Reconciliation: Principles, practices, and interventions in Rwanda

Ervin Staub

University of Massachusetts at Amherst


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In this chapter I will discuss principles and practices of reconciliation. I will then describe work my associates and I have conducted in Rwanda, starting in 1999 and still ongoing, to promote reconciliation after the genocide of 1994, in which about 700 thousand Tutsis were killed. About 50 thousand Hutus were also killed, because they were identified as people who would oppose the genocide, or were historical opponents of Hutus who ruled at the time. In the end, since violence evolves (Staub, 1989, 2011), some were killed simply because of personal enmities. Most likely over two hundred thousand people participated in the killings (Straus, 2006). We conducted trainings/workshops in Rwanda, and then developed educational radio programs (which we then also introduced in Burundi and the Congo). In each case we used general principles to guide the programs, applied to the conditions in the particular setting.

What is reconciliation.

Reconciliation may be defined as mutual acceptance by groups of each other (Staub and Pearlman, 2001; Staub and Bar-Tal, 2003). The essence of reconciliation is a changed psychological orientation toward the other. Reconciliation means that victims and perpetrators, including both direct perpetrators and members of the perpetrator group who were passive bystanders, or members of hostile groups in general, do not see the past as defining the future, as simply a continuation of the past. It means that they come to see the humanity of one another, accept each other, and see the possibility of a constructive relationship (Staub, 2011). This definition is consistent with other definitions, which focus on restoring a damaged relationship, and on both the processes involved and the outcome (Broneus, 2003; de la Rey, 2001; Kriesberg, 1998b; Lederach, 1997). Reconciliation, when it happens, is gradual, often with setbacks along the way, and rarely complete.
While the focus of this definition (and of the interventions described in the article) is psychological change, institutions and how they operate are important, both in promoting reconciliation, and in solidifying or maintaining psychological changes that can be subverted by political and social processes. Whether the media devalues or humanizes groups, how the justice system or schools operate, the nature of leadership, structural justice or the situation of groups in society, are crucial in promoting or hindering reconciliation.

When psychological interventions affect leaders or the media, they can bring about institutional change. For example, if journalists come to present issues between groups in a manner that promotes reconciliation rather than incite hostility, this can be regarded as change in the media as an institution. Effective reconciliation requires engaging with and changes in a whole range of actors in a society, from members of the population whose psychological orientation is the core to reconciliation, to national leaders who can shape policies, practices and institutions, to religious leaders and the media that can exert both downward and upward influence (Lederach, 1997, Staub, 2011).

**Principles and practices of reconciliation**

**Healing from past victimization.** A number of scholars and practitioners have suggested that healing is important for reconciliation (Montville, 1993; Kriesberg, 1998b; Staub, 1998, 2011; Staub and Pearlman, 2001, 2006). Galtung (2001) defines reconciliation as “the process of healing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators after violence, providing a closure of the bad relations” (p. 3). Healing strengthens the self, moderates the perception of the world as dangerous, and makes it more likely that positive changes in the other group are perceived.

Trauma researchers and therapists, working with individuals, have suggested engagement with rather than avoidance of painful, traumatizing experiences as one process in healing
(Herman, 1992; Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995). When this happens under emotionally supportive conditions it reduces the negative emotional force of painful memories, and helps people see when the danger present at the time of their traumatizing experiences is not present any more. Another central process, since victimization creates mistrust and fear of other people, especially those outside the group, is reconnecting with and gaining new trust in people. Acknowledgment by others of the suffering of survivors can greatly furthers healing (Gibson, 2004; Proceedings, 2002), and even more when perpetrators acknowledge the harm they have done, combined with expressions of regret (Staub, 2011). Such experiences can lead those who have been victimized to feel empathy with themselves, opening them to empathy with others. As these processes initiate reconciliation, with some safety and trust, healing can progress.

After group violence healing will ideally be a group process (Herman, 1992; Staub and Pearlman, 2006), taking place in small groups, or individuals supporting each other, or at the group level, in testimonials and commemorations. First, a huge numbers of people have been affected—in Rwanda the whole population. Second, the violence was a group process. Third in collectivist, community oriented societies, Rwanda one of these, people engaging with each other in groups is a natural process (Staub, 2011).

Large group approaches to healing include testimonials and commemoration. They offer the opportunity both for engagement with experience and reconnection. It seems important for such commemorations to focus not only on the pain and suffering, which can make wounds persist and make the past into a “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1997), but also on hope, the possibilities of a better future (Staub, 2011). For example, a historical/psychological focus on the military defeat of Serbia by the Turks at Kosovo in 1389 seemed to reaffirm Serb victimization and the sense of the world as dangerous. A televised re-enactment of the battle of Kosovo in
1988 (Leatherman, et al., 1999), arranged by Milosovic at a time of increasing societal problems (Staub, 1996), seems to have added to the nationalism that resulted in the wars and mass killings in the former Yugoslavia.

**Truth and a shared history (collective memory).** Establishing the truth seems an essential motive of victims/survivors. After the military dictatorships in South America, with their torture and killings, truth commissions emerged to investigate and describe what was done (e.g. Nunca Mas, 1986). South Africa created the Truth and Reconciliation commission on the assumption that truth is essential for reconciliation (Gibson, 2002, 2004; Tutu, 1999).

The truthful description of harmful actions is an acknowledgment of the suffering of victims and is therefore healing to them. Truth that is empathic with the victims and indicates that the perpetrators’ actions are unacceptable also reaffirms the moral order (de la Rey, 2001). By expressing the community’s refusal to accept such actions, it can enhance feelings of safety.

The establishment of the truth makes it more difficult for the perpetrators to deny their actions or their responsibility for the harm they caused, and to claim that they themselves were the victims. After the Holocaust, the Nuremberg trials, using thousands of pages of documents and many films the Nazis created, showed the German people what was done in their name and with their participation. This was probably crucial in starting Germany on the road to democracy.

The Holocaust was unusual in that violence was completely one sided. Even in a genocide, however, perpetrators and victims have different stories. In intractable conflict, usually each side sees its cause and actions as just (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2013; Staub and Bar-Tal, 2003). When Palestinian and Israeli high school students were asked to describe the conflict from the perspective of the other side, they were initially unable to do so, but were more able after they
learned about the narratives of different sides in another conflict, the Northern Irish conflict (Salomon, 2004).

In many instances of mass killing there is some harm done by both sides, if not at the time of the mass killing or genocide, then over a longer historical period. In Rwanda, the genocide was one-sided, and was preceded by repeated mass killings of Tutsis, by sporadic killings at other times and by discrimination and persecution (des Forges, 1999). However, Hutus refer to the period before 1959, when Tutsis were dominant in Rwanda, and especially the period during Belgian colonial rule (des Forges, 1999; Mamdani, 2001), which has become a “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1997, 1998) for them, as a period of servitude. The Hutu justice minister at the time of the genocide, whom I interviewed in 2000 in prison, referring to this period said that the reason for the genocide was the slavery if the Hutus.

In addition, in the course of the civil war starting in 1990, Hutu civilians were killed. While after the genocide was stopped the government was successful, on the whole, in inhibiting revenge killings, in the course of the fighting in 1994 to end the genocide there were revenge killings (des Forges, 1999). Afterwards, in the course of fighting infiltrators from the Congo who were killing Tutsis, Hutu civilians were killed. When the Tutsi led army went into the Congo to fight genocidaires, in 1996 and 1998, it also killed a very large number of Hutu refugees (Prunier, 2009). This is part of the truth, and for full reconciliation Hutus also need to heal—both from the wounds of perpetrating the genocide, and from being victims (Staub, 2011).

Survivors of genocide understandably focus on the immediate truth, the perpetration of horrendous violence against them. Members of the perpetrator group tend to focus on an account of events that includes, and usually emphasizes, either the harm they had suffered or the threat to them by the other party. Consideration of injuries to both sides, even if substantially unequal,
makes the development of a shared history, of shared collective memories possible (Cairns and Roe, 2002; Bar-Tal, 2002; Kriesberg, 1998b; Staub and Bar-Tal, 2003; Staub, 2011).

When antagonistic groups have conflicting accounts of the roots of violence, their antagonism is likely to continue. But resolving differing views of a violent history is hard. For deeply wounded survivors is extremely difficult to consider the injury their group has done to the other, which in their consciousness pales in significance. And members of the perpetrator group may overemphasize their group’s suffering at the hands of the other (Baumeister, 1997) and use it as justification for their actions.

Moving toward a shared collective memory requires examination and reinterpretation of history. This may involve a process of negotiation. A Franco-German commission of historians in the 1950s had critically scrutinized the myths of hereditary enmity between the French and German peoples. The commission provided new accounts of the history of the two nations (Willis, 1965) and revised the existing history textbooks. However, such negotiation is difficult if not impossible when wounds are fresh. Processes such as healing may need to precede them.

In Israel the official story or narrative was that Palestinians left on their own accord during the 1948 war between Israel and the Arab armies that invaded Israel. However, Israeli historians have rewritten Israeli history, showing that while many left to escape the fighting near them, and others left because their leaders told them to do so for the presumably brief period of the war, many were expelled (Morris, 2004; see also Shavit, 2013; Staub, 2011). In our seminar/training in Rwanda in 2000 with high level leaders, participants strongly affirmed the importance of a shared collective memory, but regarded it as an ideal that may not be possible to achieve in the short run (Staub and Pearlman, 2006).
**Justice and reconciliation.** Justice is another important need of survivors of genocide and mass killing. Justice requires truth. It acknowledges the harm done to victims. It helps them heal, by making a moral statement about the perpetrators’ actions, and to some extent balancing the harm, suffering and loss of status by victims (Berscheid, Boye & Walster, 1968; Staub, 2005a). Justice is served, in part, by punishing perpetrators. It is sometimes assumed that punishment will discourage future perpetration. However, punishment usually focuses on a limited number of people. Moreover, genocide and mass killing are societal processes that have deep societal, cultural and psychological roots. Punishment alone, without addressing those roots, is unlikely to inhibit group violence.

For the sake of building peace, in part to avoid creating new hostility in members of the perpetrator group, most post conflict societies punish only some (at times very few, sometimes none) of the perpetrators. Often this is less than what is needed to satisfy and help heal the survivors—or to change society in a constructive way. Punishment of at least important perpetrators, public discussion of the reasons to limit punishment, and the use of other forms of justice may together satisfy psychological needs and provide the psychological benefits required by the different parties to advance reconciliation.

Restorative justice refers to contribution by perpetrators to the lives of survivors and to rebuilding society. It may include monetary compensation, as well as work. Compensation for victims/survivors, if necessary by the state, however that is now constituted, helps them improve their economic situation devastated by violence. This has been viewed as important by theorists (Broneus, 2003) and been found important for the population in South Africa (Gibson, 2002). In Rwanda, at hearings held by the Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 1999 about what people require for reconciliation, survivors often mentioned improvement in their material
conditions, devastated by the genocide. In radio listening (focus) groups in Rwanda before our radio drama began to broadcast in May 2004, many people said that their poverty intensifies trauma as it reminds survivors of what they have lost in the genocide.

Justice is a matter of both actions and the perceptions they create. Just societal procedures have been found especially important (Tyler and Smith, 1998). In an analysis of interviews of women who were raped during the genocide in Rwanda (Lillie, 2005), lower trauma symptoms were associated more with the perception of an effective justice system than with the personal experience of justice. Just relations between groups contributes to lasting reconciliation (Kelman, 1990), but like truth, this is a complex matter that goes beyond exact equality or equity.

Forgiveness and reconciliation. There has been controversy about the importance of forgiveness in reconciliation (Hayes, 1998; Shriver, 1995). Forgiveness has been defined as a change from negative emotions and thoughts about the offender such as anger, resentment and the desire for revenge to more positive, benevolent ones (McCullough, Fincham and Tsang, 2003; Worthington, 1998). Research with individuals, such as rape victims or people harmed by relatives, friends or associates, suggests that forgiving can relieve psychological distress (Worthington, 1998). Is forgiving the perpetrators, or the bystanders—passive members of the perpetrator group—that is of primary benefit for healing? For reconciliation, forgiving the other group seems more important. In turn, members of the perpetrator group may do a great deal to facilitate reconciliation, and forgiveness, by acknowledging the harm done by their group and apologizing for its actions.

Forgiving and reconciliation are overlapping concepts. However, forgiveness is usually described as one sided, in contrast to reconciliation, which is mutual. In the case of intense, one-sided violence, forgiveness without appropriate actions by perpetrators or members of the
Perpetrator group can have harmful effects (Staub, 2005a, 2011). Being publicly forgiven may bring about positive change in some perpetrators. However, it does not require anything of them. As a result, it may limit acknowledgement and empathy by perpetrators, and maintain or enhance the imbalance between the groups (Staub, 2005a). In South Africa, as part of the TRC process (Byrne, 2004), survivors appeared to have been further injured by confessions by perpetrators without indications of regret.

In Rwanda as well, some perpetrators confessed their actions in front of the community but did so without any expression of feelings, creating distress among community members. In both countries some perpetrators asked for forgiveness, without expressions of sympathy or regret, assuming that it was their right then to be forgiven (Hetzfeld, 2003). Our study described below shows further the need for reciprocity in forgiveness (Staub, et al. 2005). Participants expressed “conditional forgiveness,” contingent on the acknowledgment of harmdoing and apology by perpetrators (see also Staub, 2005a, 2011). This is consistent with past research showing that apology is important for forgiveness (Worthington, 1998).

The more perpetrators acknowledge their actions and the harm they have created, assume responsibility, express regret and apologize, show empathy and concern for the pain and suffering of the victims, and offer reparation, whether it is monetary or compensatory actions, the more they help survivors feel safe, affirm their worth and balance the relationship. But to move perpetrators or members of perpetrators groups to do that requires both clear evidence of their actions and healing by them (Staub, 2011, in press).

Contact between groups and community building as avenues to reconciliation. The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Sherif et al., 1961; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006), stresses the
importance of contact between people belonging to different groups as a way to overcome prejudice and hostility. Thus, contact is an avenue to reconciliation.

Contact is a basic element of dialogue groups, problem solving workshops and other forms of conflict resolution (Kelman and Fisher, 2003; Rouhana and Kelman, 1994). Deep contact, genuine engagement, what Deutsch (1973) has called “cross-cutting relations,” must exist for contact to work. Joint activities, with shared, “superordinate” goals, facilitate this (Sherif et al., 1961). Equality between the parties in the course of contact and support by authorities contribute to positive effects (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1997; 1998; Al Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013).

In dialogue groups, in the course of contact, participants can have their suffering acknowledged and acknowledge their own group’s harmful actions. Usually neutral third parties facilitate such engagement. There is also self-selection: people with intense negative views and closed minds about the other party are unlikely to participate. Equality between the parties in this setting is important, although differences in power in the larger society make this difficult. This is true in dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

Rwanda has engaged in societal processes that aimed to promote reconciliation, with seminars, national conferences that are televised and on the radio, justice proceedings against people accused of perpetration of the genocide, and more. It has also passed laws promoting equal access to education and jobs. However, with the minority Tutsis holding power, a government ideology of “unity,” and policies that encourage talking only about “Rwandans” but not about “Hutus” and “Tutsis,” Hutus may feel both in the larger society and in dialogue groups, trainings and workshops, that they lack power and are deprived of identity and voice (Staub, 2011).
Institutions can have structures that promote positive contact. Schools can have children from different groups in the same classrooms, with practices (Staub, 2003) including cooperative learning procedures (Aronson et al., 1978) that create positive contact. In India, in three cities where significant Hindu-Muslims violence did not occur in response to instigating conditions, there were institutions in which members of the two groups had positive contact. They organized themselves to combat rumors as they arose and to engage with politicians and inhibit them from making speeches that would increase tensions. In three cities where instigating conditions led to violence no such institutions existed (Varshney, 2002). Reconciliation between the French and Germans was facilitated by contact between cities, and the creation of shared institutions after World War II, for example, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) (Kriesberg, 1998).

People joining to rebuild communities after violence also contributes to reconciliation. In Angola and other places, members of communities have developed ceremonies, combining tradition with psycho-social principles, to reintegrate child soldiers into the community (Wessells, 2007; Wessells and Monteiro, 2001). The children were enticed to be soldiers with food or other incentives, or were abducted. As soldiers, they sometimes were directed to kill people in their own communities. In the course of reintegrating them, people were also rebuilding the community and fostering healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. People can also work together to rebuild communities in other ways, for example, simply working together to build physical structures. Joining to rebuild a community can fulfill basic needs (see below), for security, feelings of effectiveness, positive identity and connection.

**Visions for the future—constructive ideologies.** An important contributor to intense violence by one group against another is a vision for the future that gives hope for a group in difficult times, but also identifies enemies who stand in the way of the vision’s fulfillment. These
visions can look unattractive from the outside, such as nationalism, or attractive, such as the vision of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia of social equality (Staub, 1989). A constructive vision that embraces all groups, so that people can join together to bring it about, can contribute to reconciliation. It can fulfill basic needs, including the need for a comprehension of reality, but do so in positive ways (Staub, 20011, 2013).

Raising inclusively caring children. Raising children in ways that makes it likely that as adults they will be active bystanders both in the face of potentially destructive social processes, and to bring about positive ends, is important for the prevention of violence and reconciliation (Staub, 2003, 2005b, in press). It is not enough to know how to raise caring children (Eisenberg et al, 2006, Staub, 1979, 2003, in press); we need to raise children so that they care not only about people in their own group, however that is defined, but also beyond their group, even people who have been historically devalued by their group. This requires transformation in way the adults who guide children, and institutions that promote positive relations. Probably efforts to create more caring societies are required (Staub, in press) for adults to become socializers who raise children in ways that promote inclusive caring (Staub, 2005b, 2013, in press).

Understanding the origins of violence. Understanding the origins of violence appears to be an important tool in promoting reconciliation and preventing new violence. Prevention requires, in part, the opposite of the influences that lead to violence, such as humanization of the other, in place of devaluation, and constructive in place of destructive ideologies. Understanding can shape the emotional orientation and practices of citizens and leaders. Understanding how social conditions and culture have shaped perpetrators may ease both the anger of survivors, and the defensiveness of perpetrators. Meaning making is central to being human and in the course of successful therapy usually a story develops that integrates and creates meaning out of
experiences of suffering (Herman, 1992; Pennebacker, 2000). This meaning may consist of understanding why a perpetrator acted as he or she did (O’Connell Higgins, 1994), and of deciding to help others who have suffered or to prevent such suffering (Kestenberg and Kestenberg, 1988; Staub, 2005b, 2011; Valent, 1998). Understanding and meaning can thus contribute to “altruism born of suffering” (Staub, 2003, 2005b; Staub and Vollhardt, 2008).

**Basic human needs.** An element of the approach to our work described below has been education about basic human needs and their role in violence, trauma and healing. Maslow’s (1968) theory of human needs has inspired other theories. The frustration of universal human needs has been viewed as a source of intractable conflict (Burton, 1990; Kelman, 1990). I see difficult conditions of life in a society frustrating basic psychological needs, and regard the frustration of the needs for security, a feeling of effectiveness and control, a positive identity, positive connection to other people, autonomy, and comprehension of reality as an important contributor to the psychological and social processes, such as scapegoating and the creation of destructive ideologies, that can initiate processes leading to mass killing or genocide (Staub, 1989; 2003, 2011). These needs are profoundly frustrated by victimization and violence, and they require some degree of fulfillment for healing to occur (Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995). Their fulfillment facilitates the resolution of conflict, and helps to develop caring about others’ welfare (Staub, 2005b, 2011, in press).

“Interventions” in Rwanda to promote reconciliation, and their evaluation.

The projects I describe are the outgrowth of my work starting in the late 1970s on understanding the roots of genocide and other mass violence (Staub, 1989, 2003), which naturally led to research and theory on the prevention of violence between groups and reconciliation as a way of preventing violence (e.g., Staub, 1998, 2006, 2011, 2013). Aspects of
the projects, on the traumatic impact of violence and on healing, were primarily guided by the work of Laurie Pearlman (Pearlman, 2001; Saakvitne, Pearlman, et al., 1996; Staub, 1998). She and I have together initiated and then collaborated on these projects.

Our goal was to create resistance to the influences that lead to violence, promote healing and reconciliation, and foster active bystandership in the population (a bottom-up approach) and among leaders (a top-down approach) to prevent violence and promote reconciliation and peace building. These second part of this project, educational radio dramas intended to serve the same goals, were developed by us in collaboration with, and produced by a Dutch NGO that its Director, George Weiss, created to produce these programs, Radio LaBenevolencia Humanitarian Tools Foundation. The use of radio for positive ends is in stark contrast to the activities of the infamous Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda which promoted hate against Tutsis before the genocide and even guided killers to particular locations during the genocide (des Forges, 1999).

In addition to specific publications (see below), these projects are described in detail in Overcoming evil: Genocide, violent conflict and terrorism (Staub, 2011). Overcoming evil also describes influences leading to different kinds of intense group violence, and principles and practices of early prevention and reconciliation, all relevant to our work in promoting reconciliation.

Trainings—Workshops/Seminars in Rwanda

Between 1999 and 2006 with the help of U.S. and local associates we conducted trainings—workshops/seminars—with varied groups in Rwanda. They included the staff of local NGOs working in the community, journalists, national leaders, and others. In the workshops/seminars/trainings we gave lectures of 30 to 45 minutes duration about the origins of
violence, the impact of violence on people, healing, prevention, and reconciliation. After each presentation the group engaged in extensive discussion. *In the course of this discussion members of the group applied the concepts/materials in the lectures to their own experience in Rwanda.*

In the lecture about the origins of genocide/mass violence we described difficult societal conditions (economic, political, great social changes), conflict between groups, and the harmful psychological and social effects they can lead to scapegoating another group and creating destructive ideologies (visions of a better life for the group such as nationalism or ethnic purity, that identify enemies, other groups that stand in the way), or leaders instigating hostility and violence. We also described the characteristics of cultures and societies that contribute to violence, such as a history of devaluation of some groups in a society, very strong respect for authority which leads both to obedience to destructive leaders and the passivity of bystanders, past victimization of the group and the resulting psychological wounds that make members of the group feel vulnerable and see the world as dangerous, and others. We discussed learning by doing, how individuals and groups change as a result of their own actions and the resulting evolution of violence. We stressed how passive bystanders encourage perpetrators (all this based on Staub, 1998, 2011). We also discussed the impact of great violence, the trauma and psychological wounds that result, not only in survivors, but also in perpetrators, and passive bystanders (Pearlman, 2001; Saakvitne, Pearlman, et al., 1996; Staub, 1998, 2011; Staub and Pearlman, 2006). Both in the lectures and radio programs we stressed that changes in people are the natural consequence of such extreme events.

We gave examples of the influences leading to extreme violence from genocides/mass killings other than Rwanda, such as the Holocaust, Cambodia, and others. The group then discussed the concepts and examples, and how applicable they were to the genocide in Rwanda.
This was followed by people in small groups discussing various aspects in greater depth, and then reporting their discussions to the whole group. They discussed the ways leaders exert negative influence, leading the group toward violence, and what people can do to resist their influence. They also engaged with their experiences during the genocide, with empathic support from others. The radio dramas, providing community education, included the example of people supporting each other through empathic listening.

In all except our first training, we also discussed principles and practices of prevention and reconciliation. A few elements of these were humanizing a devalued group, developing a critical consciousness so that people can use their own judgment and foresee the consequence of events and thereby be more able to resist the evolution of violence, promoting more moderate respect for authority, creating constructive ideologies that join all groups to work for positive ends, and how people might heal (Staub, 2011).

Evaluation of the Effects of Trainings. We first conducted a two weeks long training with 35 staff members of local organizations that worked with groups in the community. We first did an informal evaluation of the effect of the training on participants. Both using examples from places other than Rwanda, and having participants apply the information to their own situation seemed important components of the approach. Participants seemed to gain a deep, experiential understanding of the concepts, showing some healing and a more positive sense of self. They said things like: ‘So this was not God’s punishment..; others have also had such experiences; … if we understand how such things happen we can also prevent them’ (Staub et al., 2005).

We evaluated in more formal research the effects of the training not on the facilitators we trained, but once removed, on members of new community groups we set up which these
facilitators led. There were experimental groups, treatment control groups led by facilitators we did not train, and no treatment controls (Staub et al., 2005). We found significant positive changes in the treatment group both from before to two months after the end of their training, as well as in comparison to changes in the other two groups. (Each condition, treatment, treatment control, and control, included a number of separate groups). The changes included reduction in trauma symptoms, a more positive orientation by Tutsis and Hutus to each other, a more complex understanding of the roots of violence, and “conditional forgiveness,” forgiveness conditional on members of the other group acknowledging what they have done.

Other Trainings. Given these positive results, we expanded the project, with seminars and workshops with journalists, community leaders, and high level national leaders [government ministers, heads of national commissions, advisors to the President, and members of parliament] (Staub, 2011; Staub & Pearlman, 2006). As part of our work with journalists, we had them write news stories informed by the understanding they have gained. They wrote, for example, stories that humanized members of all groups (rather than devalue some group). As part of our work with leaders, we had them examine in groups of three policies they had just introduced or were contemplating, and consider whether in terms of the influences that lead to or prevent group violence that we had discussed, these policies would make violence more likely or contribute to their prevention and peaceful group relations.

Expansion to Educational Radio

Our conceptions of origins, traumatic impact, prevention, and reconciliation were transformed into “communication messages,” that expressed the central elements of these conceptions (Staub & Pearlman, 2009; Staub, 2011). In addition, the staff received repeated training on these topics. Together with Rwandan staff we developed a storyline for the radio drama. The Rwandan writers
wrote weekly episodes, and using the communication messages and the information and understanding they gained inserted educational material into each episode. Before the episodes were broadcast they were translated from Kinyarwanda, the local language, into English. We provided feedback about the educational content, and the writers made revisions accordingly.

The radio drama in Rwanda, which began to broadcast in 2004 and is still ongoing, is about conflict between two villages. One village has adequate food because the government at an earlier time gave this village a piece of fertile land between the villages, while the people in the other village are suffering after a draught. In the drama the conflict leads to attacks and cycles of violence. There is a leader who responding to the scarcity but also driven by personal issues incites people to attack the other village.

The radio drama has examples not only of harmful leadership and followership, but positive bystanders speaking out against the leader, and some people continuing to maintain positive relations across village lines and humanizing members of the other village. There is also a love story between the sister of the leader in the poorer village and a young man from the wealthier village; they are both active, positive bystanders. There is a village “fool” in the poorer village who is also a wise man, telling truth to power. After attacks and counterattacks, justice processes, educational elements about trauma and examples of people helping traumatized individuals by engaging with them and empathically listening to them, the story slowly moves on to reconciliation. Then the two villages join in actions to prevent violence by another group.

**Evaluation of the Effects of the Radio Drama in Rwanda.** Assessments of listening habits showed that the radio drama became extremely popular by the end of the first year of our broadcast, and that popularity continued over the years, with between 84 and 89% of the population listening to it, a large percentage regularly. A complex experimental evaluation study
after one year (Paluck, 2009; Staub & Pearlman, 2009; for an overview see Staub, 2011) found that listening to the radio drama led to many changes in people, in comparison to people in control groups. It both affected the attitudes and actions of listeners and led to extensive discussion of the program in the community, and within families, between parents and children (see also Bilali, Vollhardt, & de Balzac, 2011).

One important change relevant to the prevention of violence was increased belief in expressing one’s opinions. People both said more that they would say what they believed, and were found to do so in behavioral assessments. They also acted more independently of people in authority. They expressed more empathy for varied groups and were more likely to engage in reconciliation activities rather than just advocating for them.

Further evaluations are planned; however, a new experimental evaluation does not seem possible, since with most of the population listening there is no appropriate control group. The educational radio programs were extended in 2006 to Burundi and then to the Congo. Evaluation studies found positive effects in Burundi, and somewhat complex effects in the Congo, mostly positive but not on all dimensions (Bilali et al., 2011). In the Congo there is ongoing, substantial violence. However, the more complex effects may also have been due to too much conflict between groups within the radio drama, which in the context of ongoing violence generated more complex reactions. The content of the ongoing radio drama in the Congo is now developed with consideration of this possibility.

**Pitfalls, Issues, Materials, and Uses of the Approach.**

To work in another culture, and after people have experienced great trauma, requires both sensitivity and humility. It is important to see oneself as a collaborator rather than an expert, as a facilitator of the important goals of prevention and reconciliation. Doing this work requires
substantive knowledge (Staub, 1989, 2011), but also knowledge of the history of the society and of the violence between groups. It also requires preparation in attitude. It is both effective education, and respect for people’s experience, to have them apply the knowledge they have gained to their own situation, rather than doing this application for them. This conceptual and practical approach needs to be applied to the specifics of each situation, but with that proviso, this “understanding approach” can be applied to many settings where there is conflict, hostility, or danger of violence between groups, or where violence is or has taken place.

Conclusions: Psychology, social structure, politics and institutions.

Efforts to promote reconciliation need to focus on at least three domains. First, helping members of the population heal, and their understanding of events change. Second, on changing the words and actions of those who can both influence people, and affect societal processes and institutions—the aim of our work with leaders and journalists. Third, changing institutions, such as schools, the justice system, the political system, and NGOs, by working both with leaders and directly with institutions. Psychology has an important role in all these. While established institutions tend to resist change, and there may be lack of societal resources, frequently psychological elements like fear, hostility, beliefs and attitudes play a crucial role.

A societal process of reconciliation needs to address both structural and psychological issues. For example, reducing inequalities, establishing more equal opportunity in schools and employment for Catholics in Northern Ireland has helped prepare the ground for the peace process there (Cairns, E. & Darby, J. (1998). Our “interventions” aimed to promote psychological change, through healing, understanding, and the emotional changes and attitudes associated with these. However, the two types of change are connected. To establish a fair system of justice requires a reasonably positive attitude toward a group that has been an enemy.
The operation of such a system, in turn, can promote healing (Lillie, 2005), as well as positive intergroup attitudes (Gibson, 2004). Creating schools that promote reconciliation also requires developing positive attitudes.

Early in this article I noted the stress of the Rwandan government on “unity.” Part of the policy is to punish vaguely defined “divisionism.” This deprives opposition in general and Hutus in particular of a voice, making reconciliation more difficult. The reason for such policies can be psychological woundedness and the resulting vulnerability, negative attitudes toward Hutus and viewing the world as dangerous. It can also be realistic concern about the still hostile intentions of the other group, as well as the desire of those in power to retain their power. We stopped working with leaders because as we moved to educational radio we did not have sufficient human and financial resources (Staub, 2013). But working with leaders may help them see the dangers in such policy, and as long as the realistic danger is not too great enable them to take the risks involved in allowing and promoting pluralism, guided, in part, by enlightened self-interest.

Reconciliation is an extended process requiring a long term vision. It needs to create a “sense of participation, responsibility and ownership in the process across a broad spectrum of the population” (Lederach, 1998, p. 242). The example of South Africa, and of Europe with its long history of violence and seemingly deep-seated antagonisms between countries, show that reconciliation is possible. Hopefully, reconciliation can be brought about even in such extremely demanding conditions as Rwanda, with its intimate genocide, with perpetrators, bystanders and survivors continuing to live together and with the country ruled by a small minority of the population that was the victim of the genocide.

References


