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Reconciliation in Zimbabwe:
Building Resilient Communities or Unsafe Conditions?

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Abstract:

Reconciliation and resilience are intimately connected concepts. They emphasise the agency involved in influencing and enhancing bottom-up social change, and the self-help mechanisms that persist despite the disturbances following intrastate conflicts. This article uses a qualitative methodology to examine the absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities of communities as they seek to deal with intrastate conflict. It also assesses the extent to which the government-led reconciliation approach used in Zimbabwe since 2008 has facilitated community resilience. This research suggests that local communities have adapted to the conflict in order to go about their daily lives, but that neither community actions, nor the government-sponsored reconciliation process, have led to the transformation of the status quo that caused the intrastate conflict in the first place. Absorptive and adaptive capacities should not be seen as ends in themselves. Instead, they should provide the basis for facilitating sustainable peace and social change.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Resilience, Intrastate Conflict, Absorption, Adaptation, Transformation, Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Much ink has been expended in debates about the concept of resilience: it has long been in vogue across a variety of fields, particularly in research that concerns socio-ecological systems (Adger 2005, Holling 1973), disaster risk reduction,[1] child development (Rolf 1999), and, most recently, international relations (Chandler 2013). However, peacebuilding studies seem to be lagging behind, despite the apparent attractiveness and promise of resilience thinking: resilience frameworks emphasise the role of agency in influencing and enhancing bottom-up social and political change and the importance of self-help mechanisms for local communities and institutions, and this should make resilience thinking a fruitful line of enquiry for peacebuilders (Milliken 2013). Transitional justice in particular, a key component of both reconciliation and peacebuilding, offers opportunities for the transformation of the status quo *ante bellum* (before the violent conflict) with the potential to bring about lasting peace and resilience after disturbances end.

In this article, we use resilience thinking to examine two key issues: firstly, we consider the extent to which communities have used their absorptive and adaptive capacities to cope with the intrastate conflict in Zimbabwe; secondly, we consider how these coping strategies could be used as the building blocks for a reconciliation process that would facilitate community resilience. We argue that the failure of durable and resilient reconciliation processes and outcomes, even after the formation of Zimbabwe's government of national unity (GNU) in 2008, is a manifestation of the deficiencies and inefficiencies of the processes through which communities try to restore themselves. The restorative agency of communities is important but often idealised in ways that are unhelpful to their members. Not only does our strategy of examining reconciliation and resilience provide a novel way of conceptualising reconciliation in post-conflict contexts, but it also makes an important contribution to broader discussions within peacebuilding studies.

This article is broadly structured into three sections. We begin by acknowledging that the concepts of reconciliation and resilience are notoriously contested. We then briefly describe Zimbabwe's conflict in order to contextualise the need for reconciliation and resilience in the country's communities. In the second section, we analyse evidence from the Shinje community in order to examine how local communities have handled conflict, violence, and their legacies. We investigate how resilience strategies, such as absorption, adaptation, and transformation, have been used by people in this community, and we explore the extent to which these reconciliation processes have enhanced their resilience. While the findings of this study are context-specific, they may resonate with similar cases elsewhere.

Conceptualising Reconciliation and Resilience

Although reconciliation is a contested term (Dwyer 1999), the relevant research literature is generally clear on its broad meaning. Reconciliation tends to be associated with the question of how surviving victims and perpetrators move from a divided and violent past to a shared future (Bloomfield 2006). It is not a straightforward undertaking for former enemies to build new relationships and live together in harmony despite their past differences (Bloomfield 2006); it can be challenging and the process may involve complex emotions, aspirations, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. Moreover, reconciliation relates to both 'a perspective' and 'a place' (a focus and a locus) where truth, justice, mercy and peace need to be brought together (Lederach 2011). From a peacebuilding vantage point, reconciliation should be understood to include transitional justice, a form of justice which involves the use of both legal and non-legal means to address critical issues that have contributed to the development of violent conflict (Carey *et al.* 2010). Table One (Loizides 2011) illustrates at least four instruments of transitional justice, namely retributive justice, restorative justice, amnesties, and truth recovery. Retributive justice is concerned with the rule of law. Restorative justice, amnesties, and truth recovery, meanwhile, tend to be associated with the rebuilding of communities' relationships in post-conflict situations in order to enable them to bounce back. Communities are supported in dealing with their past differences so that they can coexist and work together in harmony (Carey *et al.* 2010). Restorative justice tends to involve a people-centred approach: it focuses on the victim, perpetrators, and the community, and tackles the impact of post-conflict violence in order to create new futures (*ibid.* 2010).

Table I: Approaches to Reconciliation

Approaches	Focus/ Unit of Analysis	Instruments	Objectives
Legal	Individual (perpetrator)	Retributive Justice (Tribunals, Policies of Lustration)	Reconciliation (deterrence and rule of law)
Political	Society	Amnesties	Reconciliation (democratic consolidation)
Theological	Individual (victim and perpetrator) and Society	Restorative Justice (Forgiveness, grassroots activities – Ubuntu, Gacaca, Truth Commissions)	Reconciliation (restoration of broken social relations)
Political Psychology	Collective/ National identities	Truth Recovery (Truth Commissions; revised history textbooks)	Reconciliation (reconstruction of collective identities)

Peace is not always positive, however, and the literature makes a clear distinction between positive and negative peace. Negative peace refers simply to the absence of violence. When, for example, a ceasefire is enacted, negative peace will ensue because something undesirable has stopped happening (e.g. the violence has stopped, and the oppression has ended) without something positive having taken its place. Positive peace, by contrast, includes the restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population, and the constructive resolution of conflict (Carey *et al.* 2010). Positive peace creates space for former enemies to engage in a dialogue of reconciliation; this, in turn, builds

and enhances new relationships that can serve as the basis for a more lasting settlement. Efforts to secure positive peace are, therefore, critical to the process of building resilience.

Indeed, what is new about this article is the link we make between reconciliation and resilience. Resilience resonates with reconciliation in many respects and its promise that it can enable communities to cope positively with disruptive events is attractive; however, defining resilience is complicated. Different fields use resilience to mean slightly different things (Zolli 2012); it can be conceptualised as either a narrow or a wide-ranging term, the meanings of which can understood in a range of ways from 'a dead end' to 'a bridging concept' (Davoudi *et al.* 2012). Nonetheless, the generally agreed definition suggests that resilience represents the capacity of a system, community, institution, or society – when exposed to the onset of hazards or significant and protracted disruption – to resist, absorb, adapt, or transform in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure.[2] The triggering disruption can arise rapidly or slowly from a complex combination of natural and human-made hazards including stressors such as conflict, poverty, corruption, resource scarcity, environmental degradation and disease. Surprisingly, or unsurprisingly, this definition of resilience is closely related to the definition of vulnerability (Wisner *et al*. 2004). Manyena (2006) clearly demonstrates the connections and disconnections between these two terms, which can serve as factors of each other and as separate constructs. The semantic similarities between them arguably stem from the fact that both constructs share ontological foundations as well as a social focus. To be resilient is to accept vulnerabilities, and to be vulnerable is to accept a lack of either the capacity or capabilities to deal with uncertainty (Manyena 2015). Such uncertainties include post-conflict situations which are often characterised by political polarisation, tension, and lack of trust, among other problems.

On a more fundamental level, discussions of resilience resonate with social theory and particularly with Giddens' (1984) structuration theory which develops from the idea that reality is socially constructed. Giddens' theory helps us to examine the dialectical relationship that exists between the human capacity to act, or agency, and the structures that (re)produce opportunities, as well as constraints, for such actions. While agency implies power (*ibid.*), the exercise of that power depends in large part on what a person possesses and what they can do with those possessions. A focus on capabilities is particularly helpful when we seek to understand the connections between resilience and reconciliation; it illuminates our understanding of the implications of relationship breakdown at the community level where breakdown can be triggered by violence and oppression through, for example, the political or economic exclusion of certain people or groups. Not only does a critical focus on resilience help us to recognise the importance of agency, but it also increases the attention given to the strengths of local communities rather than their weaknesses (Milliken 2013). In definitions of resilience, its absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities are commonly recognised. While these three capacities are by no means exhaustive, they do provide us with a sense of how local communities have 'coped with the conflict'; they also illustrate the extent to which the reconciliation processes that followed the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 have contributed to enhancing resilience in Zimbabwe.

'Absorption' is sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as 'persistence' and 'resistance', and, in the technical sense, it describes an ability to withstand and absorb change and disturbance while still maintaining stable relationships between populations or state variables (Holling 1973). Absorption is used to refer to an actor's or community's ability to minimise the negative impact of shocks and stresses through appropriate and successful coping strategies. It is characterised by recuperative power, perseverance, and stability, and by the use of relief and recovery mechanisms that help avoid permanent damage while preserving and restoring essential basic structures and functions. Absorption involves a 'business-as-usual' approach and is enhanced by parallel or redundant systems and structures, humanitarian assistance, support for victims and survivors, rehabilitation, and recovery. However, an absorptive strategy can narrow community and management options, as it tends to support the maintenance of status quo.

By contrast, adaptation is an approach that involves diversification and alternative livelihood strategies, adjustments, modifications, or changes that can be made to benefit communities, institutions, and organisations. It is also a strategy that can be used to moderate the potential future damage that might be wrought by, for example, migration to urban areas for better medication, education, or remittance, among other reasons. Adaptation also offers opportunities for actors or communities to continue functioning without major changes to roles, functions, or structural identities. Some adaptive adjustments may be short-term yet result in positive outcomes, while others may produce negative 'resiliencies'; for example, corruption may solve short-term supply issues but pose difficulties for people in disadvantaged communities who cannot afford to pay their way through the system to access services.

Of course, in some instances it is neither possible nor desirable to persist or adapt. These practices may be inappropriate in situations where levels of destabilisation cross the critical threshold beyond which a system cannot self-organise along a different trajectory towards a new dispensation (Folke 2010). Some systems, including egalitarian ones, may appear highly resilient, persistent, and adaptable, but are at the same time characterised by poverty, corruption, and oppression. In these cases, transforming, if not dismantling, the status quo that might have caused the disturbance in the first place becomes the most plausible option. Transformation involves a capacity to create a fundamentally new system when the existing system's ecological, social, or economic conditions become untenable or are undesirable (Nelson 2007, Walker *et al.* 2004). The changes can be made incrementally, or can be drastic and sometimes violent. We argue that, among their other effects, reconciliation processes can provide an opportunity for communities to transform existing systems; they do this by making time and space for people to ask questions about the stakeholders, institutions, practices, structures, problems, and social relations that must change (See Brand 2013).

Approach to Collecting Evidence

This article is based not just on the research reviewed up to this point, but on the authors' experiences and fifteen in-depth interviews with Shinje community members in the Mushavanhu district where attempts to reconcile communities were made following the

political violence in 2008. The real names of the Shinje community and Mushavanhu district have been anonymised to protect their inhabitants from political victimisation. Mushavanhu district is located in a province which is known to be a stronghold of President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and violence is always at its highest level during election campaigns. The Shinje community is based about 150 kilometres from Harare, and six kilometres from Mushavanhu Growth Point. It consists of about eighty households, and its population comprises people who survive mostly thanks to self-help projects: the area is dry and hot with a rainfall level far too low to make farming a viable survival option. Their self-help projects involve welding and blacksmithing, carpentry, poultry-keeping, and peanut-butter-making, as well as gardening cooperatives and general business dealings. Farming takes place, but on a very low scale. Prominent political players include war veterans, party youth groups, local politicians, and 'traditional' leaders.

In terms of our methodology in gathering data for this article, we took a qualitative approach. This allowed people to express themselves, but it also provided us, the researchers, with ways of discerning, examining, comparing, and contrasting meaningful patterns or themes which would not be made available by statistical procedures (Berkowitz 1996). Qualitative methods are very useful when exploring the viewpoints of people or groups, like victims of conflict and violence, who have a particular need to be heard (Berkowitz 1996). Research ethics were observed, respondents participated completely voluntarily, and no payment or reward for participation was promised. We did, however, share with community members the information that, while the study was a purely academic endeavour, its results could inform policy formulation which might facilitate peace in their communities. We kept the transcripts of the interviews under lock and key, and they were only accessible to the authors of this article. Cognisant of the political sensitivity of the topic of our research, we assiduously observed confidentiality protocols and used pseudonyms to make sure that there was no link between any data and the person who provided it. We carried out semi-structured interviews because they involve a low level of intrusion and are therefore well-suited to research projects, like this one, which are of a politically sensitive nature.

The resilience framework guided our analysis. We classified the responses we collected according to the absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities which became our categories of analysis. We acknowledge that our study has limitations generated by its political sensitivity. At the time of our research, the community still suffered from political violence to the extent that we cannot be certain that participants' responses represented their actual feelings about the past. Fear could have been a limiting factor in their provision of valid data, though we reassured them about the aforementioned research ethics. While the findings presented here are instructive, it should be noted that our sample involved a very small number of contributions from which to obtain an exact picture of the community, let alone of Zimbabwe at large. This is a story of one community then, but it may still serve as a story with relevance for many other communities in the country during the period under discussion. Certainly, the dynamics of conflict and violence that emerge here dovetail with stories told across Zimbabwe with slight contextual variations.

Contextualising Reconciliation in Zimbabwe

Attempts at reconciling the Shinje community after a violent conflict were not a new phenomenon. After Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 following a protracted war, the then prime minister, Robert Mugabe, announced a policy of reconciliation which decreed that the 'wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten' (de Waal 1990). While Mugabe made concessions to demonstrate reconciliation with the white population by reserving twenty seats for the Rhodesian Front party in parliament, the limitations of Mugabe's reconciliation policy were proved just two years after independence with the emergence of the 1982-7 Gukurahundi conflict, a government-sponsored attack on the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces. An estimated 20,000 people were killed in this conflict (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009).

After the Matabeleland crisis, all violations committed during this period were pardoned, but the conflict and violence did not go away: they resurfaced and escalated in the 2000s following the formation of Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 which challenged Mugabe's rule. Probably the deadliest violence of the 2000s was witnessed during the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008. The first presidential round saw ZANU-PF's Mugabe garnering fewer votes (forty-three per cent) than MDC's candidate Morgan Tsvangirai who secured forty-eight per cent of the poll. As neither of the candidates achieved the constitutionally required majority of fifty per cent plus one vote, a second round of elections was organised. ZANU-PF became increasingly vicious between the first result's announcement and the second round of elections, progressively unleashing all forms of violence on MDC's supporters and ordinary citizens (Kaulemu 2011). As a result, MDC withdrew from the contest leaving ZANU-PF's Mugabe participating alone in an election that was labelled internationally as a sham.

The magnitude and intensity of the violence in the run-up to the elections prompted the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to suggest a Government of National Unity (GNU) which would be achieved through a Global Political Agreement (GPA). The GPA was signed in 2008; it involved ZANU-PF; the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations of MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) led by Morgan Tsvangirai who later became prime minister; and MDC-Mutambara (MDC-M), founded by Arthur Mutambara who later became deputy prime minister in the GNU. ZANU-PF was effectively forced into a temporary power-sharing deal that it did not want by an economic collapse that resulted from the deleterious economic policies of the Mugabe state; it was also affected by its lack of national legitimacy and punitive international measures in the shape of American and European Union sanctions (Raftopoulus 2010). Both formations of the MDC were similarly pushed into the GPA. Factors in their cases included state repression and violence against their structures; the structural erosion and political exhaustion of their support bases; the weakening of the civic movement as a result of similar factors; and the limits of the SADC regional bloc in dealing with Mugabe's regime (*ibid.*). Unsurprisingly, there was continued polarisation after the GPA was reached, and ZANU-PF and MDC remained as different as fire and water (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). Mugabe retained much of the executive power he had wielded prior to the GPA, including

control of the security apparatus, and his regime continued to harass human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, some of the ambitious targets of the GNU involved reconciling Zimbabweans and attempting to reconstruct or build new relationships and bury their past differences. The Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (the Organ), a government department, was tasked with leading the post-2008 reconciliation process. While earlier reconciliation attempts had tended to take the form of political pronouncements that were largely ends in themselves, the creation of the Organ was intended to make the reconciliation process structured and government-led: the Organ's role was 'to oversee the healing process and to promote dialogue among parties, and to diffuse tension and threats that may lead to incidences of violence through engaging all parties' (ONHRI 2009). Whereas past attempts to achieve reconciliation had relied on aspirational political statements, the Organ offered an opportunity for citizens to discuss Zimbabwe's troubled transitional justice discourse. It was possible that such discussions would contribute to strengthening community resilience against future violence and conflict. To assess its effects, we now move forward to analyse the experiences of the Shinje community through the lens of the resilience framework.

The Absorption of Violence and Everyday Resistance in the Shinje Community

The narratives we gathered from the Shinje community reveal that it absorbed sporadic violence that could occur at any time of the day. To remain safe from that violence, people avoided open resistance. The adoption of a non-confrontational approach towards aggressors meant that community members were forced to participate in acts of assault and arson; they burned down properties and the livelihood assets of suspected enemies whether the people were from MDC or ZANU-PF. Meanwhile, those who openly resisted participating in acts of violence were targeted. Some people sustained scars and injuries, and deaths were also recorded. Jennifer, a fifty-five-year-old woman who was born in Shinje, gave her testimony:

> We lost our property such as houses, livestock, and farming implements. People were intimidated and arrested on a daily basis and detained in police custody – they weren't taken to court. If you reported a case to the police, they would first find out whether you are an MDC supporter or whether you come from a village dominated by MDC supporters. If the answer is 'yes' then you who reported would be taken into police custody and not the one you reported to them. We ended up playing along, to avoid worse situations.

The nature and dynamics of in-conflict case reporting, which emerged here as a way of absorbing the violence, depended on the political party to which one belonged. Those who belonged to the MDC rarely reported acts of violence to the police or court for fear of being victimised. Thomas (29), an MDC activist said: 'I was arrested and stayed in remand prison for three months. I didn't go to court as there were no charges against me … I didn't complain for fear of being victimised.' Zandile (30), a ZANU-PF member, related her contrasting story: 'I had a miscarriage and I lost my baby as a result of violence from MDC members because I

supported ZANU-PF. When I reported the case, the perpetrators were arrested and taken to jail.'

The narratives from the Shinje community regarding the way they absorbed violence were corroborated by media reports which revealed that some people were being detained by the police without charge:

> In Chivi, police last month rounded up district organisers who had arranged a rally at Makovere Business Centre, and detained them for days at Mashava Police Station … Partisan police officers have shown contempt for Tsvangirai and memories of a brutal 2008 terror campaign, waged through the length and breadth of Zimbabwe, have left MDC supporters traumatised by fear. (Phiri 2012)

Absorption of the effects of the conflict and violence also varied according to gender. A woman in her thirties, Shupikai, stated that 'I for one would not sleep in our house because my husband and I were suspected of being MDC supporters. I was therefore afraid and I was eight months pregnant.' Interviewees reported that women were forced to cook food for the political activists during political rallies and campaigns, and complied. This was despite food shortages during the period of the violence. In some instances, women abandoned their homes for fear of abduction and rape. Women who were raped while their husbands were either away in hiding or in remand prison rarely told their husbands about their experiences for fear of being divorced. They stated that there was no guarantee that their husbands would understand them, and they feared the high chances of having contracted HIV and AIDS. Some women who were sexually abused, raped, and conceived children during the conflict period were branded 'prostitutes'.

Men who were suspected of supporting MDC were also abducted, beaten up, or had their property destroyed. Peter (33), a tuck shop owner, said:

> I was arrested at midnight by police in the company of Green Bombers[3] … I was beaten up, and then sent to remand prison where I stayed for twenty-three days. My tuck shop business at home collapsed. My eight months' pregnant wife also suffered as she had to sleep outside because the militia were coming to interrogate her almost every night about my political activities.

Some men died in the process of abduction when they tried to resist their captors or were murdered for resisting conscription into militia groups, particularly those groups that supported ZANU-PF. In most cases people lied or pretended to belong to the political party of the perpetrator of violence to avoid being attacked at that very instant. Perhaps the most telling example of this practice involves a man who, despite being an MDC member, contested the elections of 2008 as a local councillor on a ZANU-PF ticket to avoid harassment and the destruction of his property and livelihood by ZANU-PF supporters. Even if most participants did not support lying, few disputed the logic of lying in order to absorb violence.

In the absence of formal institutions, which had virtually collapsed, the traditionally powerful chiefs sometimes supported communities in absorbing the conflict; they became providers of services, and were often involved, for example, in the distribution of seed packs and relief. While it is often assumed that chiefs prioritise their communities above everything else, this idealised commitment was often undermined in practice by what was at stake for them personally: they stood to lose their allowances and salaries from the government, as well as resources such as free vehicles, tractors, and grinding mills. As a result, most of the participants did not trust chiefs or their traditional authority. Manyepo, an MDC supporter for ten years, said:

> Chiefs are now politicians. They're no longer performing their traditional roles. They organise meetings and tell their people who to vote for. If you tell them you will vote for a party of your choice, they will tell you to leave their area. They fan violence instead of maintaining peace.

This statement is far from unique. Our interviews with Shinje community members were consistent with independent media reports which branded chiefs as 'puppets' of the government. While it was in some ways seen as legitimate for chiefs to act in this way to avoid being targeted by perpetrators of violence, some participants suggested that a number of chiefs 'overdid' their pretence as they openly coerced their subjects to support the ruling party, ZANU-PF. Some Shinje community members were seen to blur the boundary between the state and traditional institutions: the chief was seen as a civil servant and politician who turned against the people who they are supposed to protect from conflict. However, in step with the concept of absorption, the stance the chiefs sometimes adopted, while clearly biased in favour of the ruling regime, reduced the violence that could be meted out by ZANU-PF militia against their communities.

These accounts demonstrate the ways in which the Shinje community tried to absorb the physical and psychological effects of violence. While these narratives justify the need for reconciliation, they also demonstrate the difficulties that arise in a community that absorbs violent conflict.

Adaptive Capacity of the Shinje Community to the Conflict

Adaptations or changes that enable people to live together in a post-conflict environment can mark a closure of the violent past and a new beginning based on better values, not least among which are trust and healing. However, it might be worthwhile to first establish the participants' understanding of the concept of reconciliation in order to establish their community's adaptive capacity needs. Their understanding determines their actions in response to the violent situation. Common responses from different people to questions about what reconciliation means were consistent with the literature and included: 'kuregererana' (forgiveness); 'kureurura zvitadzo' (talking about the bad things one did); 'restoring relationships'; 'building social unity'; 'kubatsira vanhu vakasangana nemirizhonga' (helping those affected by the conflict); 'people understanding each other so

they can become one people again'; and 'kugarisana zvakanaka' (living together peacefully after quarrelling). Reconciliation is about being in 'good books' with each other after a misunderstanding. Tinashe, a 40-year-old unemployed father of four, said that reconciliation was from the 'heart' and contingent upon truth-telling and testimonies, without which it would be difficult to live together:

> Reconciliation means to forgive from inside the person's heart who was wronged … Those who cause violence must come out in the open, tell, and testify what they did. They should say, 'I am sorry for what I did, this shouldn't happen again', then we can forgive each other. Without this happening, I don't think we can be able to work together.

Maidei is a 33-year-old MDC activist and a single mother of two. Before she joined MDC, she was a member of the ZANU-PF Youth League. While she felt that reconciliation was important, she stressed the importance of people taking part voluntarily on a basis of trust:

> It [reconciliation] can work, but it mustn't be forced on a person. In the first place, I should be prepared to participate in the activities. I am very suspicious about these activities [of the Organ], because I don't trust anybody.

Maidei's account raises questions about structural and institutional approaches to reconciliation, particularly in relation to how people are helped prepare to participate in the process and to own the outcomes. Perhaps this would also facilitate dialogue on what the communities need in order to adapt to the new environment. Consistent with Maidei's account, the majority of the participants were ignorant of the government-led reconciliation process being conducted through the Organ. According to Tinashe, a forty-year-old unemployed man, 'very few people knew about it [the Organ] … [and those] who know about it, I'm not sure if they know what it does … there is no information.' Tinashe doubted if 'they are serious at all … If they were serious they could have come to talk to us [to hear our views]'. However, Mheremhere, a fifty-year-old man, had heard about the Organ. A self-employed blacksmith, he was the father of five children affected by the conflict in different ways: two were injured and another two dropped out of school, while the remaining child went to South Africa to look for a job because there were no jobs in Zimbabwe due to the collapse of the economy. Mheremhere said '[the] reconciliation process is a disguise, it's not going well'. He stated that 'reconciliation shouldn't only be in word but also in practice as leaders [of political parties] say one thing and what happens is another'.

Participants recalled the partisan nature of security and law enforcement agents, particularly the police. They asked questions such as: 'What reconciliation can we talk about if the person who reports a case is the one who is arrested, even to this day?' and 'How can we forgive each other under these circumstances?' Some of the sentiments of the participants were supported by media reports:

> Tsvangirai's party alleged army personnel have been deployed in Masvingo and Manicaland … The MDC claims over thirty soldiers are now camped at

government offices at Range office in Chikomba West, where they are alleged to be intimidating villagers ahead of the coming referendum on the new constitution.

The Mutoko arson came hard on the heels of another attack on MDC Midlands North provincial treasurer, John Kinnaird and his wife Jackie at their Kadoma residence when Zanu PF youths, in party bandanas, broke into their residence at night last month and attacked John with wheel spanners and metal rods while one grabbed Jackie around the neck and dragged her to the bedroom.

The Zanu PF youths freed them after they offered $2000 cash and two cell phones. Hospital authorities said he suffered multiple lacerations from the machete-wielding assailants and received dozens of sutures in his head and neck. (The Daily News 2012)

Some non-governmental organisations responded to the reconciliation needs of the people, mainly through civic education workshops. Participants supported the workshops as they bridged the communities which stood traumatised and polarised by the conflict. Joina, a forty-three-year-old mother of three and a member of ZANU-PF, was beaten up by suspected MDC supporters during the violence. In her view,

> Workshops help since they don't target people from one political party. They take people from all walks of life and put us in one room. This is helpful. It helps us engage with issues as much as is possible. It gives us chances to express ourselves.

Another participant, Jeremiah (49), said workshops were important for exchanging knowledge on reconciliation and building peace in the community.

> Workshops are important because when we are in communities we don't know everything, we're closed from new knowledge, hence workshops bring an opportunity for new knowledge. It's the only chance for the grassroots communities closed out to formal education and the media. So far I have gained a lot from training workshops in many aspects of my life.

As to how the reconciliation agenda can be incorporated into workshops, they suggested that it should not be 'a stand-alone topic'; instead it should be embedded in other topics involving development, gender, HIV and AIDS, and farming. Sebastian (57), a primary school teacher, gave this advice to fellow participants and organisers:

> When in a workshop look for appropriate topics which are not sensitive but related to development projects so that, as people discuss, they build what they lost. Reconciliation can't be eaten. It can't send your children to school. Move slowly from that [development] topic until you reach the aspect of reconciliation because if you just go straight to it participants will be frightened or traumatised. If you were to call for a workshop on reconciliation only one political party would come. During the training workshops mix the participants overlooking which

party a person comes from. Also mix training and practical projects and when you create committees for any task mix people from different political parties.

Josephine (30), and Pamberi, a 38-year-old man, were much more sceptical about including reconciliation topics in workshops because reconciliation is such a sensitive issue. They indicated that they were afraid because, in some instances, talking about reconciliation had landed people in trouble in the past.

> To be honest, talking about reconciliation is accepting that violence took place. That would be acceptable to MDC but not to ZANU-PF. You are then caught in between, if you are not careful. What can you do? The best is to keep quiet … You will be safer that way.

Participants warned that reconciliation workshops should be carefully conducted, otherwise they would lead to violence instead of peace. They suggested too that workshops should not just target the community leaders but should also 'target the community at large so that everyone hears for himself or herself'. The participants asserted that, once everyone has the knowledge, 'the people will protect their own peace.'

The preceding narratives demonstrate that attempting adaptation to the legacies of violence and conflict through the reconciliation process requires approaches that are highly sensitive to political implications. Most importantly, this also requires us to view adaptation processes securely within the context of the struggles over democratisation and nation-building that are taking place in Zimbabwe today.

Transforming the Structures that Caused Violence

To lay the foundation for sustainable and resilient peace and reconciliation, it may be essential to enhance the capacity of communities to transform the structures that have contributed to the conflict's causes. We asked participants whether there were any attempts by the Organ to reform policies and institutions that were complicit in the violence. In response, participants questioned the Organ's sincerity. They pointed out that the reconciliation process was elitist because it served the politicians: 'Politicians [across the political divide] sit together in parliament, they laugh and eat together, while we are living in tense and suspicious situations. They talk about healing and people to live together, but that ends in speeches,' said Tonderai, a 35-year-old unemployed father of two boys. Other participants pointed out that the Organ had not dismantled the institutions that had contributed to the violence, particularly the police. Failure to transform institutions and policies such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) were seen to mean that violence would continue. Statements like the one that follows here were commonplace in the independent media:

> This commendable effort by the Organ needs to be backed up by action demonstrative of political will on the part of the political leadership. But more

importantly, the Organ must realize that the key to ending the culture of violence lies in the ability of the Organ to deal with key state institutions responsible for violence, and for the maintenance of law and order. State-sponsored violence must end, and the police must discharge their mandate professionally and hold accountable perpetrators of violence. (Holland 2011)

While the Organ was meant to heal the fractured community and also provide opportunities for communities to rebuild their lives, the media did the opposite. State-controlled media painted a rosy picture of President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party while at the same time lambasting the then prime minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his MDC party and calling him, among other names, 'a stooge of the Western countries'. By contrast, private media praised the then prime minister Tsvangirai and his MDC party while condemning ZANU-PF as corrupt and violent. The SADC Observer Mission of the 2013 Elections noted that:

… a number of stakeholders raised concerns about the coverage and editorial bias of both the state and private media towards one or the other party while other stakeholders raised concerns regarding the existence of pirate media. (Membe 2013)

Before and after the 31 July 2013 elections, there were still pockets of violence in Zimbabwe. Violence occurred in various places and the practice of arresting human rights activists continued. The Organ was silent about such developments. Generalisations cannot be made based on the evidence from this study given its small sample size; still, this research indicates that the Organ faced challenges in initiating a reconciliation process and in developing activities that would transform the structures that caused violence and conflict, and bring sustainable peace to Zimbabwe.

Discussion

This study's findings reveal that both physical and psychological violence were normalised in Zimbabwe as mechanisms for thwarting political opposition. Instances of sexual assault, imprisonment without charge, torture, beatings, and murder, among other acts, destroyed both social and political relationships in Shinje. Violence became institutionalised during the conflict: law enforcement agents, the military, and the justice system were partisan, as were the wider government institutions; and the militia or 'Green Bombers' as they were commonly known – trained under the guise of the national youth training service – were deployed to commit violence (Raftopoulus 2010). This ZANU-PF strategy was not new in Zimbabwe. Kriger (2005) expertly demonstrates that ZANU-PF has, since independence, used strategies such as organised, unpalatable coercion and violence, often with the active participation of the police. These strategies were underpinned by ZANU-PF's machinations in the political space where its domination was pursued through a range of communicative and discursive practices including propagandist language, framings, threats to return to war, and the labelling of opposition parties either as puppets of white people's interest groups or opponents of pan-Africanism (*ibid.*).

In order to absorb or cope with the violence, people in the Shinje community did not engage in open confrontation; this difficult option would have fuelled violence. Instead, they deferred to non-confrontational acts that enabled them to go about their daily lives. The coping and survival strategies they used included avoiding the police and Green Bombers, not reporting acts of violence to the courts, lying to avoid trouble, agreeing to participate in acts of violence, and pretending to belong to a certain political party at a particular time. These acts may appear to represent extreme ways of absorbing violence since some of them resulted in the loss of lives and livelihoods; however, decisions to respond in this way did represent some kinds of individual and collective agency. They were agreed in principle in Shinje through multiple interactions including 'whispering to each other' about how best to respond to threats of violence. In some cases, those conscripted into acts of violence would send messages in the form of 'kuruma nzeve' (biting the ear) to alert individuals, households, and community members of impending violence against them so they could vacate the area, but such warnings were communicated without the knowledge of the authorities.

These gestures form a contrast with the chiefs' use of their traditional authority to support the acts of violence openly. The chiefs were accused of being partisan, working in cahoots with the police, and 'furthering political ideologies and the interests of the [ZANU-PF] ruling party at the expense of the people's socio-cultural ideologies and interests' (Ndlovu 2012, p. 61). This is not surprising given that chiefs have long been labelled as 'puppets' of sitting regimes, a charge which can be traced from colonial to postcolonial times (van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1996). While the representation of chiefs as anti-tradition and as appendages of ruling elites has become a common narrative, it has also been noted that real political power still attaches to their roles (Manyena 2014). When a ruling party's support wanes, there is a tendency for political parties, and ZANU-PF is no exception, to fall back on traditional institutions because these institutions 'own the people'. To appeal to chiefs, the parties engage a number of mechanisms that range from the use of praise names, cultural symbols, and a discourse of appeasement, to the provision of resources such as motor vehicles and mobile phones. However, in some cases chiefs will be echoing their communities' 'everyday acts of resistance' (Thomson 2011, p. 446) and absorbing the violence by pretending to work with the ruling party while 'in their hearts' sympathising with their people.

It would appear that, at the time of this study, the situation was one of 'negative peace' (Mani 2005): while there was no overt violence, the atmosphere was replete with anger, hatred, and fear and people were drawing on a negative psychological repertoire. It is difficult to point to any one section of society as having been impacted most severely by the worst of the conflict and violence. That said, the manner in which women and children suffered during the conflict confirms their culturally constructed vulnerability. Denial of what happened is 'destructive for both victims who remain traumatised, and might resort to revenge violence, and perpetrators, who also may remain disturbed, and might continue to be violent. This blocks the development of communities' (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum 2009, p. 35).

The absorption of violence and the avoidance of confrontation and escalation can create opportunities for communities and individuals to adapt to new environments. Certainly, there

appear to be overlaps between absorptive capacity and adaptive capacity: as communities absorb violence, they make adjustments to their lives and livelihoods, but these are not necessarily positive adaptations. A reconciliation framework encourages us to focus on how the reconciliation process fosters productive adaptation to changed circumstances. The starting point here is to obtain a sense of the community's understanding of reconciliation. The Shinje community's perception of reconciliation is generally consistent with the literature. In line with Bloomfield's findings (2006), people in Shinje community viewed reconciliation as a way of being in each other's 'good books' and of building and restoring relationships after a conflict. They felt that the process of building relationships after a conflict depended on certain conditions: it should be underpinned by truth-telling and forgiveness, and it should involve not only saying 'sorry' but also agreeing that 'it shouldn't happen again'. This insistence on conditionality was perhaps an indirect way of calling for retributive justice. It suggests that while the victims held the perpetrators of violence accountable, they also blamed politicians, and particularly those from the MDC and ZANU-PF political parties, for masterminding the violence. It is worth remembering that, at the time of this research, participants were still gripped by fear, and so any calls for justice were likely to worsen the violence, particularly considering that some of the perpetrators were still in positions of power and influence.

In these circumstances, some interviewees suggested that reconciliation should not be included in discussions since it was such a sensitive topic that it would put people's lives at high risk of political violence. Moreover, talking about reconciliation would mean the political parties, and particularly ZANU-PF, would have to accept that violence took place. This sounds familiar. What is new is the proposition that reconciliation should be 'mainstreamed' into development projects rather than established as a stand-alone project. This would allow the community to rebuild their livelihood assets, and enhance their resilience, instead of focusing on the perpetrators of violence. Technically, this strategy would be referred to as 'reparation' as reparations seek to provide both practical and symbolic compensation to victims of human abuse (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum 2009, p. 29). As participants noted, against a backdrop of high unemployment, economic projects would enhance the community's income and help people to support their families. Consistent with the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) concept, economic activities could be seen as more direct and having more immediate results than, for instance, justice and truth-telling approaches, although these are by no means less important. The Shinje communities had worked together on development projects prior to the conflict and a focus on these projects would therefore build on the strengths and relationship they have built from before. Further research might be needed to unravel the nature and dynamics of mainstreaming reconciliation frameworks into livelihood-asset-based reparations.

One of the approaches participants favoured for helping communities fractured by conflicts to adapt to new circumstances was the opening of 'reconciliation spaces', or relational spaces, through workshops or gatherings. Research participants proposed 'mixing', or a 'hybrid' approach, whereby reconciliation facilitators would be drawn from a wide range of partner institutions, including government and non-government agencies. They also favoured the idea that educational training, which imparts values, and economic projects be

seamlessly mixed, and proposed that participants from different backgrounds be mixed during workshop tasks. Here, participants were in some ways calling for education for reconciliation (McMaster and Higgins 2002), a form of social learning (Bandura 1971) which raises each communities' critical consciousness and agency, so that people are able to safeguard their peace and become responsible for their own security. However, the success of such workshops would also depend on the skills and credibility of the facilitators. John (2011) notes the difficulties faced by the community development staff who worked on the post-conflict Human Rights, Democracy and Development (HRDD) project in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He states that several HRDD community development workers reported that they were treated with suspicion by authority figures in their communities as their political allegiance and motives were called into question (John 2011). Again, the form reconciliation education should take, particularly in transitional power-sharing governments, needs further investigation.

The research participants in this study were, to some extent, aware of the existence of the Organ but not its activities. Those members of the Shinje community who were aware of it seemed to lack trust in its operations. The dynamics within the inclusive government did not point to a society in genuine search of reconciliation, and it would appear that the primary concern was to maintain rather than to transform the status quo. The Organ was a political creation co-chaired by three individuals representing political parties and, in many ways, its focus was on securing political reconciliation, mainly at the national level, rather than on healing fractured communities such as Shinje. A complete reconciliation process requires both political and social, or structural and attitudinal transformation. Engaging effectively in the reconciliation process would also mean acceptance that violence occurred, especially on the part of ZANU-PF. Such an acceptance would have worked against ZANU-PF's campaign in the elections that were due to take place in July 2013. Reconciliation was a secondary concern for the ZANU-PF and MDC parties which were preoccupied with winning elections by maintaining rather than transforming the social and political status quo. An additional obstacle arose because the Organ had a limited legal mandate and the interpretation narrowly drawn from the GPA in 2008 caused so much confusion that even the advisory role it eventually settled for was carried out unconvincingly (Mbire 2011).

The ineffectiveness of the Organ is a manifestation of the defective and flawed foundation of the GPA itself. Even if the Organ had not been chaired by political parties and had had a clear legal mandate, the lack of resources would have created a major constraint considering that Zimbabwe's economy had virtually collapsed. Even if resources had been made available, there was no guarantee that the Organ would be effective given that power was still locked by Mugabe and there was no willingness for reconciliation.

Conclusion

Using a resilience framework of analysis, this article has explored how local communities dealt with conflict and violence; it has also explored the extent to which the reconciliation process can set a foundation for the rebuilding of resilient Zimbabwean communities that were fractured by the conflict of the 2000s. We applied the resilience framework in order to

understand the contextual linkages involved in building reconciliation at different scales in time and space and the relationship between hierarchical structures and community agency. It is reasonable to conclude that the agency of local communities in Zimbabwe is organised in a series of connected, complex, absorptive, and adaptive systems, some of which are 'durable' in the face of shock, while others are negative: one particularly negative strategy involves people agreeing to participate in acts of violence in exchange for self-protection. While the findings reveal a compelling need for reconciliation to address the legacies of violence, the government-led process which aimed to deliver this was barely effective. Arguably, its failure was due to the fact that, while Zimbabwe transitioned, the legitimisation of Mugabe secured by the signing of the GPA in 2008 quickly reinforced the oppression and continuation of violence, rendering reconciliation irrelevant. The prospect that reconciliation could help communities bounce forward, transforming the structures and attitudes that caused disturbances in the first place, remains latent. It is also contingent upon communities reaching a reorganisation phase that will allow time and space for novelty, innovation, and experimentation. We are conscious that we cannot make generalisations based on this research without producing several further case studies; however, we have demonstrated that a resilience analysis provides a valuable heuristic for the evaluation of reconciliation and wider peacebuilding efforts within highly complex social systems.

Notes

1. See Manyena, (2006), Paton (2006), and Tobin (2002).
2. See Adger *et al.* (2005), Aldrich (2012), Holling (1973), Kelly and Adger (2000), Norris *et al*. (2008), and UNISDR (2015).
3. These were members of Zimbabwe's National Youth Service who were supposedly assigned to lift young people out of poverty. Effectively they were the ruling ZANU-PF's teenage militia, popularly known as 'Green Bombers' for the colour of their uniforms and the chaos and violence that followed in their wake.

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