

Special Thematic Section on "20 Years after Genocide: Psychology's Role in Reconciliation and Reconstruction in Rwanda"

The Challenging Road to Reconciliation in Rwanda: Societal Processes, Interventions and Their Evaluation

Ervin Staub^{*a}

[a] University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA.

Abstract

This article briefly discusses some efforts that Rwanda has made to recover from the genocide, ranging from trying perpetrators to creating just social arrangements. It also discusses problematic policies and practices that may interfere with reconciliation. It then describes work the author and his associates have engaged in to promote healing and reconciliation in Rwanda. First, they conducted training/workshops to help people understand the influences that lead to genocide and other great violence, and avenues to prevention, healing and reconciliation. Following this they created educational radio programs for the same ends. The article describes a highly popular radio drama in Rwanda, which has been broadcast since 2004. Evaluation studies of both the effects of the trainings and of the radio drama have found positive effects that are highly relevant for reconciliation. These include more positive attitudes toward the other group, more empathy, more willingness to say what one believes, and more moderate respect for authority (presumably leading to less blind obedience). Anecdotal reports from the community also show the positive effects of the radio drama.

Keywords: genocide, Rwanda, reconciliation, healing, educational workshops, educational radio, justice, government

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2014, Vol. 2(1), 505–517, doi:10.5964/jspp.v2i1.294

Received: 2013-12-06. Accepted: 2014-09-15. Published (VoR): 2014-10-30.

Handling Editor: Craig McGarty, University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia

*Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Tobin Hall, University of Massachusetts Amherst, MA 01003, USA. E-mail: estaub@psych.umass.edu



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Introduction: History, Reconciliation Processes and Government Actions

In the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda, Hutus killed about 700,000 Tutsis. The killing was done by parts of the army, by militias called the Interahamwe, and by neighbors. In some mixed families relatives killed Tutsis, sometimes parents killing their own children. The perpetrators also killed about 50,000 Hutus, because they were regarded as unwilling to go along with the genocide or as political opponents. Violence expands over time, and some Hutus were killed simply due to old conflicts.

The genocide was stopped by a primarily Tutsi group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). It had been fighting the government, stopped fighting when a peace accord was agreed to, and resumed fighting when the genocide began. In the course of the resumed fighting the RPF killed perhaps as many as 45,000 Hutus (Des Forges, 1999). The defeated genocidaires, and other Hutus, about one and a half million, escaped into Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Genocidaires continued to attack Rwanda from the DRC, killing more Tutsis. As before, the international community remained passive. Under the now Tutsi-led government the new Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) invaded the DRC twice to fight the genocidaires and the militias the genocidaires created. According to a United Nations report published in August 2010, the RPA also killed a very large number of Hutu noncombatants. Prunier (2009) claims more than 200,000 people were killed.

Since the genocide the government has introduced a wide range of society level interventions to promote reconciliation and positive group relations, but has also engaged in problematic and counterproductive practices. It established a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) that held public meetings around the country with various categories of people, asking them to say what they believed was necessary for reconciliation and what they personally needed to be able to reconcile. For example, at a meeting of women in Kigali some women said that they lost everything, including their husbands. To prepare themselves to reconcile they needed to be able to feed their families and send their children to school. At that time this cost money, at all grade levels.

The NURC has organized events on understanding the roots of genocide and preventing future genocides. It is also in charge of re-education camps for perpetrators of the genocide when they are released from prison and before they can reenter their communities. Some of our work to promote reconciliation that I describe below took place in collaboration with the NURC. The government has encouraged and accepted the participation of non-governmental organizations within Rwanda and other countries to create programs that commemorate the genocide, offer understanding of the genocide, and promote reconciliation. This includes our programs.

The government also introduced socio-economic reforms. It made education free. It eliminated official discrimination based on group identity (as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa) in admitting students to schools and universities, as well as in employment. In Rwanda there has been a history of discrimination, against Hutus before 1959, and against Tutsis after 1962 when a Hutu government formally began to rule the country. Differences in power and privilege are one of the central sources of conflict between groups. Equal access is essential to make people feel that they are all Rwandans (see below) and that members of each group are able to develop their potentials. However, with longstanding hostility between the two groups, it is likely to take time to make equal access a reality.

The government has been focused on, and very successful in, promoting economic development. However, as is usually the case in poor and newly developing countries, the benefits are uneven and have not yet reached large segments of the population.

The Gacaca: Truth and Justice

The government also created a new justice system to address most crimes committed during the genocide. The traditional justice system was destroyed by the genocide. Many judges and lawyers were either killed, fled, or were accused of perpetration. For a number of years about 120,000 accused perpetrators were in jail. In 2003 President Kagame ordered the release of prisoners who were old, or were young teenagers at the time of the genocide. This was beneficial in many ways, for example, by relieving the burden on family members who had to take food to the prison. After a study of how other societies, such as South Africa, have addressed justice after

violence, the government created a process, the *gacaca*, based on traditional Rwandan practice. The *gacaca* was intended to serve both justice and reconciliation. All around the country, in 9,000–10,000 communities, popularly elected judges led weekly meetings that community members were legally required to attend. Accused perpetrators, except those categorized as most culpable, were judged in these *gacaca* courts (Honeyman et al., 2004).

The purpose of the *gacaca*, in line with a traditional practice in Rwanda, was to decide what harm individuals have done and what harmdoers need to do to be accepted back into their community. In a process of many stages it was established who lived in the community immediately before the genocide, what crimes were committed, and by whom. While this was an imperfect system—for example, there were no defense lawyers—establishing justice after a genocide is extremely challenging, especially in a country where the traditional justice system was destroyed. One of the challenges was testifying at the *gacaca* courts, before predominantly Hutu communities, with the relatives of the accused present. Many Tutsi and Hutu witnesses were negatively affected (Brounéus, 2008a, 2008b). Some potential Tutsi witnesses were killed. Still, crimes were laid bare and truth was established. Most perpetrators were sentenced to a combination of prison and community labor.

It is a significant issue, however, that there has been no justice process about the mass killing of Hutus in Rwanda and the DRC. Such a justice process might implicate the current leadership. But since people who are harmed deeply yearn for truth and justice, addressing this seems essential for reconciliation. Possibly, if a well functioning and just society develops, some of the wounds would heal as a result of harmonious relations between groups. But our theories about the role of justice in helping survivors of violence heal and preventing perpetrators from later blaming the victims, and in reestablishing a moral society (Staub, 2011, 2013), as well as life examples (e.g., what happened in Argentina) indicate the importance of justice. In Argentina after the “disappearances” in the late 1970s, the killing of about 30,000 people and the torture of many more (Staub, 1989), the generals who were in charge and members of the military and paramilitary groups that directly perpetrated the violence received amnesty. But in response to the continued protests of the population the amnesty law was overturned and new trials began in the early 2000s (Burchianti, 2004).

The current political conditions in Rwanda, combined with a culture of obedience, make similar protests there unlikely, at least at this time. However, the government could itself initiate some process. It could at the very least acknowledge that innocent Hutus were killed, and point to the extraordinary conditions under which such things happen. It is not widely known, for example, that after the defeat of Germany in World War II many German civilians who lived in countries devastated by Germany during the war (in particular in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) were killed (see Staub, 2011).

In Rwanda, perpetrators go through reeducation under the auspices of the NURC before they are released into the community. This program focuses on the vision of the new Rwanda and how people are expected to behave. Such prescriptive reeducation is in line with Rwandan culture, which stresses respect for and submission to authority. It is likely to lead to compliance, but not necessarily to a transformation in people's beliefs, values, or the emotional orientation of members of groups toward each other. However, some people may accept and adopt the new vision or ideology (see below). In addition, acting in certain ways can, over time, lead to learning by doing (Staub, 1989, 2011), to developing values, beliefs and action tendencies consistent with the social norms that guide action, even if these norms are imposed by government.

Government Ideology and Political Processes

The RPF created a seemingly positive ideology, according to which the division between groups was deemed to have been created by colonialists. This is partly true. There had been division between Hutus and Tutsis, but it was greatly enhanced by the racial ideas and practices introduced by Belgium (Des Forges, 1999; Mamdani, 2001; Staub, 2011). The current government ideology holds that there are no Hutus, Tutsis, or Twa, only Rwandans. It was developed before the genocide (see Des Forges, 1999), before the primarily Tutsi RPF entered Rwanda and a civil war began. This positive vision of shared identity was presumably intended to overcome antagonism between Hutus and Tutsis. It presumably also was intended to inhibit violence against Tutsis, and when they took power after the genocide, with Hutus about 85 percent of the population, to reduce political opposition to Tutsis. But while a common identity can be beneficial after a long history of conflict, a dual identity (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009), in this case as a Hutu Rwandan or Tutsi Rwandan, is more psychologically possible to develop and more realistic to achieve. Moreover, generating or progressively developing a common identity is more likely to work than enforcing one, which the government has been attempting to do.

The government strongly discourages talking about Hutus and Tutsis. Consistent with the ideology, new laws have been created and are used to punish with prison sentences vaguely defined “divisionism” and “genocidal ideology.” In part these practices may serve the government maintaining its power. Opposing parties or presidential candidates have repeatedly been stopped from participating in elections, based on various charges against them.

These practices may also be the result of fear of harm to Tutsis if Hutus gain power, or simply fear of open communication in a society where language was used to generate genocide. A strong government in a country that has suffered a genocide, with groups continuing to live together, seems useful. The government has successfully limited violence in Rwanda. But with the shame of the genocide and fear of and obedience to the government, Hutus are unlikely to express their thoughts, feelings, and grievances. Limiting the discussion of issues between the two groups limits opportunities for reconciliation.

Reconciliation Activities

Back in their communities, former perpetrators and former victims now live side by side, with many emotional challenges. Some films that have been made of their interactions show painful steps by people as they move toward forgiveness and reconciliation, suggesting reasonable success. Others portray deep and continuing fear and pain, showing more coexistence in everyday life than forgiveness. In a country where hierarchy and obedience to authority are strong, and the government promotes forgiveness, people talk about forgiveness—but when they trust the people they talk to, some people differentiate between what they publicly say and how they feel (see Staub, 2011).

There are many ongoing reconciliation processes led by local and international groups. The NURC has organized many conferences that aim to help people understand the roots of genocide, and how to proceed with life in the aftermath of genocide. Local NGOs work on reconciliation, with widows' groups and other women's organizations being highly active. There are many memorials to the genocide. Rescuers who saved the lives of Tutsis during the genocide have been getting attention (Africa Rights, 2002). At the Kigali Genocide Memorial the exhibits include one on rescuers. This can help both groups to see something positive about the other, Tutsis seeing moral actions by some Hutus, and Hutus seeing that Tutsis acknowledge this (Staub, 2011). The Memorial also conducts

workshops for secondary students “Learning from the past; Building the future” (see www.journeyrwanda.blogspot.com).

Training and Educational Radio Programs to Promote Reconciliation

To promote reconciliation, my associates and I have engaged in two types of projects. Between 1999 and 2006 Laurie Anne Pearlman and I conducted seminars/workshops in Rwanda. Starting in 2002 we also began to develop and in 2004 began to broadcast educational radio programs in collaboration with producer George Weiss whom we invited to work with us in developing radio programs, and the staff of the NGO he created for this purpose, Radio LaBenevolencija Humanitarian Tools Foundation. Starting in 2006 the broadcasting of educational radio programs was also expanded to Burundi and the eastern parts of the DRC, two countries that have also experienced great violence, violence that is still ongoing in the DRC. Here I focus on the work in Rwanda. 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).

The approach we have developed lends itself not only to preventing new violence and trauma recovery, but also to reducing hostility before substantial violence and preventing intense violence. In this overview I focus on a central element that has been part of both components of the project: *Information* about the influences that lead to genocide, mass killing, or intense violence between groups in general (Staub, 1989, 2011), about the traumatic impact of violence on individuals and whole groups and about avenues to prevention (in part, the opposites of the influences that lead to violence; Staub, 2011), as well as healing (Pearlman, 1997, 2001; Saakvitne, Gamble, Pearlman, & Lev, 2000; Staub, 1998) and reconciliation (Staub, 2006, 2011; see also Staub, 2013).

Workshops/Training and Seminars in Rwanda

We called our meetings either workshops/training or seminars, mainly depending on their length. They ranged from three days to two weeks, with an exception of a one day event for a large group (over 60) of national leaders. They all had the same approach and content, adjusted for the length of time. We gave separate lectures of 30 to 45 minutes duration about the origins of violence (when there was enough time two lectures about this), the impact of violence on people, healing, and prevention and reconciliation. After each presentation the group engaged in extensive discussion. Usually the discussion began with the whole group present (the largest group we worked other than the national leaders was 35 people), then went on to small groups, the small groups reported to the large group, followed by further general discussion. In the course of 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, based on the conception of origins I had developed (Staub, 1989; but see also Staub, 2011, 2013), we described difficult societal conditions (economic, political, great social changes), conflict between groups, and the harmful psychological and social effects they can lead to. These include scapegoating another group, 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), and 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 contributes 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 harmful actions, this leading to the evolution of increasing harmdoing and violence. We stressed how the passivity of witnesses or bystanders encourages perpetrators and allows this process to unfold (Staub, 1989, 2011). In a separate lecture we talked about the impact of great violence, the trauma and psychological wounds that result, not only in survivors, but also in passive bystanders and perpetrators (Pearlman, 1997, 2001; Saakvitne et al., 2000; Staub, 1998, 2011), engaging the group already in the course of the lecture to talk about their own experiences.

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 small groups discussing various aspects in greater depth and then reporting their discussions to the large group, for example, the ways leaders exert negative influence, leading the group toward violence, and what people can do to resist their influence.

In all the training we conducted, except our first training program in 1999, we also included lectures and subsequent discussions about principles and practices of prevention and reconciliation. One of these is humanizing a devalued group. Another is promoting a more moderate respect for authority, in part by developing a critical consciousness so that people can use their own judgment about the meaning of events and the actions of leaders. We also discussed healing from past group trauma, and ways groups can heal (Pearlman, 2013; Staub, 2011). We stressed creating constructive ideologies that join all groups to work for positive ends for everyone as especially important. Some of this also entered in our first training as participants, coming to understand the influences leading to genocide, in the course of discussion began to draw inferences about prevention.

Evaluation of the Effects of the First Project

We conducted a two week long training program 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, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005).

We evaluated the effects of the training through formal research, not on the facilitators we trained, but on members of new community groups that some of these facilitators led. This way we were able to see whether the training had an impact beyond the participants, whether it had effects that could spread into the population of Rwanda. There were experimental groups, treatment control groups led by facilitators we did not train, and no treatment control groups. There were several variations or sub-conditions in each of these treatments: people in the community groups who were together to talk about healing or came together to talk about their work in the fields; religiously oriented or not religiously oriented groups.

We found significant positive changes in the treatment groups both from before to two months after the end of their training, as well as in comparison to changes in the other two groups. The significant 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 had done (for detailed descriptions see [Staub et al., 2005](#), and [Staub, 2011](#)).

Subsequent Training Programs

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 had gained. They wrote, for example, stories that humanized members of all groups (rather than devaluing a group). As part of our work with leaders, we had groups of three leaders examine policies they had just introduced or were contemplating. We asked them to consider whether these policies would make violence more likely or contribute to its prevention and peaceful group relations. We used the terms we had introduced and a table that showed on one side influences leading to violence and on the other side influences that can prevent violence. Leaders were deeply engaged in this process discussing, for example, the potential impact of a recently created policy of material support for Tutsi survivors that was not extended to poor Hutus for budgetary reasons.

In our training programs Hutu and Tutsi participants interacted in a positive manner in discussing information and its application to their history and experience. This seemed to humanize them in each others' eyes and provide substantive content for discussion. When members of hostile groups come together for dialogue, each party often focuses at first on the harm inflicted on them by the other group. Starting with the kind of training I described, where they at first interact about conceptual issues central to their circumstances, guided by a third party, may make subsequent engagement by participants more productive.

However, in the case of leaders in Rwanda, their training was brief (a three day program and a one day program). As the primary medium the leaders consumed was television, their listening to the popular radio programs described below was limited. The shaping of leaders by the power of President Kagame, the ideology of unity, and the influence of their larger leadership community had to be substantial. To overcome a powerful context and world view requires extensive engagement ([Staub, 2013](#)).

An unfortunate outcome of moving to educational radio was that due to our limited human and financial resources at the time we stopped the training of leaders. We were repeatedly encouraged to expand the reach of our work, with a final impetus from a training of high level national leaders who were greatly concerned about the potential impact of the gacaca that was about to begin. We were also concerned, that it might both retraumatize people and generate anger in both Tutsis and Hutus (see [Staub & Pearlman, 2006](#)). After a meeting with two members of the government, one the Executive Secretary of the ruling RPF soon to become foreign minister, the other the justice minister, we initiated the educational radio programs both to promote reconciliation in the whole population and in the hope of counteracting the potential problems created by the gacaca, as people relived the terrible events of the genocide ([Staub & Pearlman, 2006](#)).

Expansion to Educational Radio

The radio programs were intended to provide education along the same lines as our training program, in a manner appropriate for radio. Laurie Pearlman and I provided repeated training for the staff who were experienced Rwandan writers, and producers from other countries with experience in producing radio programs in other African countries (some of the Rwandan staff later became the local producers). Working with the staff, in long meetings, we transformed our conceptions of origins, traumatic impact, prevention, healing and reconciliation into “communication messages” that expressed their central elements (Staub, 2011; Staub & Pearlman, 2009). We also developed a step-by-step description, a *continuum*, of the evolution of genocide, including the influences that lead to it, its traumatic impact, healing, prevention and reconciliation. These materials, and later an expanded version of the communication messages, were used to produce a variety of radio programs: a radio drama in Rwanda, Musekeweya (New Dawn); informational programs about origins, impact, healing and prevention; and later radio dramas as well as other programs in Burundi and the DRC in which our conceptions were applied to the particular circumstances in those countries (see Staub, 2011).

Together with Rwandan staff we developed a storyline for Musekeweya. Later the continuing storylines were developed in seminars with the staff and local stakeholders. The Rwandan writers then wrote weekly episodes, and using the communication messages and the information and understanding they gained from the trainings, inserted educational material into each episode. Before the episodes were broadcast they were translated from Kinyarwanda, the local language, into English, and we (initially Laurie Pearlman and I, and later other members of our “academic team,” Rezarta Bilali, Terri Haven, Adin Thayer, and Johanna Vollhardt) provided feedback about the educational content. The local producer and 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 that lay between the villages, while the people in the other village are suffering after a drought. In the drama the conflict leads to attacks, trauma, counterattacks, cycles of violence. There is a leader who incites people in the village with little food to attack the other village and steal their food. He is portrayed as responding to the scarcity, but also driven by personal issues—hostility to a half brother who lives in the other village, and the drowning of his daughter in a creek for which he unreasonably blames the other village.

Overly strong “authority orientation” (Staub, 1989) is one contributor to the likelihood of group violence, and showing these personal motives of a destructive leader was in the service of one of our aims, to moderate respect for authority. There were other elements in the radio drama serving this goal. At one point we noticed that some of these elements were not as effectively addressed by the writers as other elements. When we engaged in a discussion about this we learned that they interpreted our goal of moderating respect for authority way beyond our intentions, including, for example, children not listening to their parents. As we clarified our aim, relevant content became more effective.

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.

There are other educational elements in the radio drama as well. For example, after violence groups have different narratives or collective memories about the past. We show this in the radio drama, with the intention to help groups see these differences and motivate them to work toward creating a shared history, which is less likely to generate new violence. The following excerpt is relevant; the poorer village is Muhumuro, and the better off village Bumanzi.

THE TEACHER: (Moderately) Mugenga, without defending yourselves, don't you know that it is you the people of Bumanzi who are the culprits for the disaster? (The conflict with and the attack by the other village, Muhumuro on Bumanzi.)

MUGENGA: (Angry) How should we be held responsible when the land was officially given to us!

THE TEACHER: Even though you didn't take it by force, you should have shared it with the people in Muhumuro with whom you shared it before! I say it impartially as I hail from neither Muhumuro nor Bumanzi.

MUGENGA: (Indignant) You don't deserve being listened to! Fabiya, I won't talk to you anymore! Our children are in trouble if you teach them such things!

THE TEACHER: Look! Why do people call a spade a spade and you get angry and start insulting them! Does being at loggerheads with someone give you the right to insult them? (Text from Musekeweya, reproduced in [Staub, 2011](#), p. 450)

After attacks and counterattacks, justice processes, varied educational elements, including trauma and examples of people helping traumatized individuals by engaging with them and empathically listening to them—our aim was to generate person to person support and people helping each other heal—the story slowly moves on to reconciliation. At one point, people in the villages use their experience to become peacemakers. They join to prevent violence by another group.

Evaluation of the Effects of the Radio Drama

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). This meant that a control group that was not exposed to the radio program was not naturally available. Expecting this, the conditions for an experimental evaluation study were set up before the broadcasts began. Six groups of people around the country listened together to our radio drama. Six other groups were set up in which people agreed that they would not listen to it, and listened to an alternative radio drama, focusing on health. The evaluation at the end of one year included knowledge about the content of the programs, and other elements, which indicated that members of the control group followed up on their agreements.

The evaluation study found that after one year ([Paluck, 2009](#); see also [Staub & Pearlman, 2009](#); for an overview of the trainings, radio drama, and their evaluation see [Staub, 2011](#)) the radio drama led to many changes in listeners, in comparison to people in the control groups. It also led to extensive discussions 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 willingness to express one's opinions. People who listened to the radio drama compared to those in the control group said that they would say what they believed, and were found to do so in behavioral assessments. In Rwandan culture, where people tend to say what they think others want to hear, this is an important change ([Staub, 2011](#)). They also reported more empathy with everyone—victims, bystanders, and leaders. They were more likely to engage in reconciliation activities rather than just advocating for them.

One of the effects, in this authority-oriented country (see [Staub, 1989, 2011](#)), was that people who listened to the radio drama acted more independently of people in authority. At the end of the year, the study over, there were parties, at which each experimental and control group received disks of the whole year of the programs and a disk player. In discussing what they were going to do with these, in each of the control groups someone suggested that the village leader should hold this material for them. Without any discussion, each of the groups agreed. In each of the experimental groups a similar suggestion was made. In each case this was followed by extensive discussion, the group deciding that some member of the group or the whole group will hold on to the disks and the disk player.

An experimental evaluation of the long-term effects of this ongoing radio drama is challenging, since with most of the population listening there is no appropriate control group. However, anecdotal reports indicate that the radio programs have real world effects. For example, a young man, who was 14 at the time of the genocide, was inspired by Musekweya, as he and members of his village reported, to persuade people in his village, Hutus who killed Tutsis in a nearby village during the genocide, to seek forgiveness. They took their tools and joined the people in the village they earlier victimized, working alongside them in their fields. Over time, this led to friendly relations ([Ziegler, 2010](#)). In another instance someone reported that people in the community gave a man who behaved badly the name of the bad leader in the radio drama, changing his name when his behavior improved.

A “grass roots” project was developed to strengthen the effects of the radio programs. Using the same conceptual approach as in the development of the radio drama and other radio programs, community members were trained as conflict resolution agents. A wide range of people were trained in 37 communities that were “strongly impacted by the genocide, and where recovery, in terms of social cohesion, the absence of conflict, and economic activity, was slow... to notice and address problems between people before they become severe, help resolve conflicts, and foster peaceful relations” ([Staub, 2011](#), p. 381). In an evaluation of the contribution of many potential influences on reconciliation, community members identified Musekweya as having had very substantial influence, and these change agents as also having made an important contribution to social cohesion in their communities ([Ingelaere, 2009](#); [Ingelaere, Havugimana, & Ndushabandi, 2009](#); see [Staub, 2011](#)).

As I noted earlier, there are significant limitations on freedom of speech and political activity in Rwanda, which would limit expressions of the effects of our reconciliation work, which stresses moderate authority, pluralism, a constructive vision that joins all groups, truth and justice, and active bystandership to promote these. Given the early positive impact of the radio drama, and that over the years repeated surveys of radio listening habits have shown much of the population listening to it, it is conceivable that it has created culture change. If this is the case, this may become evident when political conditions change. As [Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska \(2010\)](#) suggest in their dynamical systems theory, positive changes can remain latent until conditions change and allow them to emerge.

The Issues of Cultural Sensitivity and Specificity

To work in another culture, and after people have experienced great trauma, requires sensitivity. 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 relevant substantive knowledge, but also knowledge of the history of the society and of the violence between groups. It also requires humility. It is both effective education, and essential 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. The “understanding approach” we have been using needs to be applied to

the specifics of each situation. However, it can be applied to many settings where there is conflict, hostility, danger of violence between groups, or where violence is ongoing or has taken place.

Conclusions: Where Does Reconciliation Stand in Rwanda?

Reconciliation means mutual acceptance, and the creation of institutions that maintain and promote constructive attitudes and practices. Reconciliation in Rwanda requires active promotion of truth; justice in relation to past violence and just societal arrangements; acknowledgment by each group of its past harmful actions; humanizing each group in the eyes of the other and increased trust; a constructive vision/ideology that can bring people together; and at least moving toward a shared or inclusive history of past events in place of conflicting histories. Understanding the roots and impact of violence can contribute to more positive attitudes by members of the two groups toward each other, and empower people to resist the influences that lead to violence and engage in reconciliation activities (see [Staub, 2011](#)).

Some of these things are happening or are in progress in Rwanda. Equality in access to education and jobs exists in principle, although according to local people it needs to improve in practice. The improvement of economic conditions is substantial, but needs to reach more of the population. The radio drama and other educational radio programs, including a recent television program *LaBenevolencija* has created, have been providing understanding of origins, avenues to reconciliation and prevention. But justice, as I have noted, is incomplete, and acknowledgment by both groups of their actions, and assuming responsibility for them, is limited or absent. This interferes with moving toward a shared history. Some Hutus outside Rwanda have attempted to deny the genocide. The seemingly constructive vision of the government, of unity, is used to limit democratic processes. An ideology of unity can serve as a constructive vision, but only if it is more flexible (e.g., allowing double identities) and more gently held, as I discuss in this article.

The challenge is to work on and promote the missing pieces required for reconciliation. Outside parties can help, but only in collaboration with insiders. Other countries can work with the government to facilitate constructive social processes, and non-governmental organizations can collaborate with local organizations, not only in facilitating healing and reconciliation, which they have been doing, but also in generating social processes that can in turn improve group relations and lead to lasting peace ([Staub, 2011](#); see also [Staub, in press](#)).

Funding

The projects and research described in this article were supported by grants to Ervin Staub and Laurie Anne Pearlman from the John Templeton Foundation, the Dart Foundation, The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, The United States Institute for Peace, U.S. Aid for International Development, and by a small grant from a private donor, and by grants to *LeBenevolencija* from the governments of the Netherlands and Belgium, from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and from the European Union.

Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

Many persons have participated in the projects and research described in the article; Rwandans, the nationals of other countries, and from the U.S. The names of those from the U.S. are mentioned in the article.

References

- Africa Rights. (2002). *Tribute to courage*. Kigali, Rwanda: African Rights Organization.
- Bilali, R., Vollhardt, J., & de Balzac, H. H. (2011). *LaBenevolencija population survey and impact evaluation. Final report*. Unpublished manuscript, Radio LaBenevolencija, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Brounéus, K. (2008a). *Rethinking reconciliation: Concepts, methods, and an empirical study of truth telling and psychological health in Rwanda* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden). Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-8530>
- Brounéus, K. (2008b). Truth telling as talking cure? Insecurity and retraumatization in the Rwandan gacaca courts. *Security Dialogue*, 39, 55-76. doi:10.1177/0967010607086823
- Burchianti, M. E. (2004). Building bridges of memory: The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the cultural politics of maternal memories. *History and Anthropology*, 15, 133-150. doi:10.1080/02757200410001689954
- Des Forges, A. (1999). *Leave none to tell the story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch.
- Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Saguy, T. (2009). Commonality and the complexity of "we": Social attitudes and social change. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 13, 3-20. doi:10.1177/1088868308326751
- Honeyman, C., Hudani, S., Tiruneh, A., Hiarta, J., Chirayath, L., Iliff, A., & Meierhenrich, J. (2004). Establishing collective norms: Potentials for participatory justice in Rwanda. *Peace and Conflict*, 10, 1-24. doi:10.1207/s15327949pac1001_1
- Ingelaere, B. (2009). Living the transition: Inside Rwanda's conflict cycle at the grassroots. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 3, 438-463. doi:10.1080/17531050903273735
- Ingelaere, B., Havugimana, J., & Ndushabandi, S. (2009). *LaBenevolencija grassroots project evaluation*. Unpublished manuscript, Radio LaBenevolencija, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Mamdani, M. (2001). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Paluck, E. L. (2009). Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict using the media: A field experiment in Rwanda. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 574-587. doi:10.1037/a0011989
- Pearlman, L. A. (1997). Trauma and the self: A theoretical and clinical perspective. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 1, 7-25. doi:10.1300/J135v01n01_02
- Pearlman, L. A. (2001). The treatment of persons with complex PTSD and other trauma-related disruptions of the self. In J. P. Wilson, M. J. Friedman, & J. D. Lindy (Eds.), *Treating psychological trauma & PTSD* (pp. 205-236). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Pearlman, L. A. (2013). Restoring self in community: Collective approaches to psychological trauma after genocide. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69, 111-124. doi:10.1111/josi.12006

- Prunier, G. (2009). *Africa's world war: Congo, the Rwandan genocide, and the making of a Continental catastrophe*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Saakvitne, K. W., Gamble, S. G., Pearlman, L. A., & Lev, B. T. (2000). *Risking connection: A training curriculum for working with survivors of childhood abuse*. Lutherville, MD: Sidran Foundation and Press.
- Staub, E. (1989). *The roots of evil: The origins of genocide and other group violence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Staub, E. (1998). Breaking the cycle of genocidal violence: Healing and reconciliation. In J. Harvey (Ed.), *Perspectives on loss* (pp. 231-241). Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis.
- Staub, E. (2006). Reconciliation after genocide, mass killing or intractable conflict: Understanding the roots of violence, psychological recovery and steps toward a general theory. *Political Psychology*, 27, 867-895.
- Staub, E. (2011). *Overcoming evil: Genocide, violent conflict and terrorism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Staub, E. (2013). Building a peaceful society: Origins, prevention, and reconciliation after genocide and other group violence. *American Psychologist*, 68, 576-589. doi:[10.1037/a0032045](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032045)
- Staub, E. (in press). *The roots of goodness and resistance to evil: Inclusive caring, moral courage, altruism born of suffering, active bystandership and heroism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Staub, E., & Pearlman, L. A. (2006). Advancing healing and reconciliation. In L. Barbanel & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *Psychological interventions in times of crisis* (pp. 213-245). New York, NY: Springer.
- Staub, E., & Pearlman, L. A. (2009). Reducing intergroup prejudice and conflict: A commentary. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 588-593. doi:[10.1037/a0014045](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014045)
- Staub, E., Pearlman, L. A., Gubin, A., & Hagengimana, A. (2005). Healing, reconciliation, forgiving and the prevention of violence after genocide or mass killing: An intervention and its experimental evaluation in Rwanda. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 297-334. doi:[10.1521/jscp.24.3.297.65617](https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.24.3.297.65617)
- Vallacher, R. R., Coleman, P. T., Nowak, A., & Bui-Wrzosinska, L. (2010). Rethinking intractable conflict: The perspective of dynamical systems. *American Psychologist*, 65, 262-278. doi:[10.1037/a0019290](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019290)
- Ziegler, M. (2010, October-December). A soap opera for peace in Rwanda. *Peace Magazine*, 26(4), 16-18. <http://peacemagazine.org/archive/v26n4p16a.htm>