enemies – or that “everybody was my enemy”, in the case of an interviewee of mixed ethnicity, who was in a position to not be fully trusted by either side.

When the theme of the discourse moves from former to present ingroups/outgroups, there is generally a differentiation of the outgroup (as put forth in 5.1.4), as well as frequently a widening of the ingroup (cf. 5.2.4). ‘We’ and ‘they’ still often refer to the former group boundaries, as mentioned, but now in statements such as “they are OK people, too”.

5.2.2 Ethnic background positions the interviewees

The context of ethnic polarization and tension that all the interviewees have lived through ('Balkanization', cf. 4.1.3) has left its traces in these accounts. The interviewees appear both as positioned by and positioning themselves in relation to the discourse of ethnicity.

There is a sense of powerlessness in how interviewees portray themselves as involuntarily positioned by others during the war:

In a situation like that, everything that happens around you is in a way planned, and set to be like this and like that, and you find yourself in a situation where you have to choose, either the one or the other, and even if you know that it isn't right, you are sort of just put on the one side or the other of the conflict.

I had enemies on all sides, in a way, since I was not an ethnically pure Serb or Croat or Muslim. I am a mix, and so I couldn't choose a side, where to be. And I was married to another who was from a mixed marriage – so we could not choose sides.

Of interest here is that both accounts, from the 'ethnically pure' and the 'ethnically mixed', present theirs as a no-choice situation to the same degree – both because of the demand for 'purity' that ethnic division entails. Being labeled pure (and positioned on one side) as well as mixed (and positioned on no side) is here experienced as problematic. For the first of these two, the strong ethnic positioning imposed by the conflict continues today:

To me it is probably even more important to say that I am Serb than it used to be, because we've been through what we've been through. I didn't think like that before, and then suddenly it was so extremely important who you are, that is – I was placed in that group. No one asked me if I wanted it. It was like: You are a Serb, you are there.

In contrast, the mixed origin interviewee positions herself actively, in part independent of ethnic categorizations (as a cosmopolitan) and in part in relation to them (as feeling more Croat than Serb). Other interviewees also position themselves beyond ethnicity, by either a universalist strategy ("I am a global citizen") or a particularist strategy ("I am just me").

The explanation for focusing more on ethnicity quoted above ('because of what we've been through') is interestingly enough also used to explain the opposite development:

I feel that [ethnicity] is not important for me, because of what happened. It doesn't mean that one is not from this ethnic group. But if it doesn't help us move forward, or it doesn't contribute to anything, than it's irrelevant. Especially after what happened.

The expression of ethnicity in relation to one's identity varies, from clearly emphasizing its irrelevance to just as eagerly embracing ethnic identity:

We are Serbs, and I like it. (laughs) I don't know why, but I like being a Serb. We've known who we are and what our history is all along.

The overall tendency, however, is to make of point of how ethnicity does not matter to them today. This is also reflected in the TST responses, where only two mentioned their ethnicity (but then near the top of their lists)⁵². A common argument for the irrelevance of ethnicity is that individual moral responsibility matters more than group membership:

You need to act right; you need to be a good person, first and foremost. Then you can call yourself whatever you want afterwards.

Several interviewees now position themselves more independently in relation to the former ingroup. One interviewee even seems a bit embarrassed about his origins:

To me it is important that I am a Norwegian citizen. I am a Bosnian Croat, of course, that's something one can never flee from, but I'm not very proud of it. I wish I was from Spain or wherever. Being from an area where such atrocities have been committed; I'm not comfortable with that. It makes one shy to say where one is from.

When he is asked where he is from, he therefore usually answers: "Have a guess!" The same interviewee also distances himself from his country of origin by saying that they are often taken for foreigners when they go back to visit:

We are often taken for foreign tourists when we go back. People address us in English or German or something. So something must have happened, either with the way we comport ourselves, with our clothes or our looks, but we are often not recognized as domestic people down there (laughs).

Across the somewhat different perspectives on how much ethnicity matters to them, the interviewees seem to agree that ethnicity still divides their country of origin too much. They tell tales of split cities and communities, ethnical separation in schools, cultural and other institutions – and about a woman who did not come to the funeral of an interviewee's mother, even though they had been good friends, because it was on the "wrong side of town".

She didn't come to the funeral, but called to express her condolences. To me that too is a gesture of goodwill. But she didn't have the inner strength to take the final step.

5.2.3 Victims, survivors and beyond

Any post-conflict reconciliation discourse implies that someone has wronged (is a perpetrator) and been wronged (is a victim; the same person/group might be both). Consequently, another set of possible subject positions – which is also linked to ethnic intergroup dynamics – circles around *victimhood*, a phenomenon which is rarely mentioned explicitly in the interviews, but that serves as an implicit backdrop for statements and discursive strategies.

⁵² Ethnicity was referred to in their second and fifth statement out of 20 possible statements.

The individual-group dimension complicates the matter further, since victim and perpetrator statuses on the group level positions individuals differently. This was expressed in whether a certain position is taken for granted (when the individual position converges with the perceived group position) or needs to be defended (when individual and perceived group positions diverge). I will give examples of four different positions here: Undisputed victims, victims misunderstood as aggressors, survivors and nonvictims⁵³.

Interviewees in the position of ‘undisputed victim’ would usually not address their victimhood explicitly, but have it as a starting point for their discourse about reconciliation: Talking about forgiving, not about being forgiven; about living with the pain others have caused rather than about having caused others pain, etc. The design of the study also paves the way for such a position; targeting people who have been impacted by war at least so much as to have fled their country of origin.

Still, some interviewees offered more explicit explanations to position themselves as victims. This ‘misunderstood victim’ position can be seen as a reaction to one’s ingroup having been assigned collective perpetrator status by others, often expressed in a certain justification of their own or their ingroup’s participation in the war. In the case of Burundi, where the Hutu might be interpreted as aggressors in the 1993 outbreak of the civil war (cf. 4.1.2), a Hutu interviewee strongly emphasizes historical injustice and that the conflict did not start in the 1990s. He says reconciliation is difficult when the others will not recognize their share of guilt and violations through history:

If I, as a Hutu, talk to a Tutsi about this, he will say it only happened in 1993. That won’t do! Because the situation started in 1962⁵⁴. If things had not been the way they were, what happened in 1993 would never have been.

A Burundi Tutsi interviewee in this study, however, does actually acknowledge the historical injustice towards Hutu in Burundi quite explicitly, and concludes:

I cannot say that one party is guiltier than the other. All parties are victims, in a way.

The intergroup dynamics among Balkan interviewees show a similar pattern. Here Serbs take the position of ‘misunderstood victims’:

The Serbs didn’t start the war. We loved Yugoslavia. With Croats, Bosnians, friends and family, mixing, there was no problem. Then suddenly everybody wanted independence.

⁵³ I remind the reader that my analysis here builds only on the interviewees’ statements in discourse, and I have not attempted to assess their ‘actual’ participation, guilt, perpetrator/victim status etc. beyond this.

⁵⁴The assassination of the winner of the elections in 1962 can be said to have been the beginning of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict that has ridden the country since. This interviewee’s worst experience was the ‘selective genocide’ on educated Hutu in 1972, cf. also chapter 4.

It [apologies] always comes from the Serbian side. And that is who they put the most pressure on, because they are, like, the “guilty” party in the war. And Serbs feel that is entirely wrong, because the same things have happened on other sides too – and nobody says sorry.

Muslim/Croat interviewees hold the Serbs mainly responsible for the war (although some say “all sides are to blame”), and mostly base their accounts on undisputed victimhood.

There are also other positions, however, that have in common a certain distance to the victim position; the ‘survivor with a purpose’ and the ‘nonvictim’. The nonvictim position entails an attempt at distancing oneself from the victim position altogether, expressing that one is more or something other than a victim – having moved on, the nonvictim will not define her life in terms of victimhood. A TST that does not refer to war and reconciliation experiences neither directly nor indirectly, but rather defines the person positively by reference to everyday relationships, traits, skills and interests, could be read as expressing such ‘nonvictimhood’. Two TST responses stood out in this way. One interviewee also says explicitly that he does not want to “feel like a victim”.

Also for ‘survivors with a purpose’, victimhood is more in the background, but there is here a stronger sense of purpose connected to one’s experiences. Rather than taking the position of victim, they position themselves as overcomers:

I was told that it was God's plan that I am still alive. So instead of looking back in the past I decided to move on and take care of the children. We got a preaching that if you are still alive there is a purpose, there's a reason why you're still alive. You could have died during that time, but there's a reason. So that really encouraged me to move on.

5.2.4 Human or inhuman others?

In extension of the constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’, different ethnic groups, victims and non-victims; ‘the other’ – here, the former enemy – can be construed as either human or inhuman in these post-conflict discourses. Some interviewees express very clear notions of universality, in which ‘the other’ is explicitly included in the moral community of humanity:

If someone is to look ahead and to move on, then they have to consider others as fellow human beings, and not to distinguish between the ethnic groups or being different, because we are all the same.

The most elaborate expressions of universality are founded in the Christian faith:

Now I look at people not as ethnic groups, but I look to them as all created in God's image... When I read the Bible and I get closer I feel that we are all the same. And I want to teach my children that all human beings are the same and there's nothing to distinguish them from ethnic groups or from backgrounds or color of where they come from... I would like to teach my children that they are all the same. I would like them

to know that they are children of God and they should not live in the past, so that what happened will not happen again.

Other interviewees draw on an academic/social science discourse (anthropology in one interview, sociology in another), on pacifist ideology and on personal experiences of being fallible, when expressing universality. The thought that ‘all make mistakes’, of the universal potential for evil, is used by several interviewees to argue for a reconciliatory attitude:

I am a pacifist. But I don't know, if something happened to my child, what kind of a monster I could have turned into. Nobody can know.

The opposite notion construes some people, more specifically perpetrators, as inhuman. This notion can be linked to a ‘popular discourse’ or media discourse⁵⁵. One interviewee is particularly explicit about the inhumanity of the perpetrators. He considers the war he was involved in to have been the most brutal war in history, and explains that reconciliation is close to impossible after such brutal killings of civilians and rape:

Human beings – if they are human – cannot do such things. And I could never be friends again with such humans, for they are not humans. Thinking about how he could kill that many people without thinking, without stopping... you think, how can that be a human being? It cannot be a human. Animals are surely much better, any animal is better than a human like that. I could never forgive these people.

As this last sentence implies, different discursive constructions of the other – here, as human or inhuman – also position the actors differently and give different action orientations and practices. ‘Forgiveness’ is likely to be an option only when the other is seen as ‘human’. This is also stated explicitly, when talking about the criteria for forgiving someone:

It's simply about how human a person is.

There are thus perpetrators that this interviewee says he cannot forgive. He is willing to relate to members of the former enemy group – but not to those members who have committed severe crimes or still hold to their old ideology (here: Opposing Bosnia-Herzegovina's unity). In line with this distinction between the human and the inhuman, the interviewee expresses also in other ways the essential difference between self and other:

I don't know how much of it is in their blood, the nationalism and hatred and all that. Many of those who are still on that side are simply born to wage war. We see it from history, too, they have always been willing to wage war on, like, whoever. (...) I could never have done what they have done.

⁵⁵ Leer-Salvesen (2009a) mentions examples of media descriptions of perpetrators as inhuman, e.g. the Josef Fritzl-case in Austria in 2008. Having imprisoned and abused his own daughter for years, he was on several occasions referred to as a ‘monster’ in newspaper headlines.

This forms a contrast to those who talk about the human potential for evil as universal, of themselves as ‘global citizens’ and all humankind as family:

We are one family – if your brother falls down, you help him.

5.2.5 Discursive constructions of reconciliation

Reconciliation is construed in a range of different ways as the interviewees link it to various discourses. An overview of ten discursive constructions is given in table 5.2.

There are also statements in which several discursive constructions are linked, such as an explanation of reconciliation as “working together and understanding together” or

Table 5.2: Discursive constructions of reconciliation identified in the interviews

<i>Discursive construction</i>	<i>Wider discourses</i>	<i>Expressed by</i>	<i>Example quote</i>
Reconciliation as forgiveness	Theological discourse (d.)	9 interviewees	“Reconciliation means forgiveness”
Reconciliation as moving on, current wellbeing, forgetting	Psychological d., ‘spiritual growth’, ‘common sense’ d.	9 interviewees	“To me, reconciliation means putting it behind you, to move on”
Reconciliation as practical-material, cooperation	Development d., human rights, social psychology	9 interviewees	“Trade connects people. Now trade has started again. Then the rest will follow”
Reconciliation as acceptance	Psychological d., ‘spiritual growth’	6 interviewees	“Reconciliation is about acceptance – to accept and move on”
Reconciliation as unity, restoring relationship	Psychological d., theological d., Rwandan discourse*	6 interviewees	“Reconciliation means being able to shake hands, becoming friends again”
Reconciliation as coexistence, respect, nondiscrimination	Political, human rights, ethical/philosophical d.	6 interviewees	“To achieve reconciliation we need respect, recognition and a strong common identity”
Reconciliation as political/institutional; power-sharing, democracy	Political discourse, political science d., transitional justice	4 interviewees	“Everybody must feel represented. That’s where we have to start”
Reconciliation as legal closure, justice	Legal discourse, transitional justice	4 interviewees	“They need to be held accountable, so people can heal and move on”
Reconciliation as reviewing enemy, reframing	Philosophical d., ethical d., psychological d.	4 interviewees	“You can start to review your enemy... Someone who destroyed can also build”
Reconciliation as dialogue, understanding	Psychological d., transitional justice discourse	3 interviewees	“If we can talk, try to understand, we can have reconciliation”

**In Rwandan public discourse, reconciliation is often connected to unity, as in the ‘National Unity and Reconciliation Commission’. This link was also expressed by the Rwandan interviewees.*

“forgiving so you can move on”. Different discourses sometimes meet in one and the same statement, e.g. religious and political discourses:

We have faith and believe in God, but we need international participation as well.

In the following section, I will take the mapping of different meanings of reconciliation one step further, drawing up three distinct reconciliation practices; three roads on the map.

5.3 Reconciliation practices

As patterns in my material, I have identified three different *reconciliation practices*; three different ways of ‘doing reconciliation’: Activism-expression, forgiveness-spirituality and distancing-avoidance. These practices⁵⁶ are not mutually exclusive, although I find that each interviewee will typically have one of the three as their dominant practice⁵⁷.

Characteristically, activism-expression and forgiveness-spirituality were the practices most typically identified in the first interviews; these practices would logically imply that people would be ready and willing to volunteer to talk about their experiences. Several of them also stated explicitly that their motivation for participating was their desire to change the world for the better (activism-expression) or for truth and forgiveness to prevail (forgiveness-spirituality). The later interviewees, some of whom had taken months to find, and who had hesitated to participate, were almost exclusively identified as practicing distancing-avoidance.

5.3.1 Activism-expression

I know I can't save the world, but it's worth trying.

The typical practitioner of ‘activism-expression’ as a reconciliation practice would be a hopeful, struggling activist. Past war experiences are linked to present-day actions for a better world, and reconciliation takes a lot of ‘work’. Within this practice, war experiences and reconciliation processes are intertwined with one’s purpose or ‘life project’, as materialized in work, participation in development and community projects, and studies:

⁵⁶ Another potential term would be ‘reconciliation strategies’. I have chosen ‘practices’, however, since I believe they are not necessarily as consciously planned as many would understand a strategy to be.

⁵⁷ The dominant practice is often combined with elements of or sympathy for another practice. Two brief examples: One interviewee is currently practicing ‘distancing-avoidance’, but is planning to work more actively for reconciliation (‘activism-expression’) in the future. Another interviewee is very actively involved in communication and development work (‘activism-expression’), with a motivation that is closely connected to the Christian faith and an emphasis on forgiveness as a Christian virtue (‘forgiveness-spirituality’).

Social anthropology, with its cultural relativism and seeing a person instead of a group, has helped me personally.

Communication is central to this approach. The past needs to be addressed in open dialogue and in talking to raise awareness and build a peaceful future:

Our biggest problem is that people have not yet learned to talk about difficult things.

This interviewee also states explicitly that the importance of awareness-raising motivates him to talk to people, e.g. politically involved youth, about what he has been through. Another interviewee also explains his reconciliatory communication activities as based on his desire to make a difference in society:

It hurts to explain how one had to flee from home, how one had to live for two months in a refugee camp with the worst conditions ever, so – it's a bit embarrassing, too, but I see the positive sides to it: Having experienced something that one is capable of explaining, that one finds courage to fight against... I think it helps me move on, because – when you think about it often, at least for my part, you also think about the possibilities, about how things ended up the way they did, about how it could have been better, and about how we can work to try to keep it from happening. That is how I think, and it helps me as a student and as committed and involved. So that is why I do all these things, sitting here in this interview, that movie, different media, that is the reason why.

This quote shows that the communication and involvement can also be an integral part of how these interviewees personally reconcile and move on. In the process of remembering one's experiences, the goal is not just remembrance in itself, but the activation of those experiences and memories for the purpose of making a difference; fighting against any evil similar to what one suffered.

Within this way of approaching the war and its aftermath, there is often an emphasis on injustice, poverty and lacking democracy as a background for the conflict. Addressing such issues is then posed as key to reconciliation, drawing on development and political discourses. The practical and material dimensions of reconciliation take center stage:

People are tired of fighting, of hating each other. Most people have other challenges: Climbing out of poverty, survival... People are starting to understand that the ethnic card was a hoax. They see that your neighbor hasn't really hurt you. If you are both poor, you go to your neighbor when you need money, when you have a sick child.

Democratic, inclusive political processes and legal accountability for perpetrators are other important elements in reconciliation according to this approach. While impunity is rejected as problematic, other alternatives than full retributive justice might serve to confront the past. One interviewee refers to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and

Rwanda's gacaca processes to argue that a broad public process of truth-telling, justice and reconciliation is needed in Burundi:

On both sides, these people must be held accountable for what they have done, and when we do that, people can heal and move on. Forgiving in public... I think that would make a big difference.

5.3.2 Forgiveness-spirituality

The typical practitioner of 'forgiveness-spirituality' as a reconciliation practice might be characterized as a forgiving spiritual voyager. Forgiveness is at the heart of reconciliation within this practice, and is framed as a virtue explained by our common humanity. The motivation for reconciling is primarily religious. 'Forgiving-spiritual' interviewees would bring up religious dimensions also without being asked about them, and were explicit about how their Christian⁵⁸ faith and practice inspired them in their reconciliation process:

When I started to go to church, it helped me a lot, because church teaches about forgiveness.

One interviewee 'blames' his "very Christian" mother for the fact that he can now relate to members of the former enemy group. She has even forgiven her husband's killers.

I have a very Christian mother. She would always tell us, and still tells us, that in the Bible, God says 'don't seek vengeance, but let me fight for you'⁵⁹.

In line with Christian ideas of self-giving forgiveness, another interviewee also underlines that reconciliation entails releasing the right to seek revenge or retribution. Justice, also in legal terms, might still be regarded highly, but for oneself, forgiving is the key task:

I have forgiven them even if they have not come to me to ask forgiveness. Because I don't want to relate to reconciliation as put forward by the politics of the government, I want to reconcile in myself and with God and forgive them – and try to move on.

The religious foundation for forgiveness also includes strong notions of universality:

Reconciliation does have a religious meaning for me, because now I look at people not as ethnic groups, but I look to them as all created in God's image. If someone is to look ahead and to move on, then they have to consider others as fellow human beings, and not to distinguish between the ethnic groups or being different, because we are all the same. When I read the Bible and I get closer, then I feel that we are all the same.

This positive universality – seeing all people as equally human and equally willed by God – is combined with a negative universality – seeing that all has a potential for evil:

⁵⁸ All the interviewees in this study who said reconciliation had a religious meaning for them were Christians.

⁵⁹ Bible reference: "Vengeance is the Lord's." Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30. When I verified all quotes with the interviewees, this interviewee responded that he also meant to refer to that God in the Bible says "Have faith, keep courage and I will fight for you".

I found in myself that I can also make mistakes. How about me, if I got into a fight during a night out on the town, and someone got hurt or killed?

‘Self’ and ‘other’ are thus essentially the same, and any human being is more than her/his actions. Consequently, there is in principle no limit to what can be forgiven – even after the most horrendous deeds, a human being has worth as a human being.

This practice also contains a concept – or, perhaps more precisely, a narrative structure – of life as a journey, and of growing and moving forward in personal development:

First, there is a stressful time, a difficult time. As this passes, the time comes to find out if you can move forward. When you find out, you start moving. That’s how it is. It has been terribly hard for me, trying to find answers, and when I found that answer, I had to start moving on.

My labeling of the practitioners of ‘forgiveness-spirituality’ as *voyagers* rests on this observation. They clearly express a development, a process; from avoiding the company of members of the other group in the first refugee camp to going to church with them now; from bitter sadness and anger in the home country to a forgiving, at-peace attitude today. One interviewee tells a story of an interpersonal experience that helped such an attitude develop. A person he wronged surprisingly came to him first to ask forgiveness – for cutting off their relationship in response to the first transgression:

By that, I learned how to forgive... She opened my way to not be afraid to ask or to speak truth; it's going to help you.

As we see reflected here in a belief that ‘the truth shall set you free’⁶⁰, truth is emphasized, along with other classical Christian virtues such as justice, repentance and mercy. Reconciliation, which combines these virtues, “has to come from the heart” and cannot just be politically imposed. This can also be understood as an emphasis on a form of inner reconciliation, although with profound relational and eventually societal consequences – because you reframe the other from ‘enemy’ to ‘sister’ or ‘brother’:

Think that it's like one family. If your brother falls down, you just go help him. If your sister is becoming a prostitute or an alcoholic or something like that, just try to talk to her – don't drink too much, go in a good way. That's what they're doing in my country now: Build your country... Then you understand – someone who destroyed can also build. And you come to understand how it's important to talk and to meet with them.

Finally, the forgiveness-spirituality practice can be linked to the subject position of ‘survivor with a purpose’: “I was told that it was God's plan that I am still alive.”

⁶⁰ Bible reference: John 8:32.

5.3.3 Distancing-avoidance

The typical practitioner of ‘distancing-avoidance’ as a reconciliation practice can be characterized in positive terms as a grateful worker living in the present, or in negative terms, as a person who avoids talking or hearing about the past. Forgetting as much as possible is considered desirable. Reconciliation is sought by focusing on the here and now, and on rebuilding one’s own life.

To me, reconciliation means putting it behind you, that you are done with it. But if you always enlarge what used to be, you will miss out on what is now. Then you can’t move on, and you can’t live life now.

This interviewee’s reconciliation process entailed cutting off contact with many who were refugees from the same country and moving to a new place within Norway, where she started over, working and studying, “living her own life”. This clear break with the past is typical. Interviewees who employ this reconciliation practice are usually clear about not wanting to return to their country of origin, many who have gone back to visit did not enjoy it, and some avoid it altogether. There are some very emotional references to the pre-war past, when life in their home country was good. Other than that, a here-and-now-focus is at the center of this way of doing reconciliation. War-related communication is avoided:

Talking about the war is something we prefer to avoid, it is something that happened and done with it. Why repeat the same thing over and over? There are many other things to talk about, like music, theater, whatever. Also in the company of Norwegians I try to avoid it, I do not want to complain. When they ask where I am from, and the conversation takes that turn – sometimes I ask them “How do you like it in Norway?” instead (laughs), because that is such a typical question from a Norwegian, and people go... (laughs louder) So I try to put it into a funny perspective. But if I get deeper into the conversation, and I am not in the mood for it, I say I’m sorry, but I don’t want to wreck the evening with talking about that. (laughs)

Talking about the conflictive past is considered “boring” and “annoying”, it equals picking on old wounds, and can hinder the enjoyment of the present and the future:

I have heard these stories so many times that it gets boring. I would rather focus on the future and not think about what happened.

It annoys me terribly that they always talk about what was. Either they talk about the war, or about how great things were, and that now nothing is any good anymore. And I think it is all nonsense. It happened, but we can’t spend the rest of our lives just repeating it. A lot of fun things happen now as well.

Another reason to not want to talk about war-related issues, specifically with more ingroup-centered relatives in their country of origin, is for the sake of family peace:

I do not want to create discussion and conflict during the few hours I spend with them. And our children are with us there, and I don't want them to get the impression that there is only arguing and discussion. I want them to experience smiles on their mouths.

Also in relation to outgroup members, the avoidance of war talk/confrontation can help keep the peace. This is expressed by an interviewee who clearly says there are people who have done things he cannot forgive, and he would not sit down with them if he knew what they had done during the war:

But you never talk about it, right? So it is better not to talk. You are really very careful. You say hi and greet them and stuff. So you never know – I don't ask them, where were you during the war, were you there or there – and they never tell you.

In contrast with the hopeful 'activists', the 'avoiders' tend to be pessimistic about the situation in their home country and about the prospects for reconciliation. They frequently express a sense of powerlessness, and expect conflict to recur: "I feel it was a game all along, and now it is time to pretend peace." In spite of this disillusionment, however, they often come across as grateful and content, since their life satisfaction is based more here and now than in the past and their country of origin. For their home country, if anything is going to help, it will be economic cooperation and practical interaction rather than a "talking cure".

The here-and-now focus also connects to a particularistic focus – in contrast with the emphasis on universality found in the forgiveness-spirituality practice – a focus on one's personal life; family, health, job fulfillment and personal finances. This focus is also reflected in the TST statements, which in typical 'distancing-avoidance' cases have few or no references to war-related identity aspects or refugee status. Instead, the self is defined by general parameters such as gender, age, traits, skills, interests and relationships. In one case, there was not a single TST item that revealed a participant's war and refugee experiences.

This practice can be linked to the subject positions of nonvictim or outsider; as well as to that of global citizen. Some still identify with their ethnic ingroup, but the more typical process is that of individualization; of distancing oneself somewhat from war-related groups. Similarly, forgiveness is valued more for the sake of the self ("to move on and establish myself, I must forgive") than for the other or the group. Apologies from the other side are not always requested, nor are public reconciliation events or ceremonies:

For me personally it is not important, as long as they don't demand it from us. If it's important for people, then OK, do it on both sides. But for me, it is more important to focus on the future.

About half of the interviewees whose dominant practice is distancing-avoidance somehow reflect on the question of whether it is the best option:

Maybe it's a bit cowardly not to get actively involved in anything, but to just stand on the sideline and criticize. I sometimes think about that... But I feel too powerless with my [pacifist] attitudes to do anything actively. The only option is getting involved in politics... But my life is here in Norway.

Another interviewee expresses a desire to be both active and forgiving, but finds it very difficult because of unacknowledged injustice on the part of the outgroup:

We must hope, we must have faith. If we believe in God, maybe that is it. But in terms of justice, it hurts. You cannot live without thinking about that injustice. I have lost five people in my family. Do you think I can forget that? If someone did it, and will not accept responsibility for it, I say no – it doesn't work that way. It's not right.

He says his faith helps him, by giving him hope of something beyond this short life – but not necessarily in relation to others. In these circumstances, his practice is distance-avoidance; he prefers not talking about his war experiences, but tries “to live a lot” (here-and-now focus). He concludes, towards the end of the interview:

I am not in Burundi or Rwanda, I am here in Norway. I am grateful to God! It's a country where there is peace.

The three reconciliation practices are summed up and linked to the respective discursive elements and social-psychological processes in table 5.3 (next page). I have found it helpful to summarize different approaches and positions into these three reconciliation practices – while recognizing that this does not capture the full story of any one participant in this study, nor the full range of available resources for reconciliation. There are simply more dimensions and elements in the material than can be explored fully within the scope of this thesis. On the basis of the three reconciliation practices identified here, let us move to a discussion of what this analysis might come to mean in theory and practice.

Table 5.3: Reconciliation practices – an overview

Reconciliation practice	ACTIVISM-EXPRESSION	FORGIVENESS-SPIRITUALITY	DISTANCING-AVOIDANCE
<i>Practitioner</i>	Hopeful, struggling activist	Forgiving spiritual voyager	Grateful worker living in the present
<i>Typical elements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active philanthropy • Deals with experience through studies/work/art • Emphasis on relational/society reconciliation • Justice, democracy, development, hope • Goal: Contribute to a better world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious motivation • Forgiveness as key • Universality, own need for forgiveness • Reflexive/inner process with relational consequences • Address the past, truth • Goal: Change of heart (for self and others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here-and-now focus • Gratitude for current safety and prosperity • Avoid talking about it, try to forget the past • Powerlessness in/distancing from country of origin • Goal: A new life, be done with past
<i>Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central; open dialogue necessary • Communication as awareness-raising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruitful; helps in overcoming past/pain • Lack of apology from other is transcended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoided; prefer not to talk/hear/see about experiences • More with others with similar views
<i>Identity development</i>	Recategorization Differentiation Mediator, changemaker, active agent, survivor with a purpose	Recategorization (universal ingroup) Differentiation Survivor with a purpose	Decategorization (individuals) Differentiation Victim, misunderstood victim, nonvictim
<i>Typical TST statements*</i>	I am a peacemaker I am a changemaker I am a philanthropist I am ambitious I am goal-oriented I am an optimist I am a world citizen	I am a Christian I am one who likes truth I am a person who needs to show others truth and help them when I can I have experience from what happened in Rwanda	I am not a very open person I am a Norwegian citizen I am a mother I am fond of animals I am not interested in soccer
<i>Constructions of 'the Other'</i>	Potential friend, co-worker Manipulated/misled in war Human, with needs/rights	Human, same as self Created in God's image Family member	Some: Potential friends Some: To be avoided, possibly crazy, inhuman
<i>Constructions of reconciliation (R)</i>	R as dialogue-understanding R as cooperation R as practical-material R as political, democracy	R as forgiveness R as reviewing-reframing R as understanding R as acceptance	R as moving on R as current wellbeing R as acceptance R as practical-material

* Exact quotes from the TSTs of the two interviewees most clearly located within each practice

6 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the insights this study brings to the table about the complexity and different practices of reconciliation; how these answer the research questions, and how they might contribute the theoretical and practical fields of reconciliation.

As outlined in the introduction, I argue that this study gives a *closer* look – an experience-based perspective which can nuance the ‘big picture’ of reconciliation; on the one hand, the theoretical debates about grand principles and seemingly timeless mechanisms, and on the other hand, practical interventions that are most often considered on an institutional or system level. The socioindividual experiences, practices and discourses presented here are where ‘grand’ and ‘small’ narratives meet; where individual and collective identities visibly intersect; where ideals and reality confront each other. I will attempt to show what there is to gain by adding this finer layer of complexity and picturing ‘reconciliation with a human face’.

This will entail a discussion of how these insights can be used to criticize and nuance the dominant understandings of and institutional settings for reconciliation. There will, however, also be an opposite dynamic; where what might be termed an international ‘reconciliation paradigm’ can challenge the practices identified in this study. This in turn touches upon overarching issues of normativity and definitional power. But before we go there – what is this complex face of reconciliation that I claim to have identified?

6.1 The research questions revisited

Bringing the conversations I have had with my interviewees into the larger ‘conversation about conversations’ (Kvale, 1996) that largely constitutes social research, I will now summarize how these findings and analysis answer my research questions:

- What reconciliation practices do survivors make use of to live on after war?

First, I conclude that the reconciliation practices identified in this study are diverse, and provide a complex picture of reconciliation. Second, I have suggested a patterning of this diversity into three distinct reconciliation practices, which might be considered ideal types.

6.1.1 A closer look at the complexity of reconciliation

The diverse expressions of what reconciliation means and how it can be ‘done’ that were found in these interviews confirm the *complexity* of reconciliation in several ways. I will here summarize some of these dimensions of complexity in terms of 1) language issues, 2)

different discursive constructions, 3) individual and group levels, 4) contradictions between and within interviews and 4) different reconciliation practices and mixing of practices.

1) *Language issues*: As put forth in table 5.1, different terms for ‘reconciliation’ in at least eight different languages have been involved in this study. These terms have diverging etymological roots, placing the concept within different ‘language games’ (Leer-Salvesen, 2009a), and emphasizing different elements of reconciliation – from the relational ‘coming together’ (*reconciliation, ubwiyunge*) through the process-centered ‘atonement being made for’ (*Versöhnung, forsoning*) to forgiveness as its essence (*pomirenje, kuwabararnira*). Even native speakers of the same language do not necessarily agree on a certain term’s core meaning or whether it parallels the meaning of ‘reconciliation’/‘forsoning’⁶¹. This translation issue, apparent in multilingually informed interviews such as these, adds to the understanding of reconciliation as a complex concept with fuzzy boundaries. Exploring whether these different etymologies and emphases reflect different traditions for conflict resolution and reconciliation in different cultures and languages would be a study of its own. For now, it suffices to note the challenge this poses in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic peace and reconciliation work; the lack of shared understanding a problem for outsider intervention.

2) *Different discursive constructions*: The elements linked to reconciliation and the discourses that are invoked (theological, political, psychological, legal, etc.) are many, and I will therefore not attempt to provide a more precise definition of reconciliation towards the end of this thesis, as I had expected to do. Instead, these summarizing comments on the complexity of reconciliation will have to suffice, pointing rather towards a richer and more nuanced conceptualization of reconciliation than one narrowed down to a precise definition⁶². One thing reconciliation is *not*, however, according to my interviewees, is mere nonviolent coexistence; they repeatedly refer to different ethnic groups living separately, side by side, in split communities or split cities, as unreconciled⁶³. In a very general sense, then, reconciliation can be understood as movements that are opposite of separation – while more specific conceptualizations of reconciliation are found to be multiple and diverse; e.g. as

⁶¹ My own participation in these defining discussions was more substantial than I had ideally wanted them to be, because of the language challenge in interviewing speakers of several different languages in a language non-native language to them all; as they often returned the question when I asked what reconciliation means. The range of diverse constructions of ‘reconciliation’ that emerged (cf. figure 5.2), however, suggests that there was still sufficient openness for the interviewees to express quite different understandings of the concept.

⁶² Leer-Salvesen (2009a) similarly prefers to refrain from defining reconciliation, but rather to situate it in different language games.

⁶³ This applies especially to the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. In the Great Lakes region, there seems to be more violence still occurring, which is linked to these societies being classified as ‘not reconciled’.

movements towards relatedness and universal empathy, acknowledgement of humanity and dignity, forgiveness, acceptance, cooperation and new beginnings.

In connection with my presentation of the diverse discursive constructions of 'reconciliation' (table 5.2), I argue that the use of other words to substitute the often non-colloquial 'reconciliation' can point to what they see as the core content of reconciliation; e.g. forgiving, moving on and cooperating. Another reason why 'forgiveness' may have been so frequently used, however, is because it refers to a guilt-forgiveness axis rather than to a conflict-reconciliation axis, and therefore places the blame and responsibility for what happened more clearly in a one-sided manner (Leer-Salvesen, 1998)⁶⁴. It would seem that many of the interviewees implicitly agree with Leer-Salvesen (1998) in that guilt-forgiveness is a necessary supplement to (or a necessary part of) a conflict-reconciliation discourse.

Reconciliation is also both reflexive and relational in these accounts, and the boundary between the two emphases is usually not clear – they are rather mutually supporting each other than separate phases or processes: Coming to terms with the past in oneself seems to open up for reconciling with others, and forgiveness and letting go of resentment towards others can in turn be liberating, and lighten the 'burden in one's heart'. It is no necessity, however, that reflexive reconciliation leads to actual restoration of relationship, which might be impossible or deemed undesirable for many different reasons.

Reconciliation with a unilateral point of departure, without apologies or other initiatives from the others, is relevant to most all participants here, since they as refugees in another country are unlikely to meet former enemies or perpetrators who have harmed them directly. I will argue that such a reconciliation process can still have a relational (interpersonal or intergroup) aspect. This can be related to what Volf (1996) calls the 'will to embrace', which comes before any 'actual embrace'. In fact, the actual embrace may never happen, unless the perpetrator acknowledges guilt and receives the forgiveness extended⁶⁵. However, even if direct relational reconciliation with individual perpetrators (actual embrace) does not occur, such a reconciliatory stance based on reflexive reconciliation may affect how one relates to 'the others' as a group.

⁶⁴ A parallel underlining of the brutal asymmetry of a situation was reflected when an interviewee from Rwanda rejected my use of the term 'conflict' instead of 'genocide' in the Rwandan context (cf. footnote 30).

⁶⁵ Volf (1996) finds his concept of embrace and of the primacy of the will to embrace on Christian theology; with a God that is 'ready to forgive' (Psalm 86:5), and Jesus Christ who while on the cross, with no sign of remorse from his tormenters, says: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). At least a third of the interviewees express that they have been directly influenced by this 'logic', central to the Christian gospel. Other interviewees may have decided to have a 'will to embrace', or more precisely, perhaps, a 'will to let go', mainly because of its liberating effect on themselves.

3) *Individual and group levels*: The relation between individual and group dimensions in reconciliation after intergroup conflict is also complex, and a theme that has rarely been discussed in the literature. One might reconcile with the others as a group (give outgroup members an equal chance upon meeting them, etc.) without forgiving and reconciling with individual perpetrators. Has reconciliation then been achieved?⁶⁶ The interviewees express that group level reconciliation is significant to them, while they in several cases employ careful differentiation between individuals (according to actions and attitudes) as well as subgroups (e.g. between ‘ordinary people’ and ‘leaders’) within both ingroup and outgroup.

4) *Contradictions between and within interviews*: From these interviews it is also apparent how the meanings of reconciliation are not only multifaceted, but sometimes even contradictory. In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, one interviewee links reconciliation to accepting that one will not return to one’s country of origin. Quite to the contrary, another interviewee considers repatriation to be a key criterion for reconciliation in the Bosnian context, and a similar view is found in Bringa (2005). The opposing views of the other as human or inhuman (5.2.4) and the evaluations of ‘talking about it’ as constructive or destructive (5.3) are other examples of such contradictions.

Seeing the widely diverging discourses reconciliation forms part of, it might not be surprising that there are multiple paradoxes also within each single interview: Interviewees hold that some apology or acknowledgment is needed to forgive, but have still forgiven without it. They may have forgiven, while still emphasizing the importance of a legal process involving punishment. They may state first that one is trying to forget what happened, and later that it is essential that what happened is remembered so that it will never happen again. It is also underlined that it is impossible to force or impose reconciliation from the outside (top-down, politically, by national or international intervention); at the same time as such outside intervention and institutional support is often seen as supportive and sometimes decisive for reconciliation to come about.

5) *Different reconciliation practices and mixing of reconciliation practices*: One pattern of differences between interviews has been developed into three different reconciliation practices here; activism-expression, forgiveness-spirituality and distancing-avoidance. Even though most⁶⁷ interviewees can be linked to a dominant practice, ‘pure’ categorizations do once again not quite hold in reality: One interviewee seemingly mixes all

⁶⁶ This example illustrates that a question of ‘how much reconciliation’ can rarely be given a clear-cut answer.

⁶⁷ In my reading of the interviews, a dominant practice is identified in all interviewees but one.

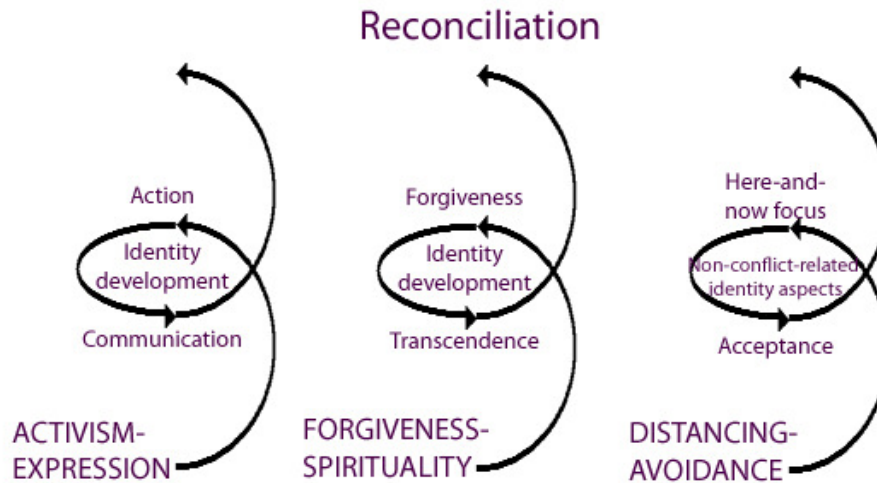


Figure 6.1: Reconciliation practices

three practices fairly evenly; almost all tell of elements of one other practice than their dominant one; some (2) interviewees in principle favor one practice but apply another for pragmatic reasons, and some change practices according to context (4) or over time (2). There was also feedback, collected during my verification round with the interviewees, pointing to that the interview participation in itself had contributed to the process of changing reconciliation practices towards activism-expression; demonstrating again the processual character of reconciliation, and how contextual support and experiences affect the process:

Amazing – it gave me a whole new angle on all this, and at the same time, inspiration to look forward. After the day we talked, I decided what my new studies will be...

6.1.2 Three reconciliation practices

Three distinct practices (patterns) have been identified: Activism-expression, forgiveness-spirituality and distancing-avoidance. These different reconciliation practices are connected to actions and discursive constructions, discourses/interpretative repertoires and subject positions, as outlined in table 5.3. I have summarized them visually in figure 6.1.

As previously mentioned, the three practices can be considered ideal types that are not necessarily found in 'pure' form. Usually one of the practices is identified as dominant in each interviewee, but there are also combinations. Who, then, practices reconciliation in which way? A full analysis of the distribution of reconciliation practices is beyond the scope of this study and its research questions, and possible explanatory variables range from cultural and institutional context through to personality and individual trauma. Since I build on a limited and non-random selection of interviewees, I cannot draw causal inferences, but will

only outline a few of the most salient distributional patterns that may serve an exploratory purpose⁶⁸: Religious motivation and geographical region.

An explicit religious motivation is expressed by all the interviewees who most clearly practice forgiveness-spirituality, as might be expected, but also in all but one who practice activism-expression. Arguably, what I have named a practice of forgiveness-spirituality fits well with central tenets of Christian theology and its suggested implications for societal reconciliation (Battle, 1997; Tutu, 1999; Volf, 1996). Contained in the practice of forgiveness-spirituality I find narratives of going through a difficult and painful time, to later transcend this suffering to move on with a purpose – a narrative structure that resembles the narrative of the life of Christ, with its suffering/death-resurrection/new life-sharing this life with others. It seems, however, that a more activist practice, aiming not only at forgiveness but also material/political consequences, can also be motivated by Christian faith.

In relation to the two geographical areas my interviewees come from, I find that activism-expression and forgiveness-spirituality dominate among participants from the Great Lakes Region, while distancing-avoidance dominates among Balkan participants.

The differences according to region overlap with the aforementioned religious factor. Religion motivated forgiveness and activism for reconciliation for participants from the Great Lakes Region, where Christianity is dominant, while religion was not relevant for the issue of reconciliation among participants from the Balkans – a more multireligious region, where Islam and Catholic and Orthodox Christianity has been linked to the different warring factions; after a Communist era in which religion was repressed and either distant or very private. Balkan interviewees almost exclusively referred to religion as a marker of difference and conflict; which might explain why it was not seen as a resource, but rather as a problem⁶⁹.

Another regional difference that may have an influence on the distribution of reconciliation practices is found in the greater amount of discrimination and immigrant challenges that is mentioned by the Great Lakes region interviewees compared to the Balkan interviewees. As black Africans they are part of a much more visibly different minority in Norway than Balkan Europeans, which may make distancing-avoidance less of an option⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ There were no clear trends in the material according to other basic categorizations such as gender or age.

⁶⁹ Several interviewees from the Balkans, however, expressed the idea that 'true religion' does not harm, but teaches people to be good to each other and live in peace. Still, their most salient experience of religion was its abuse or manipulation during the conflict. Religion was seen as an available marker of difference, and "they had to separate us somehow". The interviewees here show an understanding that might be labeled social constructionist and in line with the bulk of current ethnicity studies.

⁷⁰ The migration dimension might certainly play a great part in this. I take Uvin's (2009) observations from Burundi to portray what I would call distancing-avoidance as the dominant reconciliation practice among the

6.1.3 Identity processes in reconciliation

What do these reconciliation practices mean in terms of post-conflict identity development?

Identity development was focused on and also confirmed as important in the reconciliation processes in the material. In overcoming enemy images, both decategorization and recategorization appear to be potentially helpful strategies. Decategorization – a movement towards differentiation of the outgroup, and towards seeing others as individuals rather than as group members – was prevalent throughout most interviews. Recategorization into a common ingroup ('we are all Rwandan', 'we are all human') was most explicitly emphasized within forgiveness-spirituality, but also frequent within activism-expression. These ways of reframing the others were often, especially within activism-expression and forgiveness-spirituality, linked to reframing the self; either by way of a universalist strategy ("I am a global citizen") or a particularist strategy ("I am just me"). These self-processes correspond with recategorization and decategorization of the other, respectively.

That recategorization and decategorization is possible can be seen as a sign that conflict is weaker and reconciliation underway – while it simultaneously contributes to that reconciliation. As Volf (1996, p. 99) writes, "the stronger the conflict, the more the rich texture of the social world disappears and the stark exclusionary polarity emerges around which all thought and practice aligns itself... If one does not exit that whole social world, one gets sucked into its horrid polarity". This rings true with these accounts of powerful polarity experienced during conflict. For refugees who have in an important sense left 'that whole social world', identity polarity can be weakened through de- or recategorization. While most express a continuous ethnic identity, this is no longer an all-dominant identity aspect. Other identity aspects are more available and mean more in the new context.

Those of mixed ethnicity may in a sense originally have had this greater 'freedom of movement' between identity aspects, but in a time of war this potential flexibility is rather seen by others as threatening⁷¹, and they are locked in place by the categorizations of others. In the post-conflict context within which these interviews were conducted, however, a mixed background and the experience that categories do not tell the full story can again position people to make a more active choice of position (emphasis on different identity aspects). The

population there, while very few of the participants in this present study from Burundi and neighboring countries practice distancing-avoidance.

⁷¹ Ngendakurio & Holmedahl (2009) give an autobiographical account from Burundi of the challenges of being of mixed origin in the polarity of war, an account which resembles those found in my material regarding this.

migrant experience might provide a new type of 'mixed background', linking the migrant to new contexts and contributing with constructive complexity to their identity development⁷².

Another dimension of post-conflict flexibility in identity development can be seen in that the interviewees take different subject positions as victim, misunderstood victim (an expression of 'double victimhood', cf. Nadler & Shnabel, 2008), nonvictim or purposed survivor. There seems to be elements of choice or (re)definitional power here, as well as positioning forces beyond the individual. Along with the findings of recategorization and decategorization, my analysis here largely confirms Skjelsbæk's (2007, p. 42) observations "(1) that the victims have power to redefine their social identities in the post-conflict sociopolitical space; (2) that their ability to do so, however, depends on the material, social, and political context in which they find themselves in the post-conflict setting, as well as the ways in which their "supporting cast" plays its part; and, finally, (3) that positioning oneself mainly as a victim as opposed to a survivor (or the other way around) has different impacts on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal relations." In line with this last point, victimhood positions have an impact on practice: Where survivors are positioned for activism-expression or forgiveness-spirituality, nonvictims are rather positioned for distancing-avoidance.

Decategorization – the individual track: Differentiation and complexity

Identity development in terms of decategorization is in my material linked to a differentiation in guilt within the outgroup as well as the ingroup. This aids intergroup reconciliation by separating the collective from the individual dimension, as one discerns between different roles and degrees of agency within the enemy group. Since entire groups are not to blame, one can give individuals a chance. When the strict polarity of the war is replaced by the complex social field of a new and individualist society, a war refugee may find decategorization the most viable option for reconciliatory identity development.

Recategorization – the universal track: Towards common ingroups

Identity development in terms of recategorization is, as predicted by the common ingroup identity model (Dovidio, et al., 2008; S. L. Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), found to be a fruitful part of the reconciliation process. Recategorization leads to different level larger ingroups:

⁷² The complexity gained through intercultural experiences also entails losses and challenges, as described in the literature on Third Culture Kids and global lives, e.g. in Eidse & Sichel (2004). My argument here is that it might be constructive specifically for reconciliatory identity development.

- Nationality: Most clearly in the case of Rwanda, where building a common national identity has been a central policy for the post-genocide regime (cf. chapter 4)
- Continent: As being African, and to a certain extent being European (in references to future European Union membership for the new Balkan states)
- Immigrants: In negative terms as related to shared difficulties; or in positive terms as related to being a global citizen, a cosmopolitan with intercultural experience⁷³

At any level, recategorization does not necessarily lead to the abolishment of lower-level ingroup identification, confirming the possibility of dual identities (Dovidio, et al., 2008) – or rather *multiple* identities⁷⁴. This may explain why an ultimate form of recategorization, to a universal ingroup, is also common – contrary to former assumptions that such a universal recategorization is either not realistic or not helpful (Nadler, et al., 2008). Religious or pacifist motivations seem to be possible groundings for such universal human categorization in the present material.

This acknowledgment of the humanity of the other as well as the self can be identified – both in these interviews and in existing literature (Gravås & Velund, 2008; Kelman, 2008)⁷⁵ – as a key to both reflexive and relational reconciliation. Shared humanity opens up perspectives of shared vulnerability and interconnectedness (Brown & Poremski, 2005); in which identities are reconciled and the old ‘us’ and ‘them’ can be transcended.

6.1.4 Relating to the others: Reconciliatory communication?

In spite of the reconciliatory identity development identified, on the less hopeful side of these accounts are stories of continued polarity after migration, of violence and harassment directed at refugees because of their ethnicity or positioning in the conflict they fled from. Five interviewees, from both conflict clusters, have such stories to tell (two were harassed themselves). With this in mind, I turn to the last follow-up question in this study: What do the reconciliation practices mean in terms of how they relate to ‘the others’ today?

Generally, these migrated interviewees have few chances to interact directly with former perpetrators on an individual level, yet opportunities for contact with other members

⁷³ A third of the interviewees refer to their intercultural experience and global citizenship in their TSTs.

⁷⁴ The occurrence of multiple identities fits well with Papa’s finding (2007) that ethnic pride (ethnic ingroup identification) was independent from interethnic tolerance (by analogy, larger ingroup identification) in the context of former Yugoslavia.

⁷⁵ More specifically, Gravås & Velund (2008) see an existential confirmation of being human, and more than the wrong committed (or by analogy, for victims: the trauma suffered), as a key factor in self-forgiveness, and also refer to the importance of such acknowledgment and confirmation of humanity in psychotherapy.

of the (former) outgroup. The practice of distancing-avoidance can be linked to the avoidance of such contact; but also with the avoidance of war-related communication, a practice which actually makes contact with outgroup members (as long as they “don’t talk about it”) possible. When it comes to how distancing-avoidance practitioners relate to the others indirectly, in discourse, there are two diverging paths⁷⁶: Some construe the others as a outgroup they still have mixed or negative feelings towards; while some others prefer to relate to everyone as an individual, first and foremost, and are not more nor less interested in contact with anyone based on their relation to the war (both ingroup and outgroup members). In either case, communication *about the conflictive past* is avoided.

Practitioners of forgiveness-spirituality, on the contrary, gladly engage in such communication. They also express a principled willingness to relate to anyone, including outgroup members, sometimes even those who e.g. killed their family. And finally, within activism-expression, communication is not just desirable, but in itself the road to healing:

Uwuzza gukira ingwaru arayirata.

*If one wants to be healed from a disease, one must talk about it.*⁷⁷

From the present findings, however, it can be concluded that not just communication with former enemies, but also with others (host society, other refugees, pastors, psychologists, teachers, etc.) can contribute to such ‘healing’ and reconciliation. Reconciliatory communication, then, can take place also when there is no direct ingroup-outgroup contact. One might also speak of reconciliatory discourses; since certain discursive constructions, positionings and interpretative repertoires open up for forgiveness and reconciliation more than others, as seen in the discourses framing the others as human versus inhuman.

The finding that relevant reconciliatory communication here happens first with other people than the former enemy, and with influence from other inputs (studies, therapy, Bible reading, preachings), can be linked to the chronological primacy of self-reconciliation suggested by Leer-Salvesen (2009a). It may also be seen as supporting the conceptual division between socioemotional and instrumental reconciliation (Nadler, et al., 2008); since the interviewees’ reframing of the self and the other (identity development; i.e. socioemotional reconciliation) appears to sometimes happen independently from any actual

⁷⁶ I have considered analytically splitting the distancing practice in two; *distancing-release* (focusing on the act of ‘letting go’, acceptance) and *distancing-avoidance*. It might be useful to reexamine the material or collect more data to explore this possibility further.

⁷⁷ Saying from Burundi and Rwanda referred to by an interviewee in this study.

contact with the others (interaction; i.e. instrumental reconciliation)⁷⁸. It suggests that third party contributions can be important, and finally, that significant reconciliation processes also unfold and can be aided *outside* of the society where conflict occurred.

6.2 Theoretical implications

A question that arises in the process of outlining the theoretical implications of these findings is the question of whether all these reconciliation practices are equally fruitful. Even though an evaluation of different reconciliation practices is strictly beyond the scope of this study, a few comments along such lines are in place, particularly because of the normativity and often applied character of peace and conflict studies. The proposed reconciliation practices can be related to both theoretical discussions and practical interventions within the field:

- *Activism-expression* corresponds with legal processes such as ICTY, ICTR and ICC, democracy building, and development and human rights approaches – and theoretically with much of the transitional justice literature
- *Forgiveness-spirituality* corresponds with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions such as that of South Africa, and theoretically with much theological and psychological reconciliation literature, e.g. with Tutu (1999) and Volf (1996)
- *Distancing-avoidance* corresponds with the practice of countries where the past has been largely silenced (e.g. Chile), and is also likely to apply to many emigrants; but is theoretically rarely promoted, with the exception of Nee & Uvin (2009)

According to this reading of the reconciliation practices, there are arguments for both activism-expression and forgiveness-spirituality readily available in reconciliation theory and practice. The latter of the practices, however, is almost absent in the literature, and therefore also among the findings that surprised me the most while undertaking this study.

Distancing-avoidance is in fact the most common dominant practice among my interviewees. Contrary to my expectations, such avoidance and minimized communication even seems constructive in some cases – according to most of the interviewees themselves, it helps them reconcile. In a few cases, I would argue that the interviewees might actually be less reconciled than they claim to be; because of the way they construe the others to be essentially different from themselves with negative implications for the possibilities of forgiveness and future interaction. I could also argue that practitioners of distancing-

⁷⁸ There are also studies that suggest that imagining intergroup contact could represent a viable alternative for reducing prejudice where actual contact between groups is impractical (R. Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007).

avoidance generally seem to show somewhat less identity development than in the other practices; those who are most open towards outgroups claim to have held that attitude consistently, throughout the process. According to a definition of reconciliation as implying some sort of change, more specifically, identity development, it could then be argued that a distancing-avoidance practice yields less reconciliatory effects than the other two. Some (two) distancing-avoidance practitioners also question their own practice, a phenomenon that does not occur in relation to the other two practices. These self-critical considerations might, however, reflect wider dominant discourses about reconciliation and transformative justice as much as an inherent weakness in the distancing-avoidance practice. Even with the caveats above in mind, in most cases⁷⁹ distancing-avoidance seems a viable alternative that leads to reframing and constructive meaning-making by focusing on something other than past pain.

Nee & Uvin (2009) have made similar observations in a broad study from post-war Burundi designed to give a ‘view from below’. They conclude that the majority of Burundians prefer silence and ‘forgetting’ rather than prosecutions and truth-telling mechanisms⁸⁰, to “enable the country to look toward constructing a future instead of dwelling on the past” (Nee & Uvin, 2009, p. 148) – preferences that correspond with what I have called a distancing-avoidance practice. They also observe that those who want to talk about the past (favor truth-telling) as well as those who avoid it claim that their preferred practice will prevent recurrence of violence. In my terminology, both communicating and avoiding it can be part of reconciliation practices; that is, practices aimed at peaceful coexistence.

It is interesting to note how these findings among war survivors who stayed in their home country correspond with my findings among refugees. The difference in location is still significant, however: Several interviewees in my study underline that the migration distance implies that their personal reconciliation preferences cannot be understood as recommendations for how to aid reconciliation at home; their emigrant status positions them more clearly as individuals rather than group members. On the other hand, the refugee practices outlined here provide a basis for claiming that reconciliation efforts can be useful not only in post-conflict societies, but also among post-conflict refugees in other countries. In addition to the benefits in terms of well-being and functioning for the war survivors themselves, reconciliation achieved abroad can also impact their countries of origin through transnational connections (Fuglerud, 2004).

⁷⁹ I have considered labeling these ‘most reconciled’ cases a *distancing-release* practice, as a subcategory of *distancing* (the other being *distancing-avoidance*), cf. footnote 76.

⁸⁰ Attitudes are more positive to creating safe environments for local dialogue than to larger public processes.

Returning to Nee & Uvin (2009), I agree that the distancing-avoidance practice (preferring silence) runs counter to the basic tenets of transitional justice. It might therefore be found controversial to suggest the existence of, or even a rationale for, such a practice⁸¹, and it challenges central dogmas of the ‘transitional justice paradigm’, such as the necessity of confronting the past publicly and holding memories high. Along with the virtues (or possible key elements) of truth, acknowledgment, forgiveness, justice and memory that are so often so highly regarded, other virtues or possible keys may be suggested, such as flexibility, a present-future focus, and even a letting go of resentment that can amount to forgetting.

However, a seemingly opposite reaction to past wrongs, that of ‘righteous anger’ or continued resentment, can also be linked to the practice of distancing-avoidance among some interviewees, who avoid talking about or forgiving the wrongs they have suffered because they consider certain things unforgivable and certain ideologies and biased versions of history unacceptable (and still applied by some outgroup members). This may sound like a distancing from reconciliation altogether, but I find that it is applied in such a differentiated way (i.e., not all outgroup members were/are equally guilty, they should be given a fair chance as individuals) that reconciliation on a group level is still possible and deemed desirable by the interviewees in question. They do, however, strongly emphasize that the bulk of the responsibility for the reconciliation process to progress rests with the other party.

These narratives do not fit the dominant theoretical discourses about reconciliation very well, since these are often centered on forgiveness, and it is usually assumed that reconciliation can only be reached when the parties let go of resentments towards each other. An unwillingness to forgive and an upholding of resentment can even be tacitly pathologized and deemed immoral in a generic sense. Brudholm (2008) and Leer-Salvesen (2009b)⁸² argue that resentment can also be considered a virtue, when conceptualized as ‘moral anger and resistance against evil and oppression’. The defense of this position as a morally sound alternative to forgiveness entails an acknowledgment of the right to not forgive, and an argument to include wrath or resentment into the ethics of reconciliation (Leer-Salvesen, 2009b). My analysis here confirms and contributes to such a complex understanding of

⁸¹ An example of how controversial such an approach might be was seen at the reconciliation conference *Er forsoning mulig? Norge etter 2. verdenskrig* in Kristiansand in November 2009 (when Moris Farhi’s argument for choosing not to remember in his paper “The courage to forget” (Farhi, 2009) evoked strong reactions.

⁸² This article outlines a theological foundation for reconciliation as more or other than forgiveness: “The God of reconciliation is not only the one who forgives the offender. God is also the one who confronts Evil with wrath and resentment and the one who judges the offender and gives the victims restitution and justice.” (Leer-Salvesen, 2009b, p. 175) In my terminology, this could motivate Christian activism-expression, not only forgiveness-spirituality. Might one also imagine a Christian/theological rationale for distancing, e.g. based on Bible passages about “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” (Philippians 3:13)?

reconciliation as processes that may contain forgiveness as well as resentment, acceptance and simultaneously calls for justice, even within the same life story. A possible reconciliatory position that includes resentment would be a willingness to reconcile with people, but not with the destructive ideology in the name of which they committed war crimes: Reconciling with Germans and Nazi sympathizers after World War II, but not with Nazism⁸³; with Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims, but not with any ethnic cleansing ideology or practice; with Hutus, but not with remnants of genocidal ideology. Reconciliation is a goal, but not at any price; there is also place for moral judgment in post-conflict contexts.

While this present analysis challenges the theoretical field somewhat, questions may also be posed in return. One might ask if distancing-avoidance can be considered a fitting response when moral resentment is present, or if activism-expression would serve as a more appropriate confrontation of the resented evil. If identity development is seen as central to reconciliation, one might also ask whether distancing-avoidance is conducive of such development when war experience-related issues are not addressed. In return, the findings show processes of decategorization across different reconciliation practices (while recategorization and own identity development are more pronounced in forgiveness-spirituality and activism-expression); an argument for the fruitfulness of diverse practices.

In this dialogue between the empirical and the theoretical, there are also overarching issues of normativity and definitional power. Who defines what is normative and preferable, and how to get there? There are even different normativities from different academic perspectives – where ethical and theological normativity asks ‘what is right’, a psychological perspective might ask ‘what is healthy’ or ‘beneficial for wellbeing and functioning’, and a social science/peace studies perspective would look for ‘what creates a stable society’. The people in question, however, have their own needs and preferences, and Nee & Uvin (2009) rightly question whether professed virtues of empowerment and local participation are put in to practice when local and outsider epistemologies differ. Theories about reconciliation gain from considering the complexity of the lives in question, with intersecting experiences of e.g. migration and poverty. Reconciliation may not be the sole goal of those involved; survival, security and meaning may be equally or more important; silence might be preferred to truth-telling. One of the challenges, then, will be to respect people’s silence (cf. Skjelsbæk, 2007) while voicing their concerns.

⁸³ This distinction was underlined by Edvard Hoem at the reconciliation conference *Er forsoning mulig? Norge etter 2. verdenskrig* in Kristiansand in November 2009: “We can never lay down the struggle against evil for the sake of reconciliation” (personal notes, my translation).

In outlining these diverse reconciliation practices, I recognize that we cannot conclude from what is to what ought to be; from practice to norm. But neither can we conclude from norm to practice. Knowledge of actual reconciliation practices (as well as nonreconciliatory practices) in a specific post-conflict context is a necessary supplement to theoretical frameworks about optimal reconciliation practices; and a closer empirical investigation of the outcomes of different practices can also inform normative recommendations at a later stage.

This suggests many possible starting points for further research. Comparisons of different reconciliation practices could enrich the understanding of why different practices are applied and what outcomes they lead to. Investigations of reconciliation as played out in specified groups, i.e. participants in dialogue groups, are also likely to yield useful insights; as are comparisons between refugees and those who stayed in the post-conflict society. The fruitfulness of different types of identity development (deategorization, limited recategorization and universal recategorization) and post-conflict communication (with ingroup members, outgroup members and outsiders) can also be evaluated further.

This suggested research would all rest on the normative assumption of reconciliation as a goal, and would again require ‘reconciliation’ to be defined and operationalized, perhaps even more precisely than what I have achieved here. On a scientific-philosophical level, however, studies such as this and that of Nee & Uvin (2009) raise issues of normativity and definitional power (or in practical terms: outside interventions vs. local ownership), as argued, that to my knowledge have rarely been addressed in the field of peace and conflict studies. Simply put, the basic question would be: Whose normativity?

6.3 Practical implications

The present analysis, with its emphasis on complexity and different reconciliation practices, does in no way render current transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives superfluous or outdated. There are statements and narratives in the material that strongly support legal procedures, on both international, national and local/traditional levels (e.g. Rwanda’s gacaca courts), larger public truth-telling mechanisms and smaller scale dialogue meetings and reparation efforts. But the insights gained through this study might help us understand why any one such policy or institution does not reach everyone. This might be considered a ‘reality check’ that contributes to more realistic expectations concerning such efforts. This analysis is also clearly an argument for multi-level approaches to reconciliation. Policy makers might apply knowledge about the alternative practices of activism-expression, forgiveness-

spirituality and distancing-avoidance in devising reconciliation efforts that supplement each other and address both legal, political, spiritual, relational, practical-material and psychological dimensions of reconciliation.

For those who are themselves impacted by violent experiences, the overview of practices and elements outlined in this analysis might serve as a toolbox, a range of resources that may be considered as moves towards reconciliation. For those who want to contribute to the reconciliation processes of others, the range of practices can also be considered a range of resources, as well as a reminder of the existence of individual as well as group-positioned variations in how to approach reconciliation. As in the methodology behind this analysis, *listening* to the people in question appears as a central task. In addition to dialogue and truth-telling opportunities, history revision and legal prosecutions, practical-material, political/power-sharing and security issues may be at least as important for many. Both activism-expression and distancing-avoidance practices point to the importance of present day society-building and meaning-making for post-conflict recovery and reconciliation.

I underline once again that the interviewees move back and forth between individual and collective levels when discussing reconciliation, and that their own practice may differ from what they consider fruitful or necessary on a group or society level. The finding that some individuals prefer distancing-avoidance does not, therefore, mean that a society as a whole can achieve reconciliation without truth-telling and legal justice; in fact, the interviewees underlined the importance of such processes (particularly legal processes), even if they personally wanted to watch them from a distance. Nee & Uvin (2009), on the contrary, found in Burundi that legal prosecutions were not a priority for the majority. A hopeful dimension there, however, which is strongly confirmed by this present study, is the display of human creativity involved in rebuilding a peaceful and meaningful life after war; in finding ways to live side by side or together, and in one way or another, to reconcile. It seems that even if the phenomenon of reconciliation can be almost universally sought after, the shape of the process (which elements to include, how to weight them and balance different level approaches) cannot be universal – it needs to be locally specific and socially grounded⁸⁴, and even then will involve individual paths within the social fabric.

⁸⁴ Nee & Uvin (2009, p. 170) similarly conclude their chapter on justice and silence stating that “there *is* in Burundi a social grounding to move toward justice as defined by the international community, but this process is a much slower and much more locally specific one than the transitional justice literature and practice seem willing to recognize”.

7 Concluding reflections

A complex and colorful picture of reconciliation has emerged in this study. Shared by all interviewees was the experience of reconciliation as an important, but long and complex process, and as both reflexive (an inner process) and relational (an interpersonal/intergroup process). Yet, in this mapping of reconciliation, significantly different roads were sketched out; roads that I have termed different reconciliation practices: Activism-expression, forgiveness-spirituality and distancing-avoidance. This range of practices presented can also be viewed as a toolbox of resources for reconciliation.

As the title of this thesis implies, the participants in this study are on the move. They are moving to take action against injustice and violence, moving in spiritual and personal growth, and moving away from the trauma of the past, consciously directing their lives towards what gives meaning and joy today. Some move away from each other – most now move towards each other, or are at least facing in that direction, open to the possibility of the other being more than a former enemy.

In addition to the theoretical and practical implications outlined above, this study has personal implications – at the very least for me. Holding to the traveler metaphor of the researcher, it has been a transformative journey. Self-centered as I assume most of us can be, I have been surprised to find practices different from my own to be prevalent and fruitful, and can apply this in giving others the space to practice reconciliation in their own way – for instance by not trying to “talk to death” what the person I face may want a greater distance to.

There are lessons here that can be applied to any life, lessons in forgiveness and the greatness of the human spirit, in rightful moral resentment, and in flexibility, creativity and the will to life. So how do we tell our story? How do we relate to the ‘luggage’ of our past – using negative experiences actively for good or for growth, or focusing on the joy of the present moment? How do we find our way back to each other? There is more than one answer to the question of reconciliation. These are also valuable insights for anyone walking alongside others in reconciliation processes, on a personal, group or society level.

As long as the world is a place of struggle and conflict, the colorful mosaic of human reconciliation practices continues to be built. I will let one of my interviewees, who have so impressed me by their ability to move on, have the last word:

Reconciliation is not just between people who killed, it's the same between you and your friend. Reconciliation has to be rehearsed every day, every moment.

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Attachments

Attachment 1: Invitation to participate – information to interviewees

Kan jeg få høre din historie?

INTERVJUDELTAkere SØKES TIL STUDIE OM FORSONING ETTER KRIG

Jeg ønsker å komme i kontakt med deg som er kommet til Norge fra Balkan eller fra Rwanda, Burundi eller Kongo, for å intervju deg om forsoning – om livet etter krigserfaringene.

Om prosjektet

Forskningsprosjektet er knyttet til masterprogrammet Fred- og konfliktstudier ved Universitetet i Oslo. Jeg er interessert i å finne ut mer om hvordan man forholder seg til tidligere motstandere/fiender, og hvordan man mestrer å leve videre etter krig. Her er det ingen rette eller gale svar, men jeg er ute etter å lytte til og forstå *dine* erfaringer.

Det er frivillig å delta. Du kan når som helst trekke deg fra forskningsprosjektet, og du vil få tilbakemelding på hva jeg skriver både før og etter prosjektet er ferdig. Opplysningene som samles inn vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, og alle intervjudeltakere blir anonyme i det jeg skriver. Prosjektet skal være ferdig i juni 2010.

Praktisk om intervjuene

Hvert intervju vil ta omtrent en time, med mulighet for å snakke lenger sammen om vi ønsker det. Intervjuet kan foregå på norsk eller engelsk. Intervjuene skal avholdes i desember 2009 og januar 2010. Jeg er basert i Kristiansand/Songdalen, og kan komme hjem til deg, eller vil sørge for et annet passende lokale å være i. Tid og sted avtales ellers med hver enkelt deltaker – både dagtid og kveldstid kan være aktuelt.

Jeg ser fram til å få høre din historie – den er viktig!

Vennlig hilsen

Hildegunn Marie T. Schuff

Masterstudent, Peace and Conflict Studies, Universitetet i Oslo

Ja, jeg vil være med på et intervju om forsoning.

Navn: _____

Telefonnr.: _____

E-post: _____

Jeg kommer fra: _____

Attachment 2: Declaration of consent

SAMTYKKEERKLÆRING

Jeg samtykker med dette til å delta i et intervju i forskningsprosjektet om forsoning etter krig og konflikt.

Jeg samtykker til at intervjuet tas opp på bånd, og senere transkriberes til skriftlig tekst. Lydopptakene vil være i forskerens besittelse under hele prosjektperioden, og vil slettes når prosjektet er ferdig.

Intervjuet er konfidensielt. Jeg samtykker til at tekst fra intervjuet kan brukes i anonymisert form i sitater og eksempler i masteroppgaven prosjektet leder fram til, og i eventuelle vitenskapelige artikler og foredrag basert på denne.

Jeg vil få tilbakemelding på hvordan informasjonen som er samlet inn i prosjektet blir analysert og presentert, både før og etter fullføring av masteroppgaven. Jeg forstår at jeg vil få anledning til å gi respons på hvordan mine utsagn analyseres, samtidig som forskeren har endelig ansvar og beslutningsmyndighet i forhold til prosjektets sluttprodukt.

Intervjuet er basert på frivillig deltakelse. Som intervjudeltaker kan jeg velge å avstå fra å svare på spørsmål, og jeg kan trekke meg fra prosjektet når som helst.

Sted/dato:

Underskrift intervjudeltaker

Som forsker og ansvarlig for dette prosjektet bekrefter jeg at ovennevnte informasjon er riktig. Jeg tar ansvar for at all informasjon som samles inn i løpet av prosjektet behandles med varsomhet og moralsk integritet slik at intervjudeltakerens personvern, konfidensialitet og interesser blir ivaretatt.

Sted/dato:

Underskrift forsker/intervjuer

Attachment 3: Interview guide

Interview guide – reconciliation study

Thank you very much for being willing to participate in this interview. This interview is part of a research study on reconciliation after war and conflict. I want to try to understand what reconciliation means to you and what experiences you have had after the war/conflict that impacted your life. There are no right or wrong answers here, and both negative and positive experiences are interesting. What matters most is your experience and understanding, of which you are the expert.

Before we start I would like to give you some information. First, it is important to emphasize that this interview is confidential. Everything you say here will be only between you and me. Quotes and comments that might be used in the thesis or possibly in articles will be anonymous.

Second, because I am not able to make accurate notes of everything you say the interview will be recorded. The recordings will, however, stay with me at all times, and will be deleted when the project is finished.

Third, because this interview is based on volunteer participation you should feel free to not answer questions you may not wish to reveal answers to. If you wish to stop the entire interview, you are also free to do that whenever you want. I have a formal declaration of consent that I would like you to sign. Since I also commit to what is written here, I will sign as well, and you may have a copy.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, you are the expert and it is my goal to try to understand how you make sense of your experience. The interview will last for about one hour.

Before we start our conversation, I would like you to fill out this sheet for me (hand out Twenty Statements Test). You are quite simply to answer the question “Who am I?” twenty times.

Interview No.:

Age:

Education/training:

Citizenship:

Ethnic affiliation/group background:

Year of arrival in Norway:

1. How is your everyday life today?

- What kind of work do you do?
- What is your family situation?
- What does an ordinary week consist of?
- What are the major sources for joy in your life now?
- What is most challenging in your life now?
- If I ask you to characterize your life today in three words – what would those words be?
- When were you last in your country of origin? How often do you go there? How often are you in touch with people in your country of origin?

2. Can you tell me about your experiences from the conflict?

- In your opinion, what was the conflict about? Why was there a war/genocide?
- Who did you consider your enemies during the conflict? Did new people become enemies or friends?
 - o Can you tell me about an episode from the war that illustrates this?
- When was the last time you thought about something that happened during the war?
- How often do you think about these experiences now? (every day/week/month, only rarely, never)
Can you remember any specific situations in which you have thought about the war?
- How much have you talked to others about your war experiences?
 - o With whom?

- How did you experience talking about it?

3. What does reconciliation mean to you?

- Is 'reconciliation' a familiar term for you? (*mention in different languages as needed to reach common understanding*) How would you say 'reconciliation' in your mother tongue? What do you understand it to mean?
- What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word 'reconciliation'?
 - How important is reconciliation to you? Why/why not important?
- Does reconciliation have any religious meaning to you?
- Is reconciliation something you have thought about a lot?
- Is it meaningful for you to talk about 'reconciling' on your own? (inner/reflexive reconciliation vs. social/relational reconciliation)

4. The way you see it, has there been any reconciliation after the conflict?

- To what extent have *you and those close to you* experienced reconciliation?
 - Mention an episode/an example
- To what extent has there been reconciliation *in your country of origin, in the society as a whole*?
 - Mention an episode/an example
 - Can you think of any specific public events that have contributed to reconciliation?
 - International processes
 - International intervention and mediation
 - International trial processes (ICTY, ICTR, ICC)
 - Publicity in global media
 - National processes
 - Mediation and political peace processes
 - Elections and other political processes
 - Initiatives in the media
 - National/local trial processes
 - Balkans:
 - The admission of the Srebrenica massacre by the Serbian state, apology for it
 - Great Lakes region:
 - Rwanda: Gacaca-processes, apologies from the UN and other international actors for failing to help
 - Have you perceived any expressions of a desire for reconciliation (through for instance the media, political debate, public apologies, reconciliation ceremonies, school curriculum, dialogue gatherings, more informally, between individuals)?
- What is lacking before there can be complete reconciliation?
- Do you see yourself as reconciled with what happened to you/those around you?
 - How did you reconcile, and what does this mean for you today?

5. Have you been in contact with people from the enemy group(s) after the conflict?

- Has anybody contacted you to seek reconciliation after what happened? (Apologies, expressed wish for improved relations etc.) Tell me about an episode. What impact did this have on you?
- Have you contacted anybody to seek reconciliation after what happened?
- Have you participated in conversations or other events aiming at reconciliation?
- Can you mention examples of people apologizing, expressing regrets, or expressing a wish for future cooperation or other forms of reconciliation after the war:
 - Individuals
 - Groups, group leaders
 - National or international initiatives
- How do you view these attempts? What succeeded/failed?
- Can you tell me about the last time you met someone from the opposing group(s)?
 - What happened, and how did you experience it?
- What forms of contact do you have with people with your group background here in Norway?
- What forms of contact do you have with people from the enemy groups here in Norway?

- If none: What conditions would have to be fulfilled for you to want/be willing to?

6. Do you feel a strong affiliation with your own group (party in the conflict) today?

- What do you answer when you are asked ‘where are you from’?
- Your identity today – how important is it in your understanding of yourself that you are:
 - group/party in conflict (Bosnian Muslim, Serb, Croat, Hutu, Tutsi)
 - nationality/larger category (Rwandese, Congolese, Burundian, Yugoslav, Norwegian)
 - European/African/global citizen
 - immigrant
- How do you view (people from the enemy group) today?
- If your identity or relationship to the other has changed – can you say something about how?
- How is your group treated by the others today? Do all groups get their share of respect, power, and opportunities?
- Has the fact that you now live in Norway changed anything? How?
- When you meet people from your country of origin, is it relevant which group they are from?
- When you are with others who share your background, how do you talk about (the other groups)?
- How is the contact between the former enemy groups in your country of origin?

7. Do you see any possibility for further reconciliation in the future?

- Are there any specific events that you think require reconciliation?
- Can you mention events after which you do not think reconciliation is possible?
- Are there any public apologies/initiatives you would like to see?
- Are there any personal apologies/initiatives you would like to see?
- What do you think it would take to reach a greater degree of reconciliation?

8. Is there anything you would like to add?

(Debriefing)

If you have nothing to add at this point, I would like to thank you for participating in this interview. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you would like to add something

If you feel a need to talk to someone about the experiences we have touched upon today, there is an open group where people with war and refugee experiences can meet and talk. (give handout)

You will receive information about the project as it continues. Before I finish my analysis of the interviews I will send you the part of the text that is relevant for you, so that you can help me check if I have understood you correctly. You will also be able to see the final text when the project is completed (electronically – ask for interviewee’s e-mail address if interested).

Thank you so much for your time and contribution to the understanding of conflict and reconciliation.

Other documents brought to the interview:

Declaration of consent

Information about group for war sufferers/refugees

Attachment 4: Twenty Statements Test

Hvem er jeg?

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