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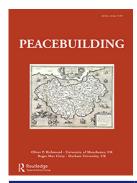
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In the aftermath of Genocide: Guatemala's failed reconciliation

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to understand the factors that have impeded meaningful intergroup reconciliation in Guatemala by drawing on scholarship addressing reconciliation, the connections between ideology and violence and wider literature in Peace and Conflict Studies. The article interrogates how the ideological and identitarian frameworks that drove the narratives that precipitated and sustained Guatemala's genocide against the indigenous Maya have continued to shape the post-genocide social and political landscape. It is the continued instrumentalization of these frameworks in the wake of Guatemala's peace process that has impeded intergroup reconciliation. Specifically, the article contends that a core driver of Guatemala's failed reconciliation has been the reticence of the economic and political elites and the Guatemalan military to accept the revision of Guatemala's conflict history and any meaningful challenge to elite privilege and power. As a result, Guatemala experiences a nexus of continuity between the past and present, between war and peace.

Introduction

Wars formally end and combatants lay down their weapons, yet what follows rarely amounts to a clear-cut, unambiguous 'peace'. Rather, societies are habitually post-accord and peaceless, where persistent intergroup antagonism means that coexistence between former adversaries and their social constituencies is brittle and intergroup reconciliation limited,[1] whilst post-accord political and criminal violence, poverty and exclusion blight the lives of the most fragile populations.[2] In such contexts, victims, perpetrators, former enemies and their constituencies often reside as uneasy neighbours,[3] their relationships shaped by mutual distrust and ongoing discrimination and by memories of recent violence and historical

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[1]Valerie Rosoux and Mark Anstey (Eds.), *Negotiating Reconciliation in Peacemaking: quandaries of relationship* building. London: Springer, 2017; Jodi Halpern and Harvey Weinstein, 'Rehumanizing the Other: Empathy and Reconciliation', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3: 561–583; Madhur Joshi and Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Quality Peace: Peacebuilding after Civil War*. London: Routledge, 2018.

[2]Christina Steenkamp, 'In the shadows of war and peace: making sense of violence after peace accords', *Conflict, Security & Development*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 357–383.

[3]Kimberley Theidon, *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru*. Pittsburg: Pennsylvania University Press, 2012.

antagonism.[4] Civilians habitually live under 'no war, no peace' regimes[5] in the wake of peace agreements.[6] Even though formal hostilities have come to an end, citizens routinely experience the present and imagine the future through the societal cleavages that may have driven the onset of past violence, or become hardened as a consequence of it.[7]

Research has further demonstrated how, in the aftermath of protracted violence, collective beliefs and perceptions change slowly, if at all, particularly when powerful groups instrumentalise historical societal cleavages or publicly oppose post-accord narratives of inclusion and intergroup conciliation consecrated within peace agreements.[8] A discrete dichotomy between the past and present is seldom experienced in the wake of violent conflict,[9] particularly by victims and survivors, as Rosoux has eloquently charged. Guatemala's post-genocide trajectory, the focus of this article, is characterised by such dynamics, where past, present and future seem to be indelibly imprinted upon one other.

The idea of a 'false dichotomy' between war and peace has become a significant theme in recent scholarship.[10] Conflict, violence and peace, it is argued, often coexist,[11] are 'mutually constitutive', or 'entwined', their logics driven by what Miller has identified as 'complex conflict systems' and ongoing direct and indirect violence, predominantly affecting the most vulnerable groups.[12] A key, although under-researched, aspect of this *conflict-peace continuity nexus* derives from the enduring scars that the causes and consequences of political violence sculpt upon the social and political landscapes of societies emerging from genocide and civil war, scars which often impose a legacy that obfuscates the past, present and future, whilst reinforcing the historical status quo. As Verdeja has contended, the legacy of 'political violence does not end with the last death'[13]; rather, the impact of war recurrently persists long after hostilities have come to a formal end.[14] Under such conditions, where structural violence persists and

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[4]Such as the armed conflicts in Colombia, Peru and Guatemala. See Theidon, *Intimate Enemies*; Alejandro Castillejo Cuellar, *Memories and Violence: Problems and Debates in a Global Perspective*. Zayed University Press, 2013; Michelle Bellino, *Youth in Post-War Guatemala: Education and Civic Identity in Transition*. New Jersey: Rutgers, 2017.

[5]Christine Bell, 'Peace Agreements: their nature and legal status. *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 100, No. 2, 2006: 373–412.

[6]See Christine Bell and Catherine O'Rourke, 'The People's Peace? Peace Agreements, Civil Society, and Participatory Democracy', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2007: 293–324; Charles Call, *Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012; Richard Caplan, *Measuring Peace: Principles, Practices and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

[7]Halpern and Weinstein, *Rehumanising*; Daniel Bar-Tal, Amiram Raviv, Alona Raviv, Adi Dgani-Hirsh, 'The Influence of the Ethos of Conflict on Israeli Jews' Interpretation of Jewish – Palestinian Encounters', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 1: 94–118; Jonathan Leader Maynard, 'Ideology and Armed Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 56, No. 5: 635–649.

[8]Leader Maynard, *Ideology*; Rosoux and Anstey, *Negotiating*.

[9]Valerie Rosoux, 'Time and Reconciliation: Dealing with Festering Wounds', in Rosoux and Anstey, *Negotiating*.

[10]Gearoid Miller, 'Toward a trans-scalar peace system: challenging complex global conflict systems', *Peacebuilding* 8, no. 3, 2020, 261–278; Rachel Pain, 'Intimate War', *Political Geography*, 44 (2015).

[11]Roddy Brett, *The Path Towards Reconciliation after Colombia's War: understanding the roles of victims and perpetrators*. Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.

[12]Gearoid Miller, 'Toward a trans-scalar peace system: challenging complex global conflict systems', *Peacebuilding* 8, no. 3 (2020): 261–278. Cedric de Coning de Coning, 'From Peacebuilding to Sustaining Peace: Implications of complexity for resilience and sustainability', *Resilience*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2016, 166–183.

[13]Ernesto Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree: Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Political Violence*. Temple University Press, 2009.

[14]Sabina Čehajić-Clancy and Michal Bilewicz, 'Fostering Reconciliation Through Historical Moral Exemplars in a Postconflict Society', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2017, 288–296.

historical narratives and antagonisms continue to characterise the fragile relations between formerly warring parties and their social constituencies, reconciliation faces acute challenges, as the case of Guatemala addressed in this article will illustrate.

Having culminated in a genocide perpetrated by the state against indigenous Maya communities in the 1980s, Guatemala's 36-year internal armed conflict came to a formal end in 1996, following a relatively successful internationally monitored peace process. Nine years of peace negotiations between successive governments and the guerrilla army, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), led to the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of the country's former guerrilla insurgents and their transformation into a political party in the late 1990s. The agreements also contemplated a broad range of political, economic, social and legal reforms, aspects of which have since been partially implemented. Guatemala's armed conflict, moreover, has not relapsed, reflecting the post-accord paths followed by neighbouring El Salvador and Nicaragua.

However, in practice, peace in Guatemala means very little. Structural violence afflicts the lives of the poorest and most marginalised, above all those of indigenous origin, whilst the terms of the peace settlement are continually challenged by the armed forces and by the political and economic elites on whose behalf the genocidal counterinsurgency campaign was waged. Political and criminal violence have remained acute, with escalating levels of criminal violence and ongoing political violence threatening the country's peace deal.[15] Despite elite accommodation between formerly warring parties at the political level, reconciliation between indigenous (Maya) and non-indigenous (ladino) ethnic groups has been limited, a state of affairs that Hughes identifies as characteristic of intergroup relations in post-accord Northern Ireland.[16] Four decades after the killing campaign commenced, Guatemala's racialised Cold War narrative – wielded against indigenous communities with such lethal force during the conflict – retains powerful currency and meaning. The ideological and identitarian foundations of such a narrative matter in post-genocide Guatemala; in fact, they matter enough to represent a crucial obstacle to peace and reconciliation.

Reconciliation has recently enjoyed a resurgence as a topic of academic study and is an increasingly explicit theme for practitioners in the field of post-conflict reconstruction addressing intergroup antagonism.[17] Approaches differ as regards the scope of reconciliation. A spectrum from minimalist to maximalist versions of reconciliation exists,[18] the former characterised by 'peaceful coexistence', the latter by widespread 'harmony' between social groups.[19] Minimalist accounts, or what Seils terms 'thin reconciliation', encompass the cessation of political violence, respect for the rule of law and a basic level of intergroup coexistence within a shared political community. A maximalist approach, or 'thick reconciliation' would furthermore include redress of the structural causes of conflict, marginalisation and discrimination and the restoration of victims as rights bearers.[20]

[15]Michael Steinberg and Matthew Taylor, 'Public Memory and Political Power in Guatemala's Postconflict Landscape', *Geographical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 4, 2003, 449–468.

[16]James Hughes, 'Agency versus structure in reconciliation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2017, 624–642.

[17]Paul Seils, *The Place of Reconciliation in Transitional Justice*. New York: ICTJ, 2017. See also European Institute of Peace, Strategic Plan 2020–2022: *Shaping Conflict Resolution Together*. Accessed at https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/813-EIP-web-10-2020.pdf (17/10/2020).

[18]Seils, *Reconciliation*.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

Reconciliation is a tall order in the aftermath of atrocious violence. Framed within the above debates, this article seeks to understand the factors that have led to Guatemala's 'thin reconciliation', characterised by minimal intergroup coexistence and the cessation of formal hostilities. The research specifically interrogates how the ideological and identitarian frameworks that undergirded the narratives that precipitated Guatemala's genocide have shaped the post-accord social and political landscape. The article seeks to develop a more nuanced understanding of the connections between processes of failed intergroup reconciliation and ideological and identitarian frameworks related to the violence and to widen the empirical evidence base for said discussions, which have focused principally on more well-known cases, such as Rwanda, Northern Ireland, the Balkans and Palestine-Israel.[21] The article will argue that exploring the persistence today of the historical ideological and identitarian frameworks that facilitated the genocide against indigenous communities represents a useful lens through which to understand why reconciliation processes between perpetrators and victims and, more generally, between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, have been limited.

The first section discusses the conceptual literature addressing the role of ideology and identity in shaping recidivism, political violence and reconciliation. The article then turns to the case study of Guatemala with the aim of analysing the role that ideology and identity played in shaping the country's violent armed conflict and societal cleavages. The article then discusses briefly the wider scholarship on reconciliation, before turning again to the study of the Guatemala case, interrogating the ways in which and the reasons why reconciliation has failed and how past framings of ideology and collective identity continue to assert meaning in the country. The article will close with a series of concluding comments.

Ideology, identity and violence

Since the early 2000s, research has increasingly developed the argument that the commission of organised political violence, including civil war,[22] ethnic conflict,[23] genocide and mass atrocities[24] is linked closely both to ideology[25] and, relatedly, to the instrumentalization of the perceptions, beliefs and motivations that shape collective identity and intergroup relationships.[26] Leader Maynard identifies a 'complex and contingent'

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[21]Burkhardt-Vetter, *Reocnciliation*; Hughes, *Structure*; Čehajić-Clancy and Michal Bilewicz, *Fostering*; Scott Straus and Las Waldorf, *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights After Mass Violence*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.

[22]Francisco Sanín Gutiérrez and Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2014, 213–226; Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Leader Maynard, *Ideology*.

[23]Barbara Harff,, 'No lessons learned from the Holocaust? Assessing risks of genocide and political mass murder since 1955', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, 57–73; Timothy Wilson, *Killing Strangers: How Political Violence Became Modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

[24]Scott Straus, *Making and unmaking nations: The origins and dynamics of genocide in contemporary Africa*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015; Roddy Brett, *The Origins and Dynamics of Genocide: political violence in Guatemala*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Michael Mann, *The dark side of democracy: Explaining ethnic cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[25]Leader Maynard, *Ideology*; Harff, *Lessons*; Manislav Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap Genocide in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Straus, *Making and Unmaking*; Juan E Ugarriza, 'Ideologies and conflict in the post-Cold War', *International Journal of Conflict Management*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2009, 82–104.

[26]Aiken, *Reconciliation*; Burkhardt-Vetter, *Reconciliation*; Bar Tal et al., *Victimhood*.

relationship between ideology, identity and political violence, manifest through 'a broader matrix of ideological perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, commitments, meanings and motives'.

Scholars have contended that ideological frameworks are habitually propagated by political/ethnic leaders and elites, both state and non-state alike, and often strategically instrumentalised in the context of rising elite security fears.[27] Leaders frequently mobilise ideological frameworks opportunistically in order to construct the adversary group (the *outgroup*) as an imminent threat to *ingroup* security and survival,[28] whilst portraying the ingroup as the principal victim of the outgroup.[29] In such contexts, existing identities may undergo 'creative ideological mobilization', as violent entrepreneurs justify and habitually incite violence through appealing to values, 'normative codes, standards, ideal self-images and norms' embedded within collective identities.[30] Leaders and ethnic entrepreneurs identify particular *categories* as cohesive groups that threaten ingroup security and mobilise ideological frameworks against them, often with the intention of shaping perpetrators' 'willingness to kill',[31] or 'purifying' and cleansing society from said threat.[32] 'Atrocity-justifying ideologies' represent ingroup perpetrators as virtuous and loyal and compelled by moral duty,[33] whilst reframing killing as 'self-defence'.[34] Such ideologies are thus fundamental for threat construction, instrumentalised as they are to motivate, legitimate and rationalise the killing of specific groups for policy-initiators, perpetrators and bystanders.[35] In Guatemala, they have persisted into the post-accord scenario.

Social psychologists have similarly focused upon the nexus between collective social identity, ideology, group formation and intergroup violence. Bar-Tal argues that a 'Conflictive Ethos' (CE) and the 'societal beliefs' that undergird it play a key role in the onset and perpetuation of political violence. During intractable conflict, the CE provides a 'functional culture of violence', setting up an *us-them* Manichaean narrative constituted by a framework of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and motivations[36] which furnish individuals and collective groups with congruent images of both the *ingroup* and its adversary (*outgroup*).[37] The CE may impose *ingroup* unity and conformity, 'denigrating rival narratives and identities'[38] and justifying the harm perpetrated against the *outgroup*.[39] Mutually-reinforcing societal beliefs sustain the CE, such as the belief in

[27]Straus, *Making and Unmaking*; Harff, *Lessons learned*; Brett, *Origins*.

[28]Erwin Staub, *Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[29]Rajmohan Ramanathapillai, 'The Politicizing of Trauma: A Case Study of Sri Lanka', *Peaceand Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006, 1–18.

[30]Jonathan Leader Maynard, 'Rethinking the role of ideology in mass atrocities', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 26, 2014, 821–841.

[31]Leader Maynard, *Rethinking*, p. 828)

[32]Jacques Semelin, *Purify and destroy: The political uses of massacre and genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

[33]See also Sabina Cehajic, Rupert Brown and Emanuele Castano, 'Forgive and Forget? Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2008, 351–367.

[34]Leader Maynard, *Ideology*.

[35]See also Michael Ignatieff, *Human rights as politics and idolatry*. Toronto: Anansi Press, 2001.

[36]Daniel Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts: Socio-psychological Foundations and Dynamics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; see also Daniel Bar-Tal, Eran Halperin and Neta Oren, 'Socio–Psychological Barriers to Peace Making: The Case of the Israeli Jewish Society', *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 4,(1), 2010, 63–109.

[37]Volkan's work is also important as a point of reference here. See for example, Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity*. Charlottesville: Pitchstone, 2006.

[38]Burkhardt-Vetter, *Reconciliation*.

[39]Bar Tal, *Intractable conflicts*; Daniel Bar Tal, 'Collective memory as social representations', in *Papers on Social Representations*, Vol. 23,, 2014, 70–96.

the justness of ingroup goals, the delegitimization of the adversary (including through dehumanisation narratives), the construction of the ingroup as uniquely positive and the belief that the ingroup represents the sole *victim*.[40]

For Bar-Tal, the CE provides a 'collective emotional orientation' which prepares individuals for violence from and against the outgroup, motivates ingroup solidarity, mobilisation and action and creates a sense of differentiation and superiority,[41] through the habitual de-personalisation, de-legitimisation and dehumanisation of the outgroup and its members.[42] De-personalisation leads to all outgroup members being perceived as sharing the same negative traits and held responsible collectively for the suffering of the ingroup; logically, all outgroup members become 'legitimate' targets of ingroup violence. Dehumanisation processes construct the outgroup as innately inferior, through ideological tropes and narratives that define their adversary as sub-human, as animals, insects, and so forth.[43] Ideological framings envision outgroup members as innately less human than the ingroup, implying that customary beliefs in tolerance, decency and mutual obligations may be suspended, as may adherence to international human rights norms. For Staub, 'passive members' of the ingroup will tend to distance themselves from its victims and recurrently accept 'justifications offered by perpetrators', whilst 'blaming and devaluing victims', reducing empathy and inhibiting guilt.[44] Lack of acknowledgement of the harm caused by the ingroup may impede future processes of reconciliation and forgiveness,[45] at the same time as slowing down the reincorporation of the outgroup within a wider 'moral community', a point to which we shall subsequently return, given its core relevance for reconciliation processes.[46]

Research has then provided important insight into how hostile relationships become ossified, in turn progressively impeding intergroup empathy[47] and reinforcing mutual distrust, fear, prejudice and stereotyping. Processes of dehumanisation, de-personalisation and delegitimation and the transformation of the ingroup's moral order thus represent 'necessary permissive conditions for the escalation of intergroup violence, repression and other gross human rights violations committed on a massive scale.[48] States habitually play a crucial role in this regard: appeals to societal beliefs are reinforced through ideological narratives mobilised through state-led cultural, educational, social and political mechanisms and institutions, through which violence against the outgroup is constructed as permissible, desirable and, ultimately, as necessary for

[40]Burkhardt-Vetter, *Reconciliation*.

[41]Bar-Tal, *Collective Memory*.

[42]See also Anthony Oberschall, *Conflict and Peace Building in Divided Societies: Responses to Ethnic Violence*. London: Routledge, 2007 and Timothy Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia 1918–1922*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[43]See also Sabina Čehajić-Clancy, Amit Goldenberg, James Gross and Eran Halperin, 'Social-Psychological Interventions for Intergroup Reconciliation: An Emotion Regulation Perspective', *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2016, 73–88.

[44]Staub, *Overcoming Evil*.

[45]Noor et al., *Prospects*; Burkhardt-Vetter, *Reconciliation*.

[46]Staub, *Overcoming Evil*.

[47]Ibid.; see also Nurit Shnabel, Samer Halabi, and Masi Noor, 'Overcoming Competitive Victimhood and Facilitating Forgiveness Through Re-categorisation into a Common Victim or Perpetrator Identity', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 49, 2013, 867–877.

[48]Nevin Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice: overcoming intractability in divided societies*. London: Routledge, 2013: 16. See also Emanuele Castano, Daniel Muñoz-Rojas and Sabina Čehajić-Clancy, 'Thou Shalt Not Kill: Social Psychological Processes and International Humanitarian Law Among Combatants', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2020, 35–46.

ingroup survival. Under such conditions, the epistemic-cognitive foundations for violent conflict may be consolidated, which, in turn, blocks mutual empathy and the widespread acceptance that peace represents an appropriate and achievable shared objective, which requires compromises by all parties.[49]

Under such conditions, a collective sense of *woundedness* frequently develops,[50] impeding mutual acknowledgement of the adversary's suffering,[51] diminishing empathy towards it and bolstering the abandonment of humanitarian norms, as Burkhardt-Vetter argues.[52] Here groups often compete over which is the more legitimate victim, or seek to monopolise victimhood, what scholars have termed *competitive victimhood*.[53] Competitive victimhood habitually intensifies a group's reluctance to trust former adversaries and their supporters, perpetuating cycles of revenge and retaliation. The longer the period in which a society experiences loss (human loss, in particular, but also loss of resources, such as land) and the more systematic the violence suffered, the more widespread and entrenched will be the sense of collective victimisation within the social fabric, potentially further polarising groups, intensifying the character of competition over victimhood and edifying it within society. For Volkan, gropus often identify a 'chosen trauma' around a 'shared calamity',[54] through which historical experiences of victimisation are. Guatemala's genocidaires nurtured this perspective and continue to cultivate it today, as shall be argued below.

Guatemala's Genocide

Representing today approximately 40% of the overall population, indigenous Guatemalans have been systematically marginalised since the colonial epoch. Ideological and identitarian frameworks have played a mutually reinforcing role in Guatemala, embedding cross-cutting societal cleavages (based on race and class) and, in turn, shaping the drivers of direct and structural violence, the brunt of which have been borne by the indigenous. Since the colonial encounter, systemic racism against indigenous communities within the political, institutional, economic, structural and interpersonal spheres has been consistently propagated and instrumentalized by religious and military leaders, politicians and the wealthy landowning oligarchy,[55] what Straus refers to as the 'primary political community'.[56]

Historically, in their pursuit to defend their economic interests and political privilege and uphold the socio-political, religious and economic foundations of Guatemala's nation-state, the non-indigenous elite[57] has constructed a belief system anchored within discriminatory attitudes and prejudices, framing the indigenous population, or

[49]See Burkhardt-Vetter, *Reconciliation* for an eloquent discussion of this issue with relation to Palestine/Israel.
[50]Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992. See also David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
[51]Burkhardt-Vette, *Reconciliation*.
[52]Staub, *Overcoming*; Bat Tal, *Intractable*.
[53]Nurit Shnabel and Masi Noor, 'Competitive Victimhood Among Jewish and Palestinian Israelis Reflects Differential Threats to Their Identities: The Perspective of the Needs-based Model', in Kai Jonas and Thomas Morton (Eds.) *Restoring Civil Societies: The Psychology of Intervention and Engagement Following Crisis*. Malden. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012: 192–207.
[54]Vamik Volkan, 'Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect ofLarge-group Identity', *Group Analysis*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2001, 79–97. See also Volkan, *Killing*.
[55]Marta Casaus Arzú, *Genocidio ¿La máxima expresión del racismo en Guatemala?* Guatemala: F & G Editors, 2008.
[56]Straus, *Making and Unmaking*.
[57]Made up of peninsulares (direct Spanish descendents) and Ladinos (mixed race indigenous/mestizos).

pejoratively Guatemala's 'indians', as a 'low, lazy, indolent, filthy … licentious and ignorant race of animalistic half-humans'.[58] As Straus has argued, the mobilisation of the nation's founding narrative is 'forged at critical junctures' and acts as a 'legitimating framework' for winning support for extreme actions, whilst also maintaining the status quo and safeguarding elites from challenges to their power and privilege. Indigenous communities have been identified as an obstacle to modernisation, yet, at the same time, their economic and political exclusion has had to be maintained indefinitely in order to preserve the economic interests and political power of the non-indigenous elite, who rely upon indigenous communities for cheap labour. In the 21st century, Guatemala's political and economic elite continues to be its non-indigenous, in the most part, Spanish-descended oligarchy (or *peninsulares*), which asserts a monopoly within the private sector, controls the core political and state structures and owns and controls over 65% of the country's land. Ladinos, have increasingly emerged as powerbrokers within the country's political ranks and licit and illicit economies. However, indigenous communities continue to bear the brunt of poverty and extreme poverty, effectively marginalised from political society and the state.

Anti-'indian' discourse and sentiment expressed by both the non-indigenous elite and within broader ladino society has been ubiquitous, although aggressively fervently at 'critical junctures', during times of national crisis or possible social transformation benefiting indigenous and poor ladino communities. During such episodes, newspaper editorials, government statements and public opinion have disseminated a narrative of 'indian threat', at once reinforcing the perspective of the indigenous population as sub-human, pernicious and threatening. Said narrative has had the effect of isolating indigenous communities from the nation's moral sphere, privileging the non-indigenous ingroup, conferring upon it superiority. Such narratives have insinuated or explicitly identified an imminent 'indian' takeover of the country,[59] appealing to embedded perceptions and beliefs of the indigenous as pariah: unclean, subversive, untrustworthy, greedy, uncivilised and violent. Historically, three episodes have played a crucial role in edifying the ideological and identitarian frameworks and societal cleavages that continue to shape post-genocide Guatemala.

Guatemalan elites had constructed the indigenous as primitive and sub-human from the colonial encounter, to be evangelised and civilised, by doctrine or by fire. They were excluded from the national imaginary and marginalised geographically, obliged to become tithe workers on large estates. Smith has eloquently argued that a first key episode of intentional mobilisation of extreme racist discourse took place in the aftermath of liberal reforms carried out in the 1870s that precipitated the disarticulation of historical patterns of paternalism and conservative protectionism.[60] By 1892, such changes had meant that lands previously protected by the Catholic Church had been affected by unconstrained capitalist incursion and coercion of labour, particularly in indigenous zones. From the 1870s, the mass expropriation of indigenous lands was accompanied by widespread public discourse which scorned and condemned indigenous lifestyle and patterns of land use as selfish and against the common good. The

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[58]Carol Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the Nation State, 1540–1988*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid.

predominant narrative employed was that indigenous people were unproductive, untrustworthy vagabonds, outcasts who could only be domesticated by enforcing conditions of bonded labour upon them, conditions akin to slavery. This narrative was reinforced emphatically in the late 19th century during a series of indigenous uprisings that were easily defeated by the military, yet left an indelible mark upon elite collective memory.

A second episode occurred during the mid-1940s, at the beginning of a ten-year period of liberal reforms, the so-called 'Ten Years of Spring'.[61] Elected in 1950, President Jacopo Arbenz, under guidance from the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT), led the country away from foreign investment by nationalising industries and introducing a radical programme of land reform. By the early 1950s, Decree 900 expropriated land from international, mainly North American, corporations (such as the United Fruit Company) and began to return it to the rural peasant population, the majority of which was indigenous.[62] The reforms would have potentially broadened economic opportunities for the indigenous population within a regional and international context shaped by growing fears of the incipient Cold War. Fear of loss of land and capital to poor indigenous and ladino peasant farmers facilitated by the proposed reforms inspired fury in the urban and rural political and economic elites and in the corridors of Washington.[63] Instrumentalising a radical racialised discourse, editorials in major newspapers spoke again of the 'indian threat', emphasising the possibility that violent and dirty indians would take control of the country, forcing ladinos and peninsulares into slavery and stealing their homes and jobs.[64] With the support of Guatemalan military and political and economic elites, a CIA-orchestrated coup ousted President Arbenz in 1954 and replaced him with a US-friendly puppet government, effectively setting the stage for the country's internal armed conflict.

Wide-ranging scholarship has contended that ideology represented a core driver of Guatemala's subsequent armed conflict, shaping collective identity and intergroup relations.[65] Two mutually reinforcing ideological frameworks drove the violence and the genocide: (i) the ideological battle led by the landed oligarchy and armed forces against communism and (ii) historical racism against indigenous communities. The armed conflict thus precipitated the evolution and extension of intergroup antagonism based solely upon racial discrimination towards a narrative that melded racial/ethnic cleavages more explicitly with ideological frameworks integral to and mobilised globally during the Cold War, which were articulated through wider narratives of poverty, power and justice. The functional narrative of racism was then developed to incorporate and respond to the shifting threats that characterised the country's Cold War experience.

[61]Pietro Gleijeses *Shattered hope: The Guatemalan revolution and the United States, 1944–1954*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
[62]Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala, Revised and Expanded*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
[63]Ibid.
[64]Smith, *Indians*.
[65]Victoria Sanford 2003; Brett, *Origins*; Carlotta McAllister, 'A headlong rush into the future: Violence and revolution in a Guatemalan indigenous village', in George Joseph and Greg Grandin (Eds.), *A Century of revolution: Insurgent and counterinsurgent violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010; Victoria Sanford, *Violencia y Genocidio en Guatemala*. Guatemala: F &G Editores, 2003., Smith, *Indians*.

Guatemala's armed conflict

Guatemala's internal armed conflict began with the mobilisation of armed leftists insurgents in 1960, and was shaped by the security, military, political and ideological logic of Latin America's wider Cold War.[66] By the 1970s, diverse armed groups had emerged, enjoying relatively widespread support from peasant and trade union groups. By 1976, indigenous support to the guerrilla in rural Guatemala grew, particularly to the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), as greater numbers of indigenous communities across the western highlands voluntarily supported or were coerced into the ranks of the guerrilla.[67] Mass indigenous support to the EGP confirmed the elites' most embedded historical fear: the emergence of an armed indian resistance linked to anti-oligarchic subversion powered by Moscow. Whilst indigenous populations had, in the past, been portrayed as untrustworthy, lazy, primitive and resentful of non-indigenous wealth and privilege, the mobilisation of armed indigenous guerrillas represented a distinct and perhaps more virulent threat. The 'indian-subversive',[68] a guerrilla hyrid of racial and class grievances, merged the historical racialised discourse of the 19th and 20th centuries with ideological communism.

With massive US support, the Guatemalan military came vehemently to the defence of the country's Spanish-descended economic and political elite, in particular in the wake of the revolutionary victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979.[69] The Guatemalan elite initially turned to the elected military government of Romeo Lucas García (1978–1982), which escalated counterinsurgency measures,[70] implementing a large-scale rural military counteroffensive, the so-called 'scorched earth' campaign, *Operation Ashes*, on 1 October 1981.[71] Counterinsurgency operations aimed to cleanse areas of subversion by massacring both military and non-military targets, emphatically the guerrilla's indigenous social base.[72] The campaign left approximately 11,000 deaths,[73] as the military indiscriminately targeted indigenous communities classified as the 'internal enemy' throughout the highlands.

The Lucas campaign failed to contain the insurgency, pushing increasing numbers of indigenous communities towards it for protection and ultimately isolating the regime from a frustrated economic, military and political establishment.[74] By 1982, sectors within the military, political elite and private sector began publicly to oppose the regime

[66]Dirk Kruijt, *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America*. London/New York: Zed Books, 2008; Greg Grandin, 'Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War', in Joseph and Grandin, *A Century*; Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (Eds.), *Societies of fear: The legacy of civil war, violence and terror in Latin America*. London: Zed Books, 1999' James Dunkerley, *Power in the Isthmus*. London: Verso.

[67]David Stoll, *Between two armies: In the Ixil towns of Guatemala*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994; Benjamin Valentino, *Final solutions: Mass killing and genocide in the 20th century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

[68]See Smith, *Indians*.

[69]Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan military project: A violence called democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

[70]George Black, Maya Jamail, and Norma Stoltz Chichilla, *Garrison Guatemala*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984; Schirmer, *Violence*; Sanford, *Genocidio*; Brett, *Origins*.

[71]Patrick Ball, Paul Kobrak and H. Spirer, *State Violence in Guatemala, 1960–1996: A Quantitative Assessment*. American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1999.

[72]Susie Kemp, 'Guatemala Prosecutes former President Ríos Montt', Journal of International Criminal Justice Vol. 12, 2014, 133–156.

[73]Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG), *Guatemala: Nunca Mas*. Guatemala: ODHA, 1999.

[74]See Rachel McCleary, *Dictating democracy: Guatemala and the end of the violent*

leading to a military coup on 23 March 1982.[75] General Efraín Ríos Montt subsequently took over as de facto President and institutionalised a renovated counterinsurgency campaign, centralised and coordinated by the military command structure with the aim of destroying the guerrilla's indigenous social base. From July 1982, within the framework of *Operation Victory 82*, thousands of indigenous civilians were exterminated,[76] as the military sought to eliminate armed subversion and its roots through massacres and the indoctrination of survivors.[77] Thousands were murdered. Survivors were rounded up in so-called 'model villages', where they underwent indoctrination programmes, obliged to speak Spanish and practice Christianity.[78]

Although indigenous soldiers took part increasingly in counterinsurgency operations, integral to the perpetration of the massacre campaign was the military high command's intentional generation and repeated operationalisation during training of a dehumanisation narrative against those indigenous groups, combatant and civilian alike, targeted by the military. Foot soldiers had gone through training and indoctrination programmes where they were told they would not be killing humans, but *indios* and, during military operations, soldiers referred to indigenous victims as *indios*, as dirty, as animals.[79] According to Casaús Arzú, in order to facilitate the interethnic violence, the entire indigenous population was stigmatised as 'communists, infidels, idolaters and sinners, as irrational and oppositional'.[80] 'Atrocity-justifying ideologies' were thus integral to the counterinsurgency, dehumanising and de-personalising indigenous victims and their worldviews.

The massacre campaign effectively neutralised the guerrilla across the country, above all in the indigenous western highlands. By August 1983, the campaign had achieved its objective of bringing the strategic defeat of the guerrilla and the control of its social base. Guatemala's systematic mass atrocity campaign thus ended formally in 1983, once counterinsurgency operations had successfully disarticulated the guerrilla. A gradual return to civilian rule began in 1984, completed in 1985, when civilian Vinicio Cerezo was elected to the presidential office. Post-accord developments, however, evidence that the military had failed to achieve its second core strategic aim of 'whitening' the nation,[81] a point to which we shall return.

Post-Genocide Guatemala

Guatemala's peace process began in 1987. Between 1994 and 1996), seventeen peace accords were signed between successive governments and the URNG. The compromises made between the negotiating parties evidenced important concessions by both sides.

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revolution. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999, for a detailed analysis of the fragmentation within the establishment.

[75]The military proposed that the transition began in 1982, with the assumption of Montt; an approach shared by certain scholars. See Schirmer *Violence* and Susan Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's peace process*. Colorado: Westview Press, 2000. The perspective taken in this research is that the transition began after the end of the killing campaign in 1983.

[76]Schirmer, *Violence*, p.45.

[77]Kemp, *Guatemala Prosecutes*, pp. 417–20.

[78]See Ricardo Falla *Masacres de la selva: Ixcán, Guatemala (1975–1982)*. Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1992, for a detailed analysis of the massacres.

[79]Brett, *Origins*.

[80]Casaús Arzú, *Genocidio*.

[81]Charles Hale, 'Rethinking indigenous politics in the era of the "Indio Permitido"'. *NACLA Report on the Americas*. pp. 16–21, 2004.

Internationally-led peacebuilding efforts focused upon political and economic liberalisation as the key drivers for overcoming intergroup antagonism.[82] Framed within the overall Liberal Peace paradigm, the peace settlement sought to establish 'new structures for governance' and mechanisms for the management of intergroup differences 'on a minimally cooperative basis'.[83] Said interventions posited that intergroup antagonism were best addressed through the institutionalisation of, on the one hand, democratic frameworks that sought to foster and guarantee mutual cooperation[84] and, on the other, initiatives that aimed to redress the wrongs of the past through the application of transitional justice initiatives.[85] Both approaches sought to transform intergroup relations based on antagonism, distrust, disrespect and violent interaction by engendering collaboration, trust, compromise, cooperation and respect and by establishing mechanisms to deal with past abuses.

On paper, Guatemala's approach held the potential to achieve significant inroads into tackling the causes and consequences of historical intergroup antagonism in Guatemala. The peace agreements were wide-ranging and had benefited from the framework of the newly minted UN Agenda for Peace, which broadened the points of reference as regards UN peace support thinking and practice – resulting in wideranging peace agreements – and incorporated innovative mechanisms guaranteeing civil society participation.[86] However, the military had agreed to negotiate because a core strategic objective had been met: the guerrilla had been strategically defeated through the genocidal counterinsurgency campaign a decade earlier.[87] The economic and political elite whom they represented did not believe in a meaningful transformative peace, but rather perceived it to be pathway to international investment, allowing Guatemala to throw off its pariah status and open for business: they learnt to speak the language of peace, at least initially so.[88] Provisions addressing the core structural driver of the conflict – land ownership and control – were also limited. The agreements fell short of a full-on land reform programme, establishing instead a land bank through which peasant farmers could buy land, often at exaggerated prices. Elite intransigence to implement the peace agreements significantly influenced the country's failed state-building process and led to weak governance, exclusionary democratic structures, high levels of insecurity, violence and corruption, whilst edifying fragile and disjunctive economic development.[89] Guatemala reflects other contexts where the quality of peace is poor, resulting from ineffective security policy, weak implementation of socio-economic or rights-related peace accord provisions and the inability of the *liberal peace* to address the

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[82]Nicola Short, *The international politics of post-confl ict reconstruction in Guatemala*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
[83]Joshi and Wallensteen, *Quality Peace*, pp.10–18.
[84]Christine Cheng, Jonathan Goodhand and Patrick Meehan, *Synthesis Paper: Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict*. London: Stabilisation Unit, 2018.
[85]In fact, Bloomfield has gone so far as arguing that an interdependent relationship exists between reconciliation and democracy, situating the former firmly within the remit of the liberal peace paradigm. See Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, *Reconciliation*, p.12.
[86]Roddy Brett, 'The Role of Civil Society Actors in Peacemaking: The Case of Guatemala', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2017, 49–64.
[87]Bridget Conley-Zilkic, *How Mass Atrocities End: Studies from Guatemala, Burundi, Indonesia, Sudan, Bosnia Herzegovina and Iraq*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016: 11.
[88]Ibid.
[89]Jonas, *Centaurs*; Brett, *Origins*.

structural causes of conflict and establish meaningful and effective policies.[90] Furthermore, broadly, Guatemalan society has asserted limited ownership and appropriation of the peace agreements.[91]

Nevertheless, the Guatemalan case represented one of the first peace processes where transitional justice mechanisms beyond amnesty for armed actors became a central tenet within the agreements. The agreements established a UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) (1994), as well as a broad reparations programme. However, beyond these components, Guatemala's transitional justice framework failed by excluding explicit mechanisms through which to pursue justice for victims of past human rights violations. Whilst special tribunals had been set up in 1994 to address the Rwandan genocide and the crimes perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia, no such tribunal was established in Guatemala. The lack of international and national acknowledgement of the egregiousness of the crimes perpetrated within the confines of the conflict arguably strengthened perspective of those that denied the genocide, a point to which we shall return. Furthermore, despite successful justice and accountability processes pursued by victims themselves – elite intransigence and explicit opposition to truth and justice seeking processes have impeded intergroup reconciliation.

Reconciliation, ideology and identity

At the core of reconciliation is 'An active process of redefinition or reinterpretation of reality – what people consider real, possible, and desirable – on the basis of new causal and normative knowledge'.[92] Bar-Tal, Noor and Schnabel have, to differing degrees, posited that a path towards sustainable peace may be crafted if the beliefs that undergirded the rationalisation for, psychological investment in and cultural foundations of violent conflict are permanently transformed.[93] The transformation of antagonistic relationships and changed psychological orientation between adversaries and their constituencies[94] represents then a core pillar of reconciliation, relationships which are undergirded by the ideologies, beliefs, narratives and perceptions that shape collective identity.[95]

For Kelly and Hamber, reconciliation requires building positive intergroup relationships with the aim of developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society based on shared values, which will itself imply mutual acknowledgement and addressing past violence.[96] However, without significant social, economic, and political transformation,[97] reconciliation will be unlikely.[98]

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[90]See Roland Paris, 'Saving Liberal Peacebuilding', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2010, 337–365; Madhav Joshi, Sung Yong Lee and Roger Mac Ginty, 'Just How Liberal Is the Liberal Peace?', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2014, 364–389.

[91]Cheng et al., *Synthesis Paper*. See also Miller, *Peace System*.

[92]Emanuel Adler and Michael Bartlett, 'A framework for the study of security communities', in Emanuel Adler and Michael Bartlett (Eds), *Security Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 43.

[93]Aiken, *Reconciliation*; Staub *Overcoming*; Lederach, *Building*.

[94]Bar-Tal, *Intractable*; Kelly and Hamber, *Working Definition*; Noor et al., *Competitive Victimhood*.

[95]Lederach, *Building Peace*; Herbert Kelman, 'Reconciliation From a Social-Psychological Perspective', in Arie Nadler, Tom Malloy, and James Fisher (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse *Reconciliation*; Wendy Lambourne, 'Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding after Mass Violence', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 3, 2009, 28–48.

[96]Kelly and Hamber, *Working Definition*.

[97]Ibid. See also Aiken, *Reconciliation*.

[98]Aiken, *Reconciliation*; Lambourne, *Mass Violence*.

The transformation of the identitarian and ideological frameworks that shape ingroup identity and mould beliefs about the outgroup plays a key role in reconciliation, by dismantling outgroup stereotypes and re-humanising and re-legitimising outgroup members.[99] Such changes, it is contended, may be contingent upon increasing episodes of cooperative intergroup interaction.[100] Similarly, requisite to reconciliation is an examination of group narratives.[101] The proposition is that collective reflection will lead to mutual respect, the acknowledgement of the outgroup's narrative, admittance that the outgroup no longer represents a threat to the ingroup and the crafting of a shared history and identity.[102]

Bar-Tal argues that reconciliation requires a transformation in the beliefs about the justness of the ingroup's goals, levied towards the elimination of the cognitive foundation of the conflict and abolition/indefinite postponement of the societal objectives and political, social and economic dreams that laid the foundation for the violence (struggles over land, nation, etc.).[103] Furthermore, a change in ingroup self-perception is also crucial, specifically a shift from self-glorification narratives, which may reduce the monopolisation of victimhood by the ingroup, and acknowledge collective suffered.

Scholars argue that shifts in beliefs framing intergroup relations should include the development of a broader sense of collective identification – a *supra-group* identity – to include both outgroup and ingroup.[104] Said identity brings the establishment of a new moral and political community that overcomes *us-them* divisions and the acceptance that the outgroup is *equally human* and belongs to the same moral community.[105] As Firchow has argued, 'During the course of reconciliation both a new common outlook of the past and a new shared vision of the future is required to secure a successful and sustainable outcome'.[106]

Accounting for Guatemala's Failed Reconciliation

Guatemala's economic and political elite came under widespread challenge after the closure of the armed conflict. Whilst land issues had been addressed inadequately, the peace agreements consecrated fiscal reform to increase tax revenue, particularly from the country's oligarchy. However, the economic elite, led by the outspoken far-right Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations (CACIF), opposed change every step of the way. Guatemala's state, such as it is, and the macro-economy remain controlled by CACIF: no meaningful redistribution of economic resources has taken place between ethnic groups, despite the limited provisions of the peace agreements to that effect. Indigenous communities – the principal

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[99]Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954.
[100]Staub, *Overcoming*; Karen Brounéus (2008) 'Analyzing Reconciliation: A Structured Method for Measuring National Reconciliation Initiatives', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 14: No. 3, 2008, 291–313.
[101]Kelman, *Reconciliation*.
[102]Staub, *Overcoming*.
[103]Bar Tal, *Intractable*.
[104]Noor et al., *Competitive Victimhood*.
[105]For an approach to political reconciliation, see Colleen Murphy, *A Moral Theory of Political Reconciliation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 and Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*. London: Routledge, 2009.
[106]Pamina Firchow, Do Reparations Repair Relationships? Setting the Stage for Reconciliation in Colombia, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2017, 315–338. Noor et al. in *Reconciliation* have advocated for the re-categorisation into an *inclusive* victim identity.

victims of past political violence – continue today to be affected disproportionately by poverty and structural violence and to be fiercely stigmatised and subject to systematic racism.[107] Poverty and socio-political and economic exclusion remain acute amongst the majority of the population. However, 80% of wealth is concentrated within the 6% Spanish-descended oligarchy, meaning that material disparities continue to be structured through and maintain the societal cleavages that shaped Guatemala's conflict, as the indigenous bear the brunt of poverty and exclusion.

Under such conditions, the instrumentalization of the ideological framework that delineates the 'indian threat' continues to play an effective ordering role between ethnic groups, generating a siege mentality amongst poor and wealthy ladinos and peninusalres alike, rooted in the perception that it's better to be poor and ladino than poor and indigenous. Moreover, indigenous communities are often perceived with contempt by poor ladinos, who see them as having been favoured by international development cooperation interventions.[108] As a consequence, no significant economic transformation has taken place, a factor that scholars such as Aiken and Hughes identify as key to intergroup reconciliation.[109]

Within this context, groups and individuals that lobby for change, such as demanding the implementation of the peace agreements, advocating human rights protection and pressuring for justice for past violations, are signalled as subversives, regardless of their ethnicity. Activists are today subject to the same ideological narrative that had been employed during the Cold War against both the URNG and those human rights and peasant organisations that sought to transform the country's exclusionary economic and political models. The Cold War continues to be waged in Guatemala, in this regard, with tropes of 'subversive' and 'communist' instrumentalized against progressive actors. Non-indigenous elites and wider groups opposed to the changes embedded within the peace agreements then continue to perceive the present and future through the zero-sum lens of the past, blocking the possibility for the crafting of a common vision of society and for positive intergroup relations.

A core factor that has impeded reconciliation in this regard has been the systematic lack of acknowledgement by elites of past violence. The final reports of both truth commissions were treated by the sitting government, military and economic elite with undeniable contempt. Days after the public launch of the REMHI report, *Guatemala: Never Again* (REMHI), in April 1998, its president, Bishop Juan Gerardi, was murdered by military officials in retaliation for its findings. A year later, then President Alvaro Arzú refused publicly to accept the UN-sponsored truth commission report, which was widely condemned by military, political and economic elites. Both reports had found the military responsible for widespread human rights violations, representing the majority (over 90%) of the killing. Moreover, the CEH report found that genocide had been perpetrated by state agents in four parts of the country and recommended investigating and sanctioning said crimes.

[107]Casaus Arzu, *Genocidio*.
[108]Brett, *Origins*.
[109]Kelly and Hamber, *Working Definition*; Hughes, *Structure*.

Rejection of both truth commissions evidenced that the military and economic and political elites were unwilling to revise their own (or their adversary's) historical and ideological narratives, a key component of reconciliation as Kelman and others have argued, this despite formal accommodation with the URNG's political party.[110] Outright denial of the commissions' findings made explicit that there would be no acknowledgement of the narrative posited by the counterinsurgency's victims, whilst ongoing accusations of communist subversion against human rights and peasant organisations evidenced that the military and the oligarchy which it defended continued to frame the outgroup as a threat through historical ideological and identitarian frameworks. Elites thus violently rebuffed the crafting of a shared history and identity.

Elite reticence to revise Guatemala's historical record and reflect upon culpability has been enduring, demonstrating a continued belief in narratives of blamelessness, self-glorification and moral superiority. Despite the lack of formal provisions within the peace agreements, victims' and civil society organisations have nevertheless struggled to bring military perpetrators to justice for their crimes, achieving some notable successes.[111] The most well known case has been the investigation for genocide led by a coalition of victims of the massacres – the Association of Justice and Reconciliation (AJR) – and a human rights organisation – the Centre for Human Rights Legal Action (CALDH).[112] After a decade of efforts, in March 2013, former de-facto president General Ríos Montt and his intelligence chief General Rodriguez Sánchez went on trial for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed between 1982 and 1983. After a gruelling and rapid trial, the triumverate of judges led by Judge Jazmin Barrios convicted Ríos Montt of genocide and humanitarian crimes and sentenced him to 80 imprisonment, whilst acquitting Rodriguez Sánchez.

The trial itself further polarised Guatemalan society, arguably hardening societal cleavages based on race and political ideology. Powerful actors that had similarly rejected the provisions of the peace agreements mobilised in opposition to Montt's trial. CACIF, the Association of Guatemalan Military Veterans (AVEMILGUA), politicians from across the party spectrum, academics and journalists made clear their outrage at Montt's prosecution. One group in particular, the Foundation Against Terrorism (FAT) played a key role in mobilising historical ideological and identitarian frameworks against those that supported the trial. Its founder, anti-communist Ricardo Méndez Ruiz disseminated materials across the media identifying the judges, the prosecution witnesses and their legal representatives as terrorists and communists.[113] The FAT also accused publicly the Norwegian government, who had supported CALDH economically, of provoking another armed conflict and polarising the country.

Simultaneously, extreme racist discourse was ubiquitous across the media during the trial and in its aftermath, reiterating the image of indigenous communities as primitive, seditious and greedy. The figure of the 'indian-subversive' had re-emerged, evidencing that, three decades after the massacre campaign, the ideological and identitarian

[110]Kelman, *Reconciliation*.
[111]See Jo-Marie Burt, 'The New Accountability Agenda in Latin America: The Promise and Perils of Human Rights Prosecutions', in K. Hite and M. Ungar (Editors) *Sustaining Human Rights in the Twenty-First Century: Strategies from Latin America*. Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013: 101–141.
[112]Kemp, *Prosecuting*.
[113]See http://fundacioncontraelterrorismo2013.blogspot.co.uk/, accessed 20/10/2020.

frameworks that had shaped the military and elites' perceptions of the outgroup had endured. Facebook posts vehemently rejected the 'vengeance' that 'dirty' indigenous people sought. In this regard, the trial demonstrated that no process of re-humanisation, personalisation and re-legitimisation of indigenous communities and their ladino advocates had taken place, signifying the continuity of delegitimization stereotypes.

In the aftermath of the May 10th conviction, mobilisation against the verdict spiralled. A group of respected politicians, academics, and policymakers published a press communiqe, 'To Betray the Peace and Divide Guatemala', which drew upon the 'indian threat' narrative. The communication rejected the legal foundation of the conviction and boldly stated that it represented a 'serious danger to the country' and could provoke the 'reappearance of political violence'.[114] CACIF itself made a decisive move, publicly opposing the verdict and declaring itself to be in permanent assembly until the verdict/trial were overturned. CACIF's motivations were less about empathy for Montt, and more about defending their private interests, given that the judges' recommended widespread reparations for victims, including as regards land ownership and rural development, and the private sector's fears that questions might be asked pertaining to its economic support to the massacre campaign.

The reticence of the elites to permit the genocide verdict went beyond saving face then and evidenced the functional articulation between the country's CE and racist political system, its domestic economic policies and the non-indigenous hegemony. Military, political and economic elites were committed to defending and maintaining their historical narrative not only in order to keep their hands clean and prevent legal repercussions against them, but also, and significantly, in order to sustain the economic system.[115] Those powerful groups that opposed the ruling were rewarded. On 20th May, the verdict was overturned by the Constitutional Court, which supported Montt's lawyers' appeal on technical grounds that their client's right to defence had been violated. The judges were required to recommence the trial at an earlier stage in proceedings.

The steamrolling of the Montt verdict and the rejection of the CEH and REMHI findings suggest that the Guatemalan military and the economic and political elites on whose behalf they commissioned the genocide are not, at present, willing to renege on their belief in the justness and glory of their historical actions, beliefs which represent a core aspect of their collective identity and evidence elements of an ongoing conflictive ethos, as Bar Tal would argue. Whilst, the defence of economic interests, in part, precipitated the elite's response to the genocide verdict, such 'rational' actions are not the only cause of the rejection of the Montt trial and conviction. The military continues to believe its response to the communist threat was proportionate and just, in the same way as many military and political and economic elites continue strongly to believe that the communist threat remains alive today. No transformation has occurred then in the military and economic/political elites' belief in the justness of their goal and actions. The cognitive foundation of Guatemala's conflict remains, whilst the indefinite postponement of the societal objectives and political, social and economic dreams that laid the

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[114]See http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/sites/default/files/traicionar_la_paz_y_divdir_a_guatemala_0.pdf, accessed 20/10/2020. The signatories of the release included former guerrilla and peace negotiator Gustavo Porras, former Vice President, Eduardo Stein, and Raquel Zelaya, former head of the Peace Commission.
[115]Brett, *Origins*.

foundation for the violence has not taken place. Guatemala's historical elites have instead hung on to power, simultaneously cultivating and operationalising historical configurations of ideology and identity across diverse social and political fields in order to prevent any challenge to them.

Conclusions

Dynamics shaping antagonistic intergroup relations are unlikely to de-escalate rapidly once formal peace agreements have been signed. Ideological and identitarian frameworks that sculpted polarisation, precipitated the onset of violence and shaped the trajectory of hostilities habitually remain once negotiations have ended, and, as such, represent a key component of the *conflict-peace continuity nexus*. The past is lived in the present and plausibly influences how intergroup relations may play out in the future, particularly when powerful groups continue to benefit from the status quo and oppose peace agreement provisions that seek to transform it and vulnerable groups remain marginalised and subject to historical structural violence.

In Guatemala, widespread trust, respect and shared values between former adversaries and, specifically, between indigenous and non-indigenous groups remain absent, despite formal political accommodation between the conflict parties. Minimal intergroup coexistence has been crafted, although past societal cleavages are deeply resonant, in part due to the lack of and elite opposition to structural transformation, a phenomenon evidenced by Aiken for the case of South Africa.[116] War ideologies and identities remain embedded due to the violent rejection of engagement with the past by the economic and political elite and across all levels of the military. More than two decades after the formal end to the Cold War, the mobilisation by these actors of a racialised discourse linked to a narrative of communist subversion and sub-human 'indians' retains the country on a permanent war-footing and in a state of de facto segregation, whilst said groups refuse to modify their war narratives, in turn impeding meaningful reconciliation.

Contact theorists have argued that encounters between previously adversarial groups may serve as a crucial first step towards re-humanisation, re-personalisation and re-legitimation and, in turn, to reconciliation. Evidence has suggested that such positive intergroup interaction may wield impact across specific cases.[117] However, on its own, intergroup contact may be unlikely to overturn macro-level perspectives, policies and prerogatives and precipitate structural transformation,[118] in particular when elite groups continue to instrumentalise historical cleavages and benefit from them. Even in spite of sustained everyday contact, such as in the cases of returnees in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, intergroup antagonism, prejudice and stereotypes often remain, coexisting with 'new hatreds and resentments', as Prieto has coherently documented. Hughes coincides with Prieto, questioning whether norms, values and behaviour can be modified progressively through positive contact between individuals from antagonistic groups. For

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[116]Aiken, *Reconciliation*.

[117]See Nee and Uvin for an analysis of the case of Burundi. Anne Nee and Peter Uvin, 'Silence and Dialogue: Burundians alternatives to Transitional Justice', in Rose Shaw, Lars Waldorf, with Pierre Hazan, *Localising Transitional Justice: interventions and priorities after mass violence*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

[118]Juan Prieto 'Together after War While the War Goes On: Victims, Ex-Combatants and Communities in Three Colombian Cities', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2012, 525–546.

Hughes, macro and structural factors, such as ongoing segregation in housing and education, play a decisive role in impeding the potential impact of contact between groups and constructing a new (intergroup) supra-identity, as Allport has similarly charged.[119] Mendeloff shares this perspective, signalling both the difficulties in and dangers of 'manipulating' existing identities in the wake of violence and atrocity, which may foster 'popular resentment and further harden and radicalize communal identities', given that they threaten elite interests and power.[120]

Today, more indigenous people live in Guatemala City than in rural areas of the country, increasing the possibility for informal intergroup contact, on public transport, in cafes, and so on. However, they continue to bear the brunt of structural violence and poverty, whilst competing with poor ladinos for the crumbs that trickle down from above. At the same time, historical cleavages endure and anti-indigenous racism remains virulent across all levels of society. Whilst some sectors of the state – such as the Human Right's Ombudsman's Office, the High Impact Tribunals, and the Public Prosecutor's Office – have sought to maintain the spirit of the peace agreements to construct a shared, equitable and tolerant future, the Guatemala case evidences reconciliation fails when powerful actors intentionally disavow their obligations and maintain conflict stereotypes. Despite increasing contact between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, structural conditions and lack of elite political will have impeded reconciliation, challenging the supposition that contact 'directly reduces prejudice, challenges stereotypes and misperceptions, and can break down rigid perceptions of the Other as a monolithic and inherently hostile group'.[121]

Similarly, the Guatemala case also demonstrates the limits to the potential impact of the transitional justice paradigm, specifically as regards the capacity of related mechanisms to provide a form of social repair in the aftermath of appalling violence[122] by bringing accountability for perpetrators, guaranteeing victims' rights to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition and enabling societies to engage with the horror of the past and prevent its recurrence.[123] The assumption in this regard has been that social, physical and psychological damage should be acknowledged if healing and reconciliation are to take place.[124] The Guatemalan military and political and economic elites have systematically opposed the findings of truth commissions and rejected the convictions of key bodies mandated to administer justice. Transitional justice can do very little then when the political will of powerful elites is absent. As such, post-genocide Guatemala urges caution with respect to whether truth-telling, reparations and justice for the past may represent pillars of successful peacebuilding and reconciliation, a critique that Mendeloff has similarly charged.[125]

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[119]Hughes, *Structure*.

[120]David Mendeloff, 'Truth-Seeking, Truth-Telling, and Postconflict Peacebuilding: Curb the Enthusiasm?', *International Studies Review*, No. 6, Vol. 3, 2004, 355–380.

[121]Aiken, *Reconciliation*, p.34. See also Erwin Staub, 'Breaking the Cycle of Genocidal Violence: Healing and Reconciliation,' in John Harvey (Ed.), *Perspectives on Loss*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

[122]See Kara Andrieu, 'Civilizing Peacebuilding: Transitional Justice, Civil Society and the Liberal Paradigm', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 41, No. 5, 2010, 537–558.

[123]See Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson's seminal article, 'Symbolic closure through memory,reparation and revenge in post-conflict societies', *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2002, 35–53.

[124]See Chandra Lekha Sriram, Jemima García-Godos, Johanna Herman, Olga Martin-Ortega's volume *Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding on the Ground: Victims and Ex-Combatants*, London: Routledge, 2012, for an insightful discussion of this issue.

[125]Mendeloff, *Curb the Enthusiasm*.

The challenges for reconciliation processes are profound, as the Guatemala case has evidenced. The process of transforming the ideological and identitarian frameworks that undergird collective beliefs and identity forged through violence is complex, slow and painful, given that it habitually unsettles collective identity and threatens economic and political interests and power. The Guatemala case demonstrates how the end to entrenched intergroup animosity, bitterness, mutual distrust and fear does not automatically follow the signing of a peace agreement or fade easily over time. On the contrary, the past may be lived contiguously to the present and likely prevent the imagining of a shared future, particularly when powerful historical actors retain significant prerogative. Expectations regarding the transformation of historic ideologies and collective identities then should be measured.

In Guatemala, elite actors have sowed violent discord, opposing truth and justice for the past, and rejecting acknowledgement of and a shared future with their victims, whilst resisting changes in beliefs and intergroup relations and challenging institutional transformation, requisite aspects of reconciliation, according to Lederach and Androff.[126] The dismantling of conflict stereotypes – based both race and political ideology – has not then occurred in Guatemala. Shifts in elite attitudes and conduct have been similarly restricted, further core elements of reconciliation,[127] ultimately signifying that integroup relations remain cast within the edifice of colonial-Cold War ideology.[128]

One of the undergirding foundations of reconciliation is the recognition by former adversaries and their social constituencies of their mutual humanity; only once agreement on this has been reached, may mutual respect, trust and acknowledgement potentially follow. Such a presupposition is founded upon moral universalism, in short, the liberal belief that we all deserve the same human rights. However, as long as moral universalism is a fiction and Guatemala's elites continue to deny the mutual humanity of indigenous people, so claims for human rights guarantees, such as the rights to truth and justice, will be 'politically irrelevant'[129] and unenforceable, whilst the broader goal of reconciliation will remain impracticable.

Acknowledgments

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[126] John Paul Lederach *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997; David Androff, '"To not hate": reconciliation among victims of violence and participants of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Contemporary Justice Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2010, 269–285.

[127] Luc Huyse, 'Victims', in David Bloomfield, Teresa Barnes and Luc Huyse (Eds.), *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: a Handbook*. International Idea, 2003.

[128] Olga Burkhardt-Vetter, 'Reconciliation in the Making: Overcoming Competitive Victimhood Through Inter-group Dialogue in Palestine/Israel', *in* Vincent Druliolle and Roddy Brett, *The politics of Victimhood in Post-Conflict Societies: Comparative and Analytical Perspectives*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Daniel Bar-Tal, Lily Chernyak-Hai, Noa Schori, and Ayelet Gundar, 'A Sense of Self- Perceived Collective Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91, 2009, 229–258; Masi Noor, Rupert Brown and Garry Prentice, 'Prospects for Intergroup Reconciliation: Social-Psychological Predictors of Intergroup Forgiveness and Reparation in Northern Ireland and Chile', in Arie Nadler, Thomas E. Malloy and Jeffrey D. Fisher (Eds.) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Nevin Aiken, 'Learning to Live Together: Transitional Justice and Intergroup Reconciliation in Northern Ireland', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2010, 166–188.

[129] See Patrick Hayden's discussion on recognition and human rights, 'The human right to health and the struggle for recognition', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, 2013, 569–588.

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