"Think past away"

- a study of reconciliation processes in Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigates reconciliation processes, based on narratives of experiences from a rural area in Rift Valley, Kenya. A qualitative method has been used and ten interviews were followed out with people who had taken part in a reconciliation workshop run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya. The authors also took part in such a workshop themselves. In the analysis, the theory of symbolic interactionism is used together with three concepts: "taking the role of the other", "negotiating reality" and "transcendence". In the narratives of the interviewees, the authors have identified five recurrent themes: fellowship and unity, restoration and peace, acceptance and forgiveness, justice and truth, and receiving strength and guidance. Each of these themes were represented by a number of symbols that were displayed in the interaction of the reconciliation process. The study has shown that reconciliation processes are complex and diverse, and contain aspects of transcendence as they require going beyond what is seen in the now and into something new. The study also points out that there are possible connections between reconciliation and social work that that could be advantageous to investigate further.

Key-words: Kenya, reconciliation process, symbol, transcendence, negotiating reality, taking the role of the other, social work

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Acknowledgements

Introduction and problem formulation

Following the Kenyan presidential elections in late 2007, violence broke out between a few of the ethnic groups in the country: that which has later been called the "post-election violence". Since then, a lot of work has been done to recover from the tragedies that occurred. One of the ways to approach the aftermath of the violence has been reconciliation projects. Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflicts (HWEC) is one of these projects. It is run by, among others, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK). This project, and the context of the post-election violence, forms the complicated frame for the current study, and it will be further described in the chapter *Background* (see below). Hearing of good outcomes of the HWEC project, we were interested to look at reconciliation as a subject in relation to the field of social work.

Reconciliation is an important theme in practice on a local level, but it is also a research subject within many disciplines on an international level (Komesaroff et al, 2008). It is a constantly topical subject and it has been studied from many different perspectives. Reconciliation projects have been operated in many parts of the world (Huyse & Salter, 2008).

As students of social work we thought reconciliation might be an important theme for our profession since the ethics and values behind the striving for reconciliation are well in line with the values that form the basis for social work (Kreitzer och Jou, 2010, p 74). Therefore we wanted to take a closer look at the theme of reconciliation and consider possible connections to our context, namely the field of social work.

Though reconciliation is a big theme on an international level, it does not seem to be as prominent in the Swedish social work arena. To get a measure of the topicality of the subject in this context, we turned to the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen). As this board is the regulator of many of the arenas where social workers work and responsible for investigations on important subjects in the social work field, it can be assumed that the topicality of a subject would be mirrored in its frequency on the website. A search for the Swedish word for reconciliation ("försoning") on the website, however, generates two results; one on arbitration in correctional treatments and one on domestic violence. A search for dissertations with the word "försoning" in the title in Libris, a national search service providing information on titles held by Swedish universities, generates 11 results; five of them are based on studies in other parts of the world and six of them are in other disciplines. The subject of reconciliation is also rather absent in the bachelor's programme in social work at Lund University. The school has since 2010 had an internationalization policy, which states that it should work towards making the international

perspective present in all the courses where it is relevant (Socialhögskolan, 2012). The subject of reconciliation, however, has not been mentioned during the six semesters that the authors have studied there.

Looking at the dimensions of research on reconciliation in the international context, the awareness of its absence in the social work arena in Sweden is raised. This is presumably partly due to the fact that Sweden has not confronted major conflicts for many years and therefore the need for reconciliation has not been so evident. However, where social work has a task there is always an element of disharmony, and the fact that there are no national conflicts does not rule out the contingent existence of conflicts on an individual level.

Kreitzer and Jou state that the social work profession "has much to offer" in the field of reconciliation; "however, its contribution is seldom written about in social work scholarship." (Kreitzer & Jou, 2010, p 74). The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) issued a statement after the violent events in Kenya following the 2007 presidential election, saying that social work had an important role in the reconciliation process (IFSW, 2008). The IFSW goes on to declare their readiness to assist their colleagues in Kenya in this work. This raises the question of whether we, in the social work field in Sweden, are failing to address a subject were social work could contribute? Moreover, are we missing to explore a subject of which the knowledge could be useful to us?

To be able to discuss the relevance of reconciliation, its usefulness in social work and the possible usefulness of social work methods and practitioners in reconciliation work, we need to deepen our understanding of what reconciliation is: what is reconciliation? How does it look, and where does it take place? Is it possible? Is it always desirable? This study aims to contribute to such a discussion, through investigating how participants in a reconciliation project describe their experiences.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate how people who have participated in a reconciliation project run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) discuss reconciliation. The study will examine how they describe and interpret their experiences of reconciliation work and potentially reconciling processes that this project might induce. By extension, we aim to search for connections between the theme of reconciliation and the field of social work theory and practice.

Research questions

1. How do people who have participated in the reconciliation work describe processes of reconciliation?

2. How do they describe concrete expressions of the reconciliation process?

3. How do they relate to the complexity of reconciliation?

4. Can there be seen any connections between the theme of reconciliation and the field of social work, and if so, in what way?

Background

Kenya and the post-election violence

To understand the relevance of reconciliation as well as the nature of reconciliation processes, one needs to know what conflicts preceded it, so as to know what it is people are to reconcile from. It is also important to note that any process of reconciliation is shaped by the frame in which it takes place (Lederach, 1997, p 107). This part is to describe the tragic events that gave rise to the project that we have studied, as well as the outlines of the project itself.

Kenya is a multi-ethnic country and has, on several occasions, seen violence due to ethnic conflicts; especially around times of election. The most severe clashes occurred after the presidential elections in 2007 (Phombeah, 2012). In Kenya, the question of land is very important. Land is inherited and deeply connected to ethnicity and cultural identity. (Allen, 2008). Kenya was a British colony until 1963, and by that time much of the fertile land in the Rift Valley was possessed by white farmers. When the country gained its independence, many of Kenya's communities had hope to regain their stolen land. When the land was not given back but rather taken by powerful politicians, people were left with feelings of injustice and land disputes has been a problem since, with clashes in 1992, 1997 and 2007 (Tarimo et al, 2010, p 297).

As Kenya went on as an independent republic, the structures of inequality grew ingrained and ethno-political competition has become everyday food. Politics and ethnicity are strongly connected in Kenya, as people often vote along with their community, and the community whose candidate gains power will be systematically benefited, politically as well as economically (Tarimo et al, 2010, p 297).

In the presidential elections of 2007, the two main candidates were Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga. The results seemed to be in the favor of Odinga, until the counting of the very last districts. Then suddenly it was announced that Kibaki had won, and he was sworn in hastily under heavy security (Ashforth, 2009, p 9; Gettleman, 2007; Njeri, 2008). It is widely recognized that the results were corrupted (Gettleman, 2007; The Hague Justice Portal, 2014), and the country immediately erupted in severe violence. In 30 days more than 1 220 people were killed, 3 500 injured and over 100 000 properties were destroyed - houses were burnt and livestock as well as food and personal belongings were stolen (The Hague Justice Portal, 2014). Furthermore it is estimated by the Kenyan Human Rights Commission that around 660 0000 people fled their homes. The events have later commonly been referred to as the "post-election violence", and in the long run they also had

consequences such as hunger and regression in development (ICRtoP).

On the micro-level, we have heard testimonies of fear, anger and pain afflicted by the events during early 2008 or lingering from earlier clashes. Our interviewees have also told us about prejudice and enmity passed on through generations. These things makes persons refuse to interact with people from other communities. Some interviewees talked about incitement as one of the main reasons why the violence could spread so wide and so quickly. In their view, political leaders as well as people from the older generation, were inflaming the young generation to attack people from the tribes who supported the opponent political groups. Since 2010, six prominent leaders in Kenya, among others the current president and deputy president, have been prosecuted by the International Criminal Court in Hague for crime against humanity because of their part in the violence (Rice, 2010; Karimi & Smith-Spark, 2013).

In January 2008 the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, came to lead negotiations between Odinga and Kibaki, which eventually led to a compromise. This might have somewhat calmed down the situation (ICRtoP). And so in 2013, elections were won by the Jubilee alliance, a multi-party coalition. This time the poll was free, fair and credible according to international observers (BBC, 2013).

Kenya and reconciliation work

Both the Kenyan government and many other operators have been involved in the work to rebuild peace (UNDP, 2014). Some have focused on bringing material resources, whereas others have focused on treating emotional wounds and promoting dialogue. The project we have chosen to study is a reconciliation project (HWEC), run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya (ELCK). The choice of this specific project was based mostly on convenience, as it was already known to us, and we already had some of the the necessary contacts.

ELCK run three day-workshops to which they invite members from different ethnic groups, different social and age groups and different genders in the local area, and around two months later there is a follow up meeting. The HWEC workshops are carried out in areas that were heavily affected by the post-conflict election violence. The ELCK planning team invite people representing different communities, age groups, genders and education levels, and the workshop is held in a church in that area.

All HWEC workshops follow a specific structure that can be found in the HWEC manual (Lloyd, 2011). The teachings, all on a biblical foundation, are illustrated by the picture of a house (see image), where each part of the house represents a section of teachings.

Section 1: Laying the foundation

The first section lays out God's intention for humans to live in harmony, at the same time giving man the freedom to choose. This leads to the conclusion that pain can be afflicted to us through the choices of other people, without the suffering being in God's will. In this part, a lot of work is put down into dealing with prejudice, as the participants are encouraged to speak out negative attributes commonly ascribed the different communities represented in the workshop. It is also told that in the church all communities should be together, displaying a vision of how God intended the world to be.

Section 2: Building the walls

In the second section focus lies on the pain that the participants carry with them. Each community is asked to present losses that they have suffered, and the teachings present Satan as a thief who wants to steal the good things that God has given to man. The teachings also assess the way in which pain forms us and the necessity to find ways to express pain. Jesus is described as a bearer of both sin as well as pain, and Jesus' cross as a place where we can leave what is weighing us down, receiving joy and peace instead.

This section culminates with "The cross workshop". The participants are seated in pairs with mixed tribes, where they share pain and pray for each other. Pains are written down, symbolically nailed to a wooden cross and then burnt.

Section 3: Putting on the ceiling

In the third section, the teachings are about forgiveness and confession. It is stressed that forgiveness is not the same as condoning what has happened, or that an eventual juridical process should be terminated. Forgiveness is not denial of the pain, but it is a gift, given undeservingly to the one who has done wrong, in the same way that God forgives humans. Then, the participants are taught about the importance of confession and this is applied on an individual level, as well as on a group level.

Section 4: Adding the roof

The whole workshop ends with a feast called "King's table", where the participants eat, sing and dance together with the teachers. The communities are asked to come forward, one at a time. The assembly are asked to recall the things they said about this community when talking about prejudice in the first section. Then they are encouraged to say good things instead, blessings that they wish for this community.

After the blessings comes the meal. Participants are encouraged to take something from the table, then give it to someone from another community. In the Kenyan culture, sharing food like this is a strong symbol for friendship.

Reconciliation: earlier and contingent research

The subject of reconciliation have been studied from many perspectives and in many disciplines (Komesaroff, 2008, p 1), and it is a highly contentious concept. In this section we will give an overview of earlier and contingent research that we found to be relevant for the context of our study. Firstly, we will give examples of different definitions of the concept of reconciliation. Secondly, we will go deeper into the disputes about the concept, explaining some of the key-issues and referring to some influential scholars. Lastly, we will give examples of some important reconciliation work and projects that has taken place all over the world.

Linguistically, reconciliation derives from the Latin word *reconciliare* where *re-* means "again" and *-conciliare* means "make friendly" (Ericson, 2001, p 13). According to Oxford dictionaries the term "reconciliation" can be translated as: "the restoration of friendly relationships" or "the action of making one view or belief compatible with another" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).

A number of definitions of reconciliation have been proposed by different writers. *Louis Kriesberg*, professor Emeritus of Social Conflict Studies etc., states that: "reconciliation can refer to actions that sometimes help transform a destructive conflict or relationship, the process by which that transformation occurs, or the outcome of such process". He stresses four primary dimensions of reconciliation which according to him are truth, justice, regard and security (Kriesberg, 2004, p 82-83).

Marc Howard Ross describes reconciliation as something that "involves changing in the relationship between parties in conflict both instrumentally and emotionally in a more positive direction so that each can more easily envision a joint future." He also talks about reconciliation as a continuum, "meaning that there can be degrees of reconciliation rather than just it presence or absence" (Ross, 2004, p 200).

Marrow, who is quoted by Bar-Tal and Bennink, suggests that reconciliation "is reestablishment of friendship that can inspire sufficient trust across the traditional split". He put emphasize on trust and asserts that the fundamental driving force of reconciliation is to focus on others' needs. The focus should not be on what they have to do, but what we have to do in order to promote reconciliation (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004, p 20).

Bar-Tal and Bennink also quotes *Asmal et al.* who describes reconciliation to be "the facing of

unwelcome truths in order to harmonize incommensurable world views so that inevitable and continuing conflicts and difference stand at least within a single universe of comprehensibility" (ibid.)

Lederach sees reconciliation as a way of dealing with tree specific paradoxes.

> "First, in an overall sense, reconciliation promotes an encounter between the open expression of the painful past, on the one hand, and the search for the articulation of a long-term, interdependent future, on the other hand. Second, reconciliation provides a place for truth and mercy to meet, where concerns for exposing what has happened *and* for letting go in favor of renewed relationship are validated and embraced. Third, reconciliation recognizes the need to give time and place to both justice and peace, where redressing the wrong is held together with the envisioning of a common, connected future." (Lederach, 1997, p 31)

Lederach states that these concepts seem contradictory but that they are in fact interdependent (ibid., p 30). He defines reconciliation as both a locus – a place where the parties of a conflict can meet – and a focus – the encounter itself, thus putting his finger on the possibility for these opposing views and the paradoxes to be negotiated. Inhabiting these paradoxes is an act of transcendence.

A contentious concept

Bloomfield, who in the report "On Good Terms: Clarifying Reconciliation" (2006, p 3) addresses the confusion of the concept of reconciliation, makes an important distinction between an interpersonally-based understanding of the term and a pragmatic approach of political reconciliation. He also describes that one clear reason to the confusion around the term is due to the conflicting definition of reconciliation as a *process* or reconciliation as a *goal* or an *end-state*. Today it seems that reconciliation as a *process* is the most highlighted perspective, especially among practitioners and pragmatists. At least this is what the International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) focus exclusively on in their handbook, which aims to give tools for addressing difficult post-violent issues (IDEA, 2003). This emphasis is also supported by other scholars; for example *John Paul Lederach,* a seminal figure quoted by Bloomfield, who describes reconciliation as a "dynamic, adaptive process aimed at building and healing" and "a process of change and redefinition of relationships" (Bloomfield, 2006, p 6).

However, reconciliation as a goal is still a significant factor in common usage in the definitional debate (ibid.). Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink acknowledge reconciliation both as a psychological process and an outcome that takes place between rival groups (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2008, p 15). They describe that peacemaking techniques have traditionally focused on the structural aspects of forging or restoring relations between former rivals, though it has become clear that this kind of work is not enough to guarantee lasting peaceful relations. The structural elements can establish formal relationships but it is not necessarily spreading the message of reconciliation among society members. For reconciliation to come, a psychological process must be included, which Bar-Tal and Bennink mean consists of "changes of the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes and emotions of the majority of society members" (ibid. p 17).

Most scholars in the field do agree on the importance of the psychological component of reconciliation (ibid.) though there are disagreement about its nature. They agree on the need for forming of a new, common outlook on the past if reconciliation is to come, but they disagree for example on whether forgiveness and healing are possible, or even necessary (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2008, p 18-19).

Yehudith Auerbach and Philipa Rothfield discuss the role of forgiveness in reconciliation (Auerbach, 2008; Rothfield, 2008). Auerbach argues that forgiveness is important and in some cases also necessary for a genuine reconciliation between former enemies. There are cases, though, where forgiveness is not possible. If there is no agreement about the crime committed it will be very difficult to achieve reconciliation (Auerbach 2008, p 157). Rothfield describe that often there tend to be normative tendencies in reconciliation processes and they who are touched by the atrocities feel a moral pressure to forgive. Rothfield (2008, p 20) emphasizes the victims' right to form their own opinions and choose freely to forgive or not to forgive.

Goran Basic, a sociologist at Lund University, has studied how the possibility to reach reconciliation and forgiveness is described by survivors from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In their narratives Basic found the attitude of irreconcilability to be predominant but reconciliation was described as a possibility if certain conditions were met, for example the striving for justice and also displaying of shame and remorse (Basic, 2013).

Geraldine Smyth, who works in the field of education, theology and psychotherapy in Ireland, shows how the origins of forgiveness can be seen in the Christian theology and she discusses the

relevance of the concept to both believers and non-believers. She suggests forgiveness to be an act of self-transcendence, creating a mutual form of reorientation (Smyth, 2008).

Komesaroff poses the question whether reconciliation, with its broad scope, is too far-reaching and diffuse to be of practical use, but states that history has shown that it remains a potent force (Komesaroff, 2008, p 1). Though there is no agreement of what reconciliation actually encompasses, its importance is nowadays widely acknowledged. It is said to play a major role for people's well-being and sense of belonging, and some even consider it crucial to creating long-term peace (Bloomfield, 2006, p 3, 5; Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004, p 3).

Practical examples

Looking at the field of reconciliation you also find various kinds of reconciliation work that has taken place in many different contexts around the world (Komesaroff et al, 2008). For example, it has been a prominent theme in projects and research in several African countries (Huyse & Salter, 2008; Kreitzer & Jou, 2010 etc.).

The most famous and influential project when it comes to bringing reconciliation is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. It was established in 1995 with the main purpose of promoting "national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflict and divisions of the past" (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004, p 29). Truth and Reconciliation Commissions has thereafter been seen in over twenty countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe (Komesaroff, 2008; Kreitzer & Jou, 2010).

The International IDEA has done a major comparative study examining the role played by traditional justice mechanisms in dealing with the legacy of violent conflicts in Africa. They refer to case studies in Rwanda, Mozambique, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Burundi where various kinds of projects have been run to achieve reconciliation (Huyse & Salter, 2008). One project in Rwanda that has had a significant impact on the reconciliation process is the Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) which promotes reconciliation through dialogue instead of violence (Kreitzer & Jou, 2010).

In this section we have shortly summarized earlier and contingent studies that seem relevant in describing the context for our study. The reasoning from the different scholars referred to in the above, will be further developed in our analysis as we enter the discussion, associating our own findings to what has been written and concluded before.

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Method
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Our starting-point in this study has been our interest in examining people's descriptions of their experiences. We wanted to get a more profound understanding of a few people's experience rather than short answers to simple questions from a lot of people. According to Ahrne and Svensson the choice of method first and foremost should be determined by the purpose and research questions of the study (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011, p 22). Therefore, we have chosen to conduct this study with a *qualitative approach*, working in an *inductive way*.

The qualitative approach can be described as a general concept for all types of methods that comprehend interviews, observations or text analysis which are not designed to be analyzed in a quantitative way (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011, p 11). According to Bryman, the most obvious difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods is the focus on words in the qualitative approach and the focus on numbers in the quantitative. What also distinguishes the qualitative approach is an inductive view of the relation between theory and practice – theories are generated on the basis of the results from the researches; also, the qualitative approach puts emphasis on the interpretation and apprehension of the social reality and it aims to understand rather than to explain (Bryman, 2011, p 341-342). This fits our study very well.

Working with an *inductive strategy* means starting the research without a theory in mind and striving for the empirics to firstly say something in itself (ibid., p 28). We formulated purpose and research questions in the beginning of our work but undertook the field study without a certain theory in mind, since we wanted to be flexible and not give the study a particular direction right away. After gathering and analyzing our material we then tried to find a theory that was suitable to our empirics (ibid., p 28, 340).

Execution

Our field study is primarily based on *qualitative interviews* which we have carried out with people who have participated in HWEC workshops. In addition to the interviews we have attempted to increase our knowledge and understanding of the context and culture in some different ways. We began our stay in Kenya by attending a two week course in language (Swahili) and cultural knowledge with a private teacher. Furthermore, we took part in a HWEC workshop as participating observers. Due to practical variables we attended a workshop run not by the ELCK but by Way of Peace (WAPE) in Kenya. However, they both follow the exact same concepts. We have also been studying quite a lot of literature about the subject of reconciliation and about Kenya and its culture.

Besides, during our time in Kenya we had a continuous discussion and reflection on our experiences of cultural expressions with our tutor in field and with other persons that we came to know. We consulted them about how we could arrange the interviews, how we could formulate questions in a culturally appropriate way, how we should understand and interpret things that had confused us etc.

Learning about language, culture and the subject of reconciliation, as well as consulting our tutor in field and other Kenyans was really helpful when it came to operate the interviews and interpret the outcomes from them. Having our own experience of a workshop also helped us a lot in our understanding of the interviewees' experiences. Our analysis is based mainly on the material from our interviews, though our observations and further studies has been important tools for guidance during the process.

Semi-structured interviews

We have chosen to do *qualitative, semi-structured, interviews.* This method suits our purpose well, since we wanted to get insight on the experiences the interviewees have made and what meaning they attributed to those (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne, 2011, p 56). Qualitative interviews is also a way to get insight in the history, the incidents and factors that have preceded the current situation. That kind of information would be very hard to retrieve in other ways (Bryman, 2008, p 441). The qualitative approach admits a flexibility and openness to changes in direction, which has allowed us to be receptive to our interviewees' perspective on the subject. For example, it presents a possibility to adapt the questions to the situation (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne, 2011, p 40). This means we have not been bound to a certain hypothesis, a certain frame in which we needed the empirics to fit – rather we have been interested in any new direction that the study were to take, and this in itself has been a goal. This also goes well with our inductive strategy.

Altogether we did 10 interviews and every interview lasted for approximately one hour. Five of our interviewees knew English well enough to be able to answer the questions without help from an interpreter and for the other five we used an interpreter to translate from English into Swahili. During the interviews we used an interview-guide which is attached in Appendix 1. When constructing the interview-guide there were many things we needed to consider. One of them is the risk that Bryman describes as social desirability (Bryman, 2008, p 224). From what we have understood by being in Kenya and also talking to people about the culture, politeness is very important and people might be more inclined to tell us what they think we want to hear than what they actually think and feel. This could make it difficult for us to get the kind of straightforward answers that we were seeking for our study. To handle this we carefully considered how we

formulated the questions in order not to lead the answers in a certain way. We also discussed our interview questions with our Kenyan teacher and he gave us some advice.

During the interviews we took turns to be the main interviewer and we were responsible for every other interview. The one who did not ask the questions was observing and tried to keep track of the main interviewer, chipping in with questions if she considered it to be needed.

All the interviews were recorded by a dictaphone. We were careful to tell our interviewees about this before we started and also that we guaranteed them confidentiality. After finishing all interviews we listened to the recordings and transcribed all of it. When transcribing we tried to stick as close as we could to the recordings, writing down even iterations and fillers. We did however add punctuation marks where we thought it suitable, to make it easier to read.

Participant observation

According to Bryman, participating observation can be a way to get insight in the local context (Bryman, 2008, p 440). We took part in a three-day workshop to get a picture of what the reconciliation work looks like and to get a deeper understanding of what our interviewees have been describing in the interviews. As a participant observer you can choose to take part in different ways. Either you can participate on the same conditions as all the other participant, or you can choose to have a more distant role and just observe what is happening. You can also choose to do something in between (ibid., p 388). You need to consider if you want your role as researcher to be open or hidden, if you want the other participants to know about your study, what you want them to know and how you explain that (ibid., p 380).

We went to the workshop together with our tutor in field, Kerstin Nilsson. She served both as an interpreter (from Swahili to Swedish) and as a kind of a guide, filling us in on what a HWEC workshop is normally like. She could also make us aware of some cultural expectations, making it easier for us to behave in a culturally appropriate way, thus interrupting the workshop less.

For our study we chose to take part in the workshop in mainly the same way as the other participants, in the sense that we took part in the all their activities. As a newcomer in Kenya it is almost impossible to avoid getting attention, especially if your skin is white. To take part in the workshop without influencing it in any way was therefore impossible. We did not want to influence the workshop more than necessary and therefore we chose to sit in the back of the room so that our

presence and also our use of an interpreter should disturb the teachings and discussions as little as possible.

Before the workshop began we also presented ourselves and our study to the leaders and the participants of the project. We tried to be clear about our role as students and that we are not a part of the team that run the workshop though we cannot be sure how people perceived the fact that we were accompanied by Kerstin Nilsson, who herself works with similar workshops as the one we attended, and is also a friend of the teachers in this specific workshop.

Sample

When selecting our interviewees we have used a *goal-oriented* method of selection. It is a strategic method that comprehends the attempt to attain conformance between research questions and sample (Bryman, 2008, p 434). In this study we wanted to mirror the experiences of participants in a reconciliation project – the HWEC workshops – and our study was conducted in one of the districts where such workshops have been held. The project invites persons from different genders, ages and ethnic groups, and we have strived to obtain the same diversity in our sample. As we are foreigners in Kenya it was hard to find a way on our own to get in direct contact with interviewees. We did not even consider trying to find interviewees on our own because we realized it would attract suspicion and we would probably not at all find the people that we needed. Therefore, to get access to the field we needed help from someone who was considered to be respected in the context and who could introduce us. At the same time, it was important for us to remain as independent as possible, since we knew that all association with other people, organizations or authorities would also affect our relations with the potential participants of the study.

Our tutor in field, Kerstin Nilsson, was as an important resource for us as she has worked in Kenya for many years and has good knowledge of the local life, as well as an understanding of it from a Swedish perspective. At the same time, our working close with her posed a problem, since she is a member of the ELCK HWEC team, running workshops, and thus not in a neutral position in relation to the persons we wanted to meet, namely persons who participated in such workshops. We considered it to be important not to be associated with Kerstin Nilsson and the work of the church any more than necessary, since we wanted the interviewees to feel free in the interview situation and not feel obligated to give certain answers.

To be able to find suitable interviewees for our study, and to try to reduce our connection to Kerstin,

we asked the local chief for advice and practical help. A chief is a provincial leader who is working with the administration in a certain community. Among other things s/he is responsible for providing necessary administrative services and maintain security and safety in the area (Kipkoech, 2010). The chief was given the lists of participants from different workshop occasions and we explained to him about the general presuppositions of our study and our need for a diverse sample. On the basis of his knowledge of the community and also his respected position he then tried to find a range of people who wanted to take part in the interviews.

Our sample consisted of people from three of the major tribes in Kenya; kalenjin, kikuyu and kisii. We were talking to seven men and three women in different ages and with different occupations and positions in society. Naturally, as our sample was dependent on the judgment of both our tutor in field, Kerstin Nilsson, and the chief, mentioned above, there is a risk that our sample have become too one-sided as it is affected by their values and thoughts. However, we have found this risk to be impossible to eliminate; any advice we get will be influenced by personal values, and for this kind of study it is not appropriate, or even possible, to randomize the sample. However, we considered the most important thing in this case to be to get in contact with people through someone who is somewhat neutral in relation to the workshops, and for this we considered the chief to be an adequate person.

We cannot know for sure if our sample is exactly representative to the people who have taken part in the workshops. But since we are not interested in generating results that can be generalized to a whole population, but rather to go deeper into the experiences of a few, the representatives are of less importance. We do not consider it necessary to be more accurate than we have been.

Transparency, transferability and credibility

The qualitative method is faced with challenges that need to be considered. One problem is that qualitative methods are often difficult to replicate, which impairs the transparency of the study (Bryman, 2011, p 368, 370). Even if we give a careful description of how the study has been done it is impossible to operate the same study again since it is unstructured and dependent on the personality of the research-workers and the outer conditions in the specific situation. Its interest in subjective experience and unique details also makes it difficult to generalize and transfer the results from a qualitative study to a whole population. As researchers we have tried to be aware of this and we have been careful not to make precipitous conclusions on other cases by drawing from our own results (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011, p 29). Rather, we have tried to use the qualitative material for

what it is good for; generalizing to theory rather than to population (Bryman, 2011, p 369). Presenting results from a qualitative study requires a certain amount of humility and awareness that these results are not necessarily universal, but even so, they can contain a great deal of interesting and useful knowledge about that what is studied. By giving a precise account of the specific conditions of the study we have aimed to create good conditions for the reader to get a clear understanding of that what is studied, and that is also a way to increase the credibility of the study (ibid., p 370).

Ahrne and Svensson (2011, p 27-28) describe the possibility of using a *triangulation of methods* in order to get a more correct understanding of a phenomenon. Triangulation means that you use more than one method and if you get similar results with both of them you can assume the credibility to be higher than if you had used just one of them. In this study we have complemented our interviews with participating observations, language studies and literature studies, thus attempting to increase the credibility of the study. Also the fact that we are two research-workers who have interpreted the material has been a way of using triangulation of methods and increasing the credibility of the study.

The roles of the researchers

The qualitative approach also implies an awareness of and reflection on the role of the researcher, as it is assumed that the impact of the researcher's presence cannot be disregarded – the researcher is even considered an important tool in the process (Jönson, 2014). Bryman describes the risk that the interviewer affects the interviewees through the way he or she is. It is not possible to be neutral in relation to the interviewees; factors like ethnicity, gender and social background are always present (Bryman, 2008, p 223, 229). This must be taken into extra consideration in a study like this one where we as researchers were situated in a context and culture that was new to us and quite different from our own. Also, the values and beliefs of the researchers may influence the analysis. In our study this aspect became relevant in the way that both of the researchers have a christian worldview and this, as well as any other worldview, can influence the way we perceive our material, and the conclusions that we make. Critical thinking is always crucial in academic work and this requires a conscious reflection on one´s own perspective all through the process.

According to Nanga (2014), cultures can be compared by putting them in different continuums, for example direct vs indirect, fatalism vs activism and individualism vs collectivism. The Kenyan culture tend to be more indirect, more fatalistic and more collective than most western cultures (Nanga, 2014). It might therefore have occurred that we have misunderstood people, that we have

not been able to interpret all our experiences in a culturally correct way or that we not have been able to handle situations in a culturally appropriate way. These risks have been impossible to avoid, though we have tried to handle them in the way we could, for example by attending the course in language and cultural knowledge and by consulting (among others) our tutor in field whenever we were confused about anything. Maybe the fact that we were new to the context and culture could also have produced certain opportunities. According to Nanga (2014), some people might feel more comfortable to speak with strangers than with people from their own country about the inter-ethnic conflicts and challenges, because of the strangers' more neutral position in relation to the situation (Nanga, 2014).

A problem that is always present when it comes to doing both interviews and observations is that you can never know for sure what a dictum actually means. You cannot take for granted that people really do what they say they do or that they give you the whole picture. Also, you cannot know for sure that you have understood or interpreted what you have heard in a correct way (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne, 2011, p 56).

As foreigners we were compelled to do the interviews in English and in some cases also with the use of an interpreter. Doing interviews with an interpreter may also result in a bigger risk that the information becomes distorted. It is impossible to know if the interviewees understand the questions correctly or if we understand the answers in a right way. These are risks that affect the reliability of the study, and though they were impossible to eliminate we tried to handle it them in the way we could.

Before each interview we talked to the interpreter and tried to make sure that he had understood our purpose with the interview, and that it was important that he tried to translate word by word without doing his own analysis. During the interviews we did summaries in between every now and then and asked the interviewees if we have had understood correctly, thus giving them the opportunity to adjust our version of what they had said. We also told them that after finishing our assignment we would send a copy of it to the chief and so he can distribute it to all the people that had participated in the study. That way they would be given the opportunity to read it and give response if they want to.

Our cooperation with the interpreters worked rather well though some of them had struggles not translating without sometimes adding their own opinions and thoughts, which was not really what we wanted. We tried to handle this when transcribing the interviews through being careful to

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specify which quotes were from the interviewee and which ones were inserts from the interpreter.

Moreover, we also need to mention the risks the relation to our tutor in field, Kerstin Nilsson, possibly created. Even if we used the chief in the area to get in contact with our interviewees, we went to the village together with Kerstin on several occasions and it was impossible to avoid people from seeing us together with her. We were very clear in the beginning of every interview about who we were, that we were not a part of the church's project and that we guaranteed confidentiality, but even so, we cannot know for sure that none of the interviewees felt discouraged to talk to us as free as they could have done if there was no connection at all. This risk was hard for us to avoid since we were dependent on Kerstin to get in contact with the people and the field at all.

Ethical considerations

Asking people about their experiences can be a difficult thing. The events in Kenya in early 2008 were very severe and some of the participants in the reconciliation workshops have seen horrors that we cannot imagine. Our position as foreigners in the country, with limited knowledge of the cultural context, also makes research difficult from both a practical and an ethical point of view. Setting out for this study, the question arose of whether it is at all possible to interview people about their personal experiences of something as severe as the post-election violence. However, having taken the advice from people with good judgment and with a better knowledge of the culture than we have, we came to the conclusion that the study would be possible, given that we are aware of the risks that it poses and handle those in a good way.

The Swedish Research Council discusses this, stating that all research aiming to obtain new knowledge that promote human health and development, also involves a certain measure of risk. This is however not unconditional: "At the same time, it is imperative that risks and harm be minimized as much as possible. The researcher assumes a responsibility for the humans he or she performs research on, for both their well-being and the information collected about them." (Codex, 2013). Ergo, we needed to carefully consider our ways of approaching the subject, as not to harm the people taking part in our research (Bryman, 2008, p 132-135).

Dealing with the sensitivity of the subject

One aspect where we have considered this is in *our sample*; for our interviews we chose people who did the reconciliation workshop a while ago. Thus, the persons we interviewed had had some time to process that what took place in the workshop. Another aspect that has been important in dealing with this difficult subject is that we needed to be very clear about *our role* (Aspers, 2011, p 117) as students: We are not professionals and this is not therapy; therefore we cannot go very deep into the difficult experiences that our interview persons might have had. This took discretion from us as interviewers, not to push into subjects that were too difficult for us to handle. It was also an issue as we formed *our interview guide* (see Appendix 1); we chose our questions as not to push the interviewees into a new round of dealing with their difficult memories, but rather to get them to give an account of their previous experiences. This interview guide was also checked by our teacher in Kiswahili and Kenyan culture, who has himself worked as a counsellor.

However, what we have found to be maybe the most important factor in taking caution at the sensitivity of the subject, is *communication methodology*. Öberg describes interviewing as a skill,

and a good interview as something that requires flexibility (Öberg, 2011). To prepare for the interviews, we did role plays between the two of us, and discussed how we could create a good climate in our interview situations. During each interview, we tried to adapt our usage of words to that of the interviewee, not using especially charged words and expressions (such as violence, murders, tribe etc.) unless the interviewee did so. Drawing from our learning about Kenyan culture as one of indirect communication rather than direct, we also aimed not to ask too straightforward questions, as this could seem strange or deterrent to the interviewees. Instead, we tried to ask more general questions, going slowly around the themes that we wanted to investigate, letting the interviewees take the initiative as to where they wanted to move in their telling of their story (Aspers, 2011, p 140). We took special caution not to push the interviewees towards themes that they did not seem to want to go into. We took turns leading the interviews, and we also took time in between the interviews to mirror each other as interviewers, as a way to increase our awareness of mistakes as well as successful tactics.

Dealing with cultural gaps

The fact that the Kenyan context, in which this study was carried out, is foreign to us as "researchers" has presented us with some important ethical issues. Our cultural knowledge is small, which made us more dependent on our tutor in field and on people in the local area to sort out all the practical details around our study. We had to rely on their judgment of what is appropriate or not, and who could be eligible for our study. This in turn left us with less control of the conditions that faced the participants of the study. We tried to explain the presuppositions of the study and the importance of confidentiality to everyone involved, but our instructions were not always followed. This was something that laid outside of our control, although we could try to limit it by not giving out any more responsibility than necessary. Tim May writes about the problems with deontological ethics, among other things mentioning the researcher's limited control of the research situation as an unavoidable problem. He states that a strict following of deontological ethics would make it impossible to do research at all. The alternative, that we also consider to be reasonable, seems to be some kind of middle way between deontological ethics and consequentialism, where the relations between the parties in the research stands on some kind of ethical foundation, giving guidelines to the researcher rather than posing obstacles (May, 2011, p 81-83).

Considering ethical principles

In our research we have tried to follow the *guidelines for social scientific research* as put together by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet; Bryman, 2008, p 131-132). The guidelines

consist of four general principles: *the claim on information*, *the claim on consent*, *the claim on confidentiality* and *the claim on use*.

The claim on information includes informing all the people involved in our study about our purpose, making sure they understand that participation in the study is completely voluntary and that they can leave anytime they want. This information has to contain all the conditions for their participation, but not too many details, not to steer the answers in a certain direction. To meet this claim, we designed a letter (see Appendix 2) that was to be given to those who were asked to participate in our study. The conditions would then be more thoroughly explained at the beginning of each interview. We left copies of these letters to the chief, however some of them were not distributed, and some of the prospected interviewees arrived at the interview without knowing anything of what it was all about. We tried to solve this by giving them the letter as soon as they arrived, giving them time to read it and asking them if they had understood it. After having received the information, we asked them again whether they would choose to participate or not. We also explained the conditions of the interviews at the beginning of each interview.

The claim on consent means that we as researchers must collect a consent from every participant. This claim is linked to the one just mentioned above, as a true consent builds on knowledge of that what the consent regards. It is not unproblematic to ask questions about a subject as sensitive as the one we have chosen, but if the participants have been well informed of the nature of the interviews, they can consider the possible risks, and their consent to participate means that they also take responsibility for the amount of private information that comes out (Bryman, 2008, p 137). The consent becomes extra important when it is unsure whether, or to what extent, the study might cause harm to the participants (Bryman, 2008, p 134-135).

This presented us with some issues. Firstly, since the information had been lacking in some cases, the consent was not built on as firm a foundation as we would have wished for. Also, for us as foreigners it was difficult to know all the conditions for the participants' decisions to partake in our research. It is possible that certain cultural codes or expectations, or relationships between interviewees and people in power, made it impossible for our interviewees to choose not to participate. This makes the consent less reliable. On the other hand, there also has to be a measure of trusting people's ability to choose whether they want to participate or not. Also, we relied on the judgment of our tutor in field, who in turn asked her Kenyan friends for their opinion on our object of study, and they judged the layout of the study passable. Moreover, since we took great care to make it clear to the interviewees that they were free not to answer all questions, there was a certain

space for them also within the study to avoid uncomfortable issues.

The claim on confidentiality demands for all personal information about the participants in the study and all the collected data to be handled with great confidentiality. Given that our interviews were conducted in two rather small villages where many people will probably know who talked to whom and about what, and considering how many people were involved in helping us with the practical arrangements and getting access to the field, it was impossible for us to guarantee complete confidentiality for the participants. For certain, people in the areas will know that two girls from Europe came and talked to the chief and did interviews, they will know who was interviewed, and many people will also know what the interviews were about.

Although we will not be able to keep confidential who took part in the study, what we can control is what happens to the material we gathered. All interpreters signed an agreement not to utter any of what was said in the interviews to anyone (see Appendix 3), and all the recordings and the transcribed interviews, receipts as well as any notes with any personal data on them, have been kept under the supervision of the writers of this study. Any interview material included in this paper has been de-identified and checked on to contain information that might give the reader a clue on who said what.

The *claim on use* means that the collected personal data can only be used for the purpose of the research. Following this, the material from our interviews will not be used in any other publication. This is also linked to the claim on consent; our interviewees have only agreed to participate in *this* study – if we use the material for other purpose the consent will no longer be valid.

The Research Council also states that it is important to the research community to submit results from the research to those whom it concern (Vetenskapsrådet, p 15). This poses a challenge to us, since the participants live far from us and we have only reached them through other persons. Even so, we will try to make it possible for the participants to access the finished paper by giving it to the chief in the area where we did the interviews, asking him to make it available to those of the participants who are interested in reading it.

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Theory
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To build a frame for the analysis of our material, we have used the theory of *symbolic interactionism.* In this section we will give a general account of the main ideas of the theory, though we will give more space to some parts – the five central ideas of the theory, its reasoning about social objects and symbols and its concept "taking the role of the other" – as they are especially useful to us in our analysis. We will also present two other theoretical concepts – negotiating reality and transcendence – which we will use to relate the symbolic interactionist concepts closer to the concrete context, to our material and to our own context: the field of social work.

Symbolic interactionism

The one who is often said to have laid the foundation of the theory of symbolic interactionism is George Herbert Mead, a philosopher active in the beginning of the twentieth century (Lindblom, 2011, p 35). His thoughts were later developed mainly by his student Herbert Blumer, who also drew from the works of other symbolic interactionists, such as William Thomas and Charles Cooley. Charon (2010, p 28-29) states that symbolic interactionism has five central ideas:

1. *Human action is formed by social interaction.* Humans are social and their actions do not derive from a personality with native traits, neither are they simply products of society; rather, their actions come out of interaction with other humans.
2. *Humans are thinking beings*. Their actions are not formed only by the influence from the outside, but they are constantly conversing with themselves, capable of reflecting and choosing their own way to act.
3. Humans do not only perceive the world around them as it is, rather, humans *define reality by observing it*. It is not said that an objective reality does not exist, only that humans are not completely blank, nor passive, in their perception, but their definition of the reality is a result of social interaction and their own thinking.
4. The interaction and the thinking that control human actions take place in *the present*. It is the humans' definition of the present that determine their actions. Our past can affect our actions in the present, but only by affecting our definition of the present situation.
5. *Humans are active beings* who do not simply respond to the surrounding environment. Although we are affected by the environment and freedom is never complete, humans are able to reflect upon and choose their actions.

Symbolic interactionism states that human action is formed by the environment – as the human

being defines it – as well as by interaction with others and with the self. The human being also act towards the environment, others and towards herself. The human being as well as society, therefore, is dynamic.

Although most symbolic interactionists accept the idea of an objective reality, they stress that humans cannot perceive objects without a perspective of some kind (Charon, 2010, p 45). Therefore, symbolic interactionists speak of objects as *social objects*, as human perception and use of them is defined by social interaction.

Symbols are one category of social objects. Many different things can become a symbol; a physical object, a word, an action. A symbol is a social object but a social object is not necessarily a symbol; symbols are arbitrarily developed and used intentionally to communicate or represent something. They carry a certain meaning which is understood by the user (and usually interpreted by others), but this meaning is not physical but abstract and socially defined. Therefore, a symbol can be changed at any time.

Charon writes that we humans are "highly symbolic":

> "It is the symbol that translates the world from a physically sensed reality to a reality that can be understood, interpreted, dissected, integrated and tested. Between reality and what we say and do stands the symbol" (ibid., p 59)

According to symbolic interactionists, words are what make abstraction and thinking possible, and symbols in general are the basis for human communication and cooperation. Even society is built on the use of symbols; Charon cites Ralph Ross (1962), writing that "community depends on shared experience and emotion" (ibid., p 61).

Taking the role of the other

Using representations such as words, pictures or ideas, we can transcend time and space; we are able to direct our actions in the present based on experiences, traditions or formal records (the past) as well as dreams, ideals or plans (the future) (Charon, 2010, p 65). Charon states that symbols also make it possible to transcend one's own person, in what he calls *taking the role of the other*. This means being able to see reality through the eyes of someone else. Imagining the perspective of

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another makes it possible to communicate more clearly, to influence the other, to feel sympathy and even love (ibid., p 66).

The idea of taking the role of the other also lies near to what Alphonso Lingis term "a redefinition of the identity of former belligerents". This is one point on his list of factors "common to the cases of successful reconciliation", and it involves transcending the view of oneself as a victim and the other one as the enemy, or oneself as the representative of law and order and the other side as subversives and terrorists (2008, p 45).

Negotiating reality

Putting a perspective of symbolic interactionism on reconciliation processes – that which has been the object of this study – takes us close to social constructionism and the applied social constructionist approach that Arieli and Friedman (2013) call *negotiating reality*.

The theory of social constructionism argues that it is not possible to take immediate sensory impressions or claims about how something really is for granted. Instead, the comprehension of reality and the way it is described is always a result of a construction process and the experiences are interpreted in a social context (Wennberg, 2010). The theory of social constructionism makes it possible to understand a phenomenon in different ways; if something is a social construction instead of an objective truth there is a possibility to deconstruct the understanding of reality and see new perspectives (ibid., 2010).

Using the negotiating reality approach, Arieli and Friedman ties social constructionism to symbolic interactionism. They stress the aspect of interaction, saying that "the external world (e.g., relations) and the internal cognitive worlds of individuals are tightly linked, each one shaping the other in an ongoing, reflexive process of world-making and formation of self" (Arieli & Friedman, 2013, p 318). The constructionist view makes it possible to think that reality is not "just there"– it is constructed and perceived. This opens the door to change. Arieli and Friedman talk about reconciliation as a process of meeting people with another view of reality, bringing awareness to one's own view. This *deconstruction* must then be followed by a common *reconstruction*, aiming to form relationships. Arieli and Friedman refers to Nan: "The core of conflict resolution is shifting awareness beyond the boundaries that shaped the conflict and expanding the focus from self alone to include the other" (ibid., p 318). Thus, negotiating reality is also closely linked to the concept of "taking the role of the other", as it implies imagining another perspective than one's own.

Transcendence

In our study we have found transcendence to be an important factor, since it is central in so many aspects of reconciliation – both in reconciliation as a process and in reconciliation as a phenomenon. The appearance of transcendence as a theme in our material echoes the occurrence of it in the earlier research that we have read.

To transcend means to surmount, to rise above, excel, surpass; to stretch beyond some concept or (ordinary) limit. The word "transcendent" can also have the religious or philosophical meaning to be beyond what can be perceived with the senses or the use of reason. In most religions, God is transcendent, which means that he is above and independent from the universe. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014; Nationalencyklopedin, 2014)

In this study about reconciliation, transcendence represents going beyond the limits of oneself, of the group, or of the norm. It also represents superhuman actions, Godly intervention and the unexplainable.

In our analysis, we have used the theoretical concepts presented in the above, as a frame for our results from the interviews and the participant observation. Looking at our material from a specific point of view like this might make new aspects of the matter appear. In the following sections the theoretical concepts will be further developed as we present and discuss our results.

Empirics and analysis

After transcribing our interviews we coded them to find recurrent themes. We found a lot of different factors that seemed to be important in the process of reconciliation, as it was described by our interviewees. These factors have been categorized in five major groups: fellowship/unity, restoration and peace, acceptance/forgiveness, justice and truth, receiving strength and guidance.

As we used the concepts from the theory of *symbolic interactionism* on our material we could identify a range of *symbols* in each category – symbols that in a concrete way express the signification of the theme. In this section we intend to describe the five categories, giving examples of such symbols that we can see in the narratives of our interviewees and investigating what meaning the users ascribe to these symbols.

We have seen symbols for both reconciliation, or the state of reconcilability, and the opposite, a state of implacability. Reconcilability and implacability are concepts used by Goran Basic (2013). He refers to Simmel who defines reconcilability as "*an emotional attitude that aims to end a conflict*" (our translation) and, in contrast to that, a possible implacability or combativeness aims to "*sustain the conflict*" (our translation). In the process of reconciliation the feeling of enmity gives room for the feeling of peacefulness and amity (Basic, 2013). We have chosen not to go into the symbols of the state of implacability, since those are simply the opposites of the ones that we describe.

A central point of the reconciliation process seems to be the *encounter.* The individual's encounter – with him- or herself, with others, with the past, with the future or with God – is the place where something happens. This is where symbols are shown and interpreted. The outcome of this encounter is of course shaped by many factors (such as power distribution or possible hidden interests) but we have chosen to focus on the interaction.

Each of the five categories of symbols will lead on into a further analysis about what happens when the described symbols are shown/seen. What role do the symbols play in the interaction between people involved in a reconciliation process? The analysis will be done by connecting our empirical data to the theoretical concepts explained in the above. This chapter will contain little of our own further thoughts on the material. These findings have the character of reasonings rather than a direct analysis, which is why they have been placed in the chapter "Further discussion" (see below).

Symbols for reconciliation: Five Categories

1) Fellowship/unity

In many of the narratives and also in our participation in the workshop we could see symbols for fellowship and unity. Our interviewees describe many different aspects that have to do with fellowship and unity that seem to be important for their reconciliation process. Some describe the fact that the two big politicians – the president Uhuru Kenyatta and the deputy president William Ruto – became united in the election 2013 and are now governing the country together, while also playing a major role when it came to achieving reconciliation on a grass-roots level. Some of our interviewees express it like this:

> "You know, Uhuru is a kikuyu and Ruto is a kalenjin, that one in itself it helped people heal…" (interviewee 1)

> "...these two people were great enemies but now they have united they have come together. They are friends. Now that they are friends and even people at the ground have become friends." (interviewee 2)

The uniting of the politicians who belong to different ethnic groups is a symbol for unity also for the people from those groups.

Many of our interviewees also highlighted the way that people, beyond tribal borders, were in contact with each other in the everyday life. They were trading with each other, they greeted one another in the streets, helped one another to reduce poverty, they owned things together and co-operated for the development of the community.

> "Things are back into normal because the [...] different tribes are now trading together, they're [...] even farming together. They talk. In fact you, they are living as a family." (interviewee 3)

All these very concrete everyday events that bring people together can be seen as symbols for the abstract values of fellowship and unity.

Further, our interviewees have told us about the transformation that started when they came

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together at the workshop organized by the ELCK. When they met with, talked to and prayed together with people from different tribes something changed. After the workshop they started to do even more things together.

"... that seminar [...] it really brought us together. We ate together, we sang together. So there was an additional peace that was really needed." (interviewee 4)

"Those who attended [the workshop] went with something… now they have started to visit one another and peace started to come." (interviewee 5)

The concrete things that happened in the workshop, the communal meal a.s.o. are symbols that to the people who participated means fellowship. It is not only the eating and sharing in itself, doing it in this context stands for something more.

Further analysis

Reconciliation implies a certain amount of fellowship, or at least community or tolerance (Lederach, 1997, p 26,27; Komesaroff, 2008, p 1). This has been an important theme in our study. Fellowship and unity is both an important part of the striving towards reconciliation, and an important indicator that reconciliation has been achieved. Fellowship and unity requires a certain amount of transcendence, since it implies the embracing of a paradox; the persons involved need to inhabit *both* the notion of pain caused by the actions of the other ("You really hurt me") *and* the desire for fellowship ("I want to be with you") with that same person. In this sense, inhabiting the paradox means not denying either of the two notions, and not letting one of them block the other one.

When the symbols for fellowship and unity are presented or exchanged, it conducts a situation of negotiating reality. From a background of a state of enmity, the symbols of fellowship and unity signal a change, transforming the person's picture of reality. When people who earlier would not even greet each other meet in a workshop, they share their mourning of past losses and their concerns for the future. This brings more nuances to the picture of the other, as well as of the situation. And when symbols of fellowship are shown on a high level in society – as with the example of Ruto and Kenyatta – it can change people's view of what degree of unity might be possible.

There is also a very important, practical aspect of the symbols of fellowship and unity. They are not only symbols but also real actions with a concrete use. Living together in peace makes it possible to benefit from each other, materially and economically. This can become an important incentive to transcend enmity and try to co-exist despite the challenges that are connected to the co-existence. Thus, fellowship and unity can also be seen as simply a means to achieve wealth.

2) Restoration and peace
In our empirical material we could also find symbols that represent the theme "restoration and peace". Restoring the community and getting a more calm and peaceful area were things that our interviewees often talked about as initial steps for the reconciliation to come. For example, the fact that both the government and some non-governmental organizations contributed with security as well as economic and material assistance, gave people the ability to endure the tough period and gave hope to start a new life. Symbols of restoration and peace also helped people in the process of psychological and emotional healing, since the receiving of material assistance reduced the feeling of having lost everything:

> "... we were given food by the Red Cross and the humanitarian groups. We stayed in the camps, being together, being given security and the government gave us some little help. We were building some small houses where we are staying until now and doing some farming [...]. That´s how we struggled and we are able to get our daily bread and feeding our children." (interviewee 7)

> "… once you have been given for example [S/he] is given examples of being given fertilizers, seeds for planting. [S/he] found that that difficulties that [s/he] had now is a bit relieved because.. The idea of thinking that everything has gone is a bit subtracted because [s/he] has been given some help." (interviewee 4)

The fact that people started their normal life again was also a sign of hope, encouraging even more people to go back to their homes, try to rebuild their houses and eventually restore the broken relationships:

> "...they [the people who fled the area during the conflicts] had hope to come [...] back, because they witnessed that people were going on with normal life. Different of what they had thought for, so they come one by one. [...] That helped them as had fear to bring their

families." (interviewee 8)

Furthermore the work of Kofi Annan – uniting the two rivals in the previous presidential election (Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki) – seemed to be a symbol for stability, creating presuppositions for peace and reconciliation to occur.

> "The secretary, Kofi Annan. He is the one who came and tried to unite the two principals. […] He created a chance of a prime minister. So after that [...] the country was somehow now fair." (interviewee 2)

Initiatives were taken from many levels in society and it seems to be the interaction of if all that eventually made the situation endurable and manageable.

Further analysis

Symbols of restoration and peace are essential in our interviewees' narratives of reconciliation processes. The fulfilling of the most elementary human needs makes it possible for people to keep their heads above water (both materially and mentally/emotionally), and give hope of being able to rebuild a normal life. The paralyzing feeling of hopelessness is somewhat reduced, which makes development possible.

Bar-Tal and Bennink discuss the role of material and economic restoration as an important factor to facilitate reconciliation processes (2004, p 26). According to Bar-Tal and Bennink, economic empowerment is an important factor in sustaining peace since it mobilizes people from opposing groups to support it from both sides.

These symbols are closely connected to the concept of negotiating reality. The concrete changes in external circumstances makes it impossible to doubt the change towards a more stable condition, thus forcing the individual to modify, or negotiate, his/her view of reality. These are symbols for things going back to normal, a movement towards well-being, corresponding to people's desire to live a good life.

3) Acceptance and forgiveness

Another prominent theme in our material was acceptance and forgiveness. One person said:

> "... if I say 'You did me wrong' every day, we'll not be going anywhere [...] If I have enmity inside me, it's very hard for us to help one another or come to reconciliation, because I still hate you. But if I forgive you, and say 'Think past away', as we normally say in Kiswahili, it should not be remembered, it helps nothing.[...] We should look at the future, and forget the rest, so that we can move forward." (interviewee 6)

The person mentions the expression "think past away" which describes the attitude of seeking to forget what has happened. This attitude can be seen as a symbol for acceptance of what has happened and for a willingness to move on and forgive. Others, on the other hand, claim that forgetting is not at all possible; rather, people have to move on anyway:

> "I do not think there's a way to heal that, except that you know you cannot grieve forever. So people have learned to heal." (interviewee 1)

Another symbol for acceptance and forgiveness that we could see has to do with not judging people, not seeking revenge or spreading the hatred and suspiciousness to the next generation:

> "Every day you tell your kid 'these people are bad' then you are planting a very bad seed. Instead you should make these people grow up knowing that 'Although we had fought for some times back, it was not at forever. They are our friends, they are people like us, we should stay with them, they are helpful'." (interviewee 6)

This mindset shows that the person is not influenced by feelings of revenge towards the other group instead there is a wish for good relationships. The way of thinking is a symbol for someone being able to accept and also maybe to forgive.

Some people told us about their experiences of letting go of pain and bad feelings and turning towards an attitude of reconcilability.

> "... when I give the heavy loads there [at the cross of Jesus], I was definitely going to get something better. [...] The joy of the Lord. [...] It felt great, I felt easy. I did not have the heavy heart." (interviewee 1)

Someone being able to let go of such burdens, can be seen as a symbol for acceptance and in the extent also to forgiveness.

The question about how it may be possible to forgive was also raised. One of the interviewees talked about the difference it made when s/he understood the mechanisms behind the events and that the persons who had caused a lot of pain didn´t have bad intentions themselves.

> "I will forgive them. Because you see this thing came it is not them, although they did, what they did it was from big politicians." (interviewee 2)

The issue of time and timing came up on several occasions during our interviews, and seems to be especially connected to forgiveness. Several interviewees talk of how forgiveness takes time, and how one has to allow for the process to run its course. These dictums can be seen as symbols of the complexity of forgiveness. One person says:

> "... if you've lost someone who is dear to you and there is this somebody who, before you have even grieved, and he's trying to tell you: do not cry. How can you stop crying when you're so bitter? You will definitely have to grieve – then heal." (interviewee 1)

The same interviewee explained how s/he was unable to assimilate the counselling they got from the Red Cross in the refugee camp:

> "... you cannot receive it [counselling] in fact, there was a lot of resistance in the heart. [...] You get hope in some way, but still, the heart is so hurt." (interviewee 1)

This person puts his/her finger on what we also heard other people talking about: How they received the teachings or counselling depended not only on the one nature of the assistance itself, but also whether it came at the right time or not.

Further analysis
The theme of acceptance and forgiveness is very delicate and disputed. Several questions regarding the nature of these concepts could be posed, for example: does forgiving involve forgetting? Basic cites Simmel, who states that "s/he who cannot forget, can neither forgive" (Basic, 2013 p 53, our

own translation). In the HWEC workshop, on the other hand, it was clearly stated that forgiving does *not* imply forgetting. The manual states:

> "Forgiveness is not forgetting, or being unable to recall it. How can we possibly forget when a severe injustice has been committed against us, especially if our relatives were killed?" (Lloyd, 2011, p 53)

Our interviews gave a diverse picture of this, as some of the interviewees talked of things like "thinking past away", while others indicated that there is a measure of moving on while still living with the memory.

Forgiveness is, as discussed by Philipa Rothfield and Goran Basic, not unproblematic. Basic (2013) claims that the space for reconciliation is sometimes very small. Forgiveness can be extremely difficult where people have suffered great losses. Rothfield (2008) writes that asking people to reconcile is a "demand for transcendence"; it means asking people to let go of painful personal experiences in favor of a common future – to accept co-existing without demanding revenge. Auerbach also goes along this line, saying that "forgiving means giving up an important part of the history of the victimized collectivity" (Auerbach, 2004, p 155). The question arises of whether it is right or appropriate to demand, or even work towards, forgiveness. Rothfield calls on the work of Derrida, defending the right for victims of atrocities *not* to forgive; thus sustaining the paradox "between situated individuality and abstract moral rationality" (Rothfield, 2008, p 19).

What Rothfield talks of is the moral pressure of the norm to forgive. This norm looks rather absurd in the light of the atrocities that some people have seen. Many have asked if forgiveness, or reconciliation, is at all possible, or even desirable (Basic, 2013, p 53; Auerbach, 2004, p 155). However, Auerbach also calls on the work of Desmond Tutu, stating that "...forgiveness is the only way to liberate oneself from the prison of past animosities and rancor" (Auerbach, 2004, p 155). As exemplified in the above, several of our interviewees bear witness of healing processes that made them able to forgive, and the forgiving in turn made them able to move on. They describe this as a burden being laid down. It could also be described as "letting go", and this is the crescendo of the workshop; all the teachings build up to "The cross workshop", where the cross of Jesus is put up as a strong symbol – the place for this "letting go".

Forgiving is by our interviewees explained as both a relief and as a necessity. In Christian theology,

Smyth summarizes, forgiveness is seen as a gift, given undeservingly to another. This is a *self-transcending*, superhuman act where the wronged person reaches out towards the perpetrator and, in the same way that God does, seeks relationship rather than revenge. Smyth calls this an acknowledgement of the human disposition; that we flourish in relationship rather than in isolation (2008, p 70-72). This links to what Basic writes about the state of implacability. He takes the example of a former concentration camp intern, talking of acquaintances that did not help him when he was captured:

> "He who has known me all his life could have tried to help me escape but nobody did. How it really was, if people pointed us out or put us on lists, I don't know. I have however finished all business with them, I have no desire, wish nothing from them, don't need them."
> (Basic 2013, p 63, our own translation)

This radically points to the link between reconciliation, or forgiveness, and community. The man's inability to reconcile with his former associates can be seen in his unwillingness to have anything at all to do with them. Some of our interviewees talk about similar feelings towards people from other tribes as a kind of blockage, something that prevents development and a good life. Forgiveness then seems to fill the function of resolving these blockages, making them able to co-exist despite differences and pain. Komesaroff talks of forgiveness as a strategy to overcome blockages in communication (Komesaroff, 2008, p 6-7).

4) Justice and truth

Symbols for justice and truth also appeared in our empirical material, both in the narratives of our interviewees and in the workshop. Some of our interviewees talked about the difference it made when the truth was revealed and when people apologized and tried to recompense for what they had done.

> "What made us to become friends is that some who stole our animals repented, they apologized. [...] that apology make me feel [...] that he comes near to me and I go near to him. [...] We started exchanging. I could buy from him, he could buy from me..."
> (interviewee 2)

The act of apologizing is a symbol. Through the apology someone shows remorse for what s/he has done. It is an acknowledgement of the other person's version of reality, recognizing that what I did

was not right. The apology seeks to recover the relationship after the wrongdoings and if it is honest it means that the person does not want to do it again. When it comes to knowing if someone is honest with the apology, our interviewees talked about the importance of words and actions to match up. The actions (which are symbols) then demonstrate the sincerity of the words (which are also symbols).

> "Through his actions [...] you know that someone who has asked for forgiveness really means it" (interviewee 9)

> "There is some people who took our animals there. After the workshop they brought them, they said this is your animals, take them. Yeah. And so we see a great change." (interviewee 2)

The interviewees also mentioned the confession to play a major role when it comes to revealing the truth and later on to come to forgiveness. There is a certain point in the workshop where this to some of them became important.

> "We were told by the pastors 'If you have taken something, that thing should not create fear in you all the time. Accept that I did this and that, and then it will end'. As long as you keep it in yourself, even the fear will stay in you" (interviewee 9)

> "Some people confessed. It was the kikuyus, the kalenjins, the kisiis [...]. Whoever burnt a house, stole a chicken or a cow [...]. They all agreed that we have left that. 'Let us forgive.' [...] They were frank saying 'I stole clothes, I stole this [...]'. They were very free. After saying that, they accepted to forgive each other" (interviewee 9)

The confession is a symbol for truth. Through the confession the truth is revealed and admitted.

Further analysis

The symbols for justice and truth are linked to the symbols for forgiveness in their connection to healing. Symbols such as confession and apology represent remorse, which Komesaroff stresses as an important part of the reconciliation process (Komesaroff, 2008, p 132). Our interviewees told us about how the apology and the acts of compensating for mistakes and confessing transgressions

made them feel better. It seems to have had an effect of healing and helping people to rebuild trust. Many scholars point out the importance of the acknowledgement of what really happened. Auerbach and Komesaroff describe it as an acknowledgement of the victim's humanity, which legitimates the pain of the victims (Auerbach, 2004, p 152-153, Komesaroff, 2008, p 132). Lederach points out the difference between knowing and acknowledging, describing the encounter between the parties as a place for acknowledgement through hearing one another's stories, which validates experiences and feelings (1997, p 26). This is a process of restitution of both individuals and relationships.

During the workshop there was several important moments where the participants were invited to tell what happened from their point of view – both in the form of expressing their own losses, but also in confessing what they or their group did to others. We interpret this as an attempt from the HWEC team to create a locus where participants could exchange symbols of reconciliation, not least symbols of longing for justice and truth. Ergo, these elements in the workshop strive to help the participants in taking the role of the other; encouraging them to negotiate their view of reality. Komesaroff talks of this exchange as a process of translation, producing a new, shared view of reality (Komesaroff, 2008, p 6). This is, of course, something that cannot be forced or rushed – that would be counterproductive. But expressing loss in a humble way, without accusations, lays a foundation for the other one to understand my point of view. Confession, then, is an act of humility, acknowledging the other person's view of reality – it is the first step towards the goal of forgiveness (Auerbach, 2004, p 154), thus ultimately an expression of reaching for community. These are all acts of transcendence, taking place in the encounter.

Although the issue of justice and truth is important, it is also problematic. What we discussed under the topic "Forgiveness and acceptance" also applies here; it is important to recognize that the severity of the crimes committed can be too great for the victims to be able or willing to forgive or reconcile, and to give room for possible states of irreconcilability (Basic, 2013). Rothfield takes the example of Munira Subašić, building the case that truth could sometimes be seen as something obstructive to reconciliation; when the truth is very ugly, how can it be diminished into a frame of reconciliation? It is also not evident what the concept of justice implies. Subašić demands accountability for the culprits, which is not always easy in a post-conflict society (Rothfield, 2008, p. 17). Whereas this theme is rather prominent in literature on the subject, it was almost absent in our interviews. However, this must not mean that irreconcilability was not a part of the process where our study took place.

A reconciliation process is a place of contesting truths – something that we also observed in the HWEC workshop. It can mean saying on the one hand: "Some things are unacceptable and must not happen", and on the other: "It really happened". It is the job of reconciliation work to inhabit and accept this kind of paradox, as well as dealing with it. The teachings in the HWEC workshop point to a central Christian concept to handle these paradoxes: that God wants to reconcile with the humans and that Jesus, who had no sin, took on the punishment for all sin. This implies two things: 1. The human can be delivered from both sin and pain and rest in the notion that God has everything in his hand, and 2. The human should strive towards showing the same mercy towards others. A paradox is submitted in saying that "mercy is the most costly thing", but still claiming that this is what was done by God and should be done by us. This is an expression of the need to inhabit a paradox, and some of our interviewees describe these teachings as key to transforming their mindsets.

5) Receiving strength and guidance

Lastly, we have also identified symbols for the theme "receiving strength and guidance". Our interviewees told us about how important their faith was for them to be able to endure the tough period with a lot of violence, insecurity and scarce resources:

> "... people were saying unless we could depend on God, there was no any other ways. Because we had no food, we had no clothes, we had nothing." (interviewee 7)

God is portrayed as someone who gave them strength, comfort and hope, and helped them in the process of forgiving and reconciling.

> " ...it's a matter of praying to God because you might have lost something very important, for example child and maybe your [spouse] has been killed. It is very difficult to forget, but [...] it's a matter of now depending on God to pray." (interviewee 4)

> "I have prayed for forgiveness, I have prayed for my heart to forgive them. So I went on, on and on, and it disappeared." (interviewee 6)

Using the theory of social interactionism, these quotes can be seen as expressing symbols for receiving strength and, through that, the ability to persevere and later to leave the past behind.

What was also said to be important is the guidance that the interviewees have received from the workshop in the church and from social leaders in the community, as well as education in general. The interviewees describe how this gave them new insights and also helped them to come towards the feeling of being able to forgive and wanting to reconcile.

> "... before there were always clashes among the neighbors but after receiving the teachings the difference that is now within the neighborhood…. those clashes, even if they exist they are now limited." (interviewee 3)

> "When the chiefs were having these meetings they could talk with those young people about not fighting again, or not to be used, like weapon. Instead create job for themselves [...] it has helped a great deal" (interviewee 6)

> "I thought hating the kalenjin is the solution, but I found at the workshop that I also made a great mistake to God by hating my enemy. You see what the bible says you love your enemy as you love yourself [...]. The workshop taught me that I have to love him [...] and that I've also made a mistake of hating him [...] So my mind changed, and I started to love them." (interviewee 2)

> "... they taught about keeping down the heavy loads in you. [...] they were teaching through role play, and you just left the loads at the cross of Jesus." (interviewee 1)

In these narratives, the organized meetings and the teachings can be seen as symbols for receiving guidance that somehow changed the way people were thinking about the situation and also the way they perceived each other.

Further analysis

Basic cites Simmel, who states that both reconcilability and irreconcilability are emotional states that can only be actualized when influenced by circumstances outside themselves (Basic, 2013, p 53). This can of course be discussed, but it must at least be recognized that outer conditions *can* affect (and often do so) the mindset of a person involved in a reconciliation process. In many of the stories of our interviewees, these outer conditions was an outer force; a person or an organization. With the guidance and/or strength received from government officials, the HWEC workshop or God, the individual is able to take different steps. Several of our interviewees expressed that they

have been changed or transformed by the reconciliation workshop or through God's power. They describe these interventions to have made them able to make changes – in their mindset or in their life – that they would not have been able to make on their own.

When someone comes from the outside and changes something in me; that is an act of transcendence. The other person transcends the boundary between us, giving me something that I did not have before; making me able to act or think in a way that I was not able to before. It enables me to do acts of transcendence myself: better understanding someone else's perspective (taking the role of the other), letting go of pain, forgiving someone or in other ways overcoming enmity and suspicion and reaching out to someone else.

Some of the symbols described to be part of this process of change are very powerful. In some interviews it was even described as a supernatural process; the change goes outside – transcends – the boundaries of what seems to be possible in the natural world. In these interviews, it seems that the thought of God as someone who has everything under control is very comforting. This makes the interviewees able to let go of e. g. vengefulness, trusting God to be both just and good.

At the same time, in the HWEC manual, there is a sense of human agency (Lloyd, 2011). The human is not simply a passive receiver but has a free will and may choose his/her actions. S/he can choose whether or not to turn to God and receive what he offers – forgiveness, strength, guidance, reconciliation. However, there is a normative element in this since it is not seen as a good alternative for the human to stay in a state of irreconcilability. The motivation to reconcile is not only practical ("We need to co-exist to survive"), but also moral. According to the manual, as humans are created in the image of God they are meant to be like him, living in harmony. God's loving intervention in the human life comes first, but it is also implied that this creates a response in the human heart; a will to also transcend the self, giving out to others what the human has her-/himself received. Some of the interviewees describe the workshop to have opened their eyes to this aspect; the need for them to try reaching for reconciliation.

Further discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how people describe and interpret their experiences of reconciliation processes. Our interest in this sprang from a wish to explore and be able to discuss the connections between the subject of reconciliation and the field of social work. Drawing on the lines of symbolic interactionism, we could see the narratives of reconciliation processes as accounts of symbols seen in the interaction of reconciliation processes. In all levels of the process, elements of transcendence can be seen. This is because reconciliation implies a change or a transformation from a state of conflict, alienation and/or enmity to a state of peace, co-existence and/or fellowship. It demands transcending boundaries of the self and one's view of reality to meet the other, and to harbor the paradoxes of the reconciliation process.

Paradox and transcendence in reconciliation

Looking at the narratives of our interviewees in this study, we have found that for reconciliation to take place, many different and complex factors and many levels are involved. For example, we have seen that creating fellowship and unity are important, but for this to take place there is first a need for restoration and material assistance to the affected people. Our interviewees have also emphasized the importance of forgiving and accepting the past, but for this to happen there is a need for truth and justice to be acknowledged. The different factors and levels are intertwined and they interact in a number of ways in the process of reconciliation.

A very central element in the reconciliation process is *paradox*. Reconciliation comprises both bringing out a painful past *and* reaching for a common future; both speaking the ugly truth *and* reaching for fellowship; both administering justice *and* letting go of bitterness and pain to live in peace.

As researchers we were sometimes confused by the paradoxicality in the stories of our interviewees, and tried to straighten out the paradoxes by asking the interviewees to explain them. The interviewees, however, were seldom able to explain or give an account of the details of or connections between these seemingly contradictory concepts (i.e. how they, in just a couple of days, could go from carrying a lot of pain and bitterness to eating happily together with their former enemies). The paradoxes remained – sometimes they were even emphasized, saying that such difficult things can *only* be handled by prayer, or that such dramatic changes are *only* possible through supernatural intervention. After further reading into the subject and a closer look at our material, we realized that the study of reconciliation cannot be about resolving the paradoxes.

Rather, it has to be about how to *embrace* paradoxes. Paradoxes seem to be *something that is just there* in reconciliation work and reconciliation processes. Overlooking this, or diminishing either side of the paradox, would make the process hollow. Lederach talks of paradoxes of two "sources of energy", stating that "a paradox can create a binding and crippling impasse when only one of the sources is embraced at the expense of the other" (Lederach, 1997, p 31), and tendencies of this can also be seen in our material.

Embracing a paradox is an act of transcendence. Harboring contradictory emotions or truths (as exemplified in the above) without diminishing or compromising one side of it, is very difficult. The pain of old wounds cannot be denied, but neither can the need for putting down vengefulness and co-existing peacefully. They are both indispensable, yet they completely contradict each other.

This process is complicated and varies from case to case. Some of our interviewees describe it as something they themselves decided to do. Others say that it was made possible by something outside of themselves. The place where these paradoxes are put to a head is in the encounter between two parties; this is where the paradoxes are expressed and reviewed. At the same time, the ability to harbor a paradox seems to be a *presupposition* for the encounter, as the decision to come to meet one's enemy is itself an act of self-transcendence. It requires challenging fear and bitterness and reaching for a renewed contact with the other. To embrace a paradox can also be an *outcome* of the encounter; maybe the encounter induced a process of taking the role of the other and negotiating reality, making the other party more human and easier to understand, thus making the paradox a slightly lighter burden. This is yet another aspect of the dimension of transcendence in reconciliation; the circular nature of the reconciliation process. In this study, we have recurrently heard the idea that some of the *symbols for reaching for, or working towards, reconciliation*, are *the same* as some of the *symbols for reconciliation as a result*. This suggests yet another level of transcendence in the nature of reconciliation: maybe one way of starting a reconciliation process might in fact be displaying symbols of achieved reconciliation?

This poses questions about how it is possible to start. How can you be able to get into that circle? Is the process of reconciliation dependent on a person's decision and willingness to strive towards it? Or is it a kind of feeling that needs to come? If it is a feeling, or a "state" as Basic (2013) calls it, what are the implications for reconciliation work – can reconciliation at all be produced, or worked for?

According to Simmel, who is quoted by Basic (2013, p 53), the state of reconcilability or

irreconcilability is an emotional state, dependent on outer forces to appear. He does not talk about it in terms of a person's will. However, in our interviews we found people talking about the reconciliation process and the ability to get rid of grudges as something that could develop slowly through, for instance, the fact that people were seeing each other again and starting to share. The feeling of reconcilability seems to come after the encounter and after the sharing. According to their stories it seems to be something more than feelings that made them move towards each other.

The question of what is a cause and what is an effect in the reconciliation process seems to be very complex. On the one hand it seems to be the actions of reconciliation that causes the feeling of wanting to reconcile, but on the other hand it seems to be the will to reconcile that caused the actions. How it starts might vary due to the individual, the situation and the timing. Whatever it is that causes the change towards reconciliation, it requires an act of transcendence to get into the circle, or the upward spiral. There is a need to transcend the state of irreconcilability and turn towards reconcilability.

Connections to social work

As students in the field of social work we think about the connection between the process of reconciliation and the role of the social worker. As referred to in the introduction, Kreitzer and Jou states that the profession of social work has much to contribute to the field of reconciliation, although it is seldom written about in social work scholarship (Kreizer & Jou, 2010, p 74). What we have learned from this study is that the perspective of reconciliation might also have something to contribute to the social work research and practice field. In the following we will investigate these two questions: "What can social work, or the social worker, contribute to the field of reconciliation?" and "What can perspectives from reconciliation work and theory contribute to the field of social work?"

In this study we have found that one thing that lies at the very core of reconciliation is the encounter. The reconciliation process takes place in the encounter between people, and in the encounter it can become possible to reform one's view of the other and the situations – negotiate the reality. Lederach talks about reconciliation as a focus and a locus. Reconciliation is a location of encounter where people in conflict can meet and in this encounter people can focus on their relationship and share their thoughts, feelings and perspectives (Lederach, 1997, p 30). In social work the encounter between the social worker and the clients is fundamental (Meeuwisse & Swärd, 2006, p 21); it is in and/or through the encounter that change or transformation takes place. When

Thomas Johansson talk about the encounter in the anthology of Meeuwisse, Sunesson and Swärd, he describes it to have different levels. On the relational level, they suggest that the point is to create social situations (Johansson, 2006, p 155).

The social worker has a special area of competence, a broad perspective containing different levels from individual to society, as well as different research subjects such as for example economy, law, psychology and sociology. The social worker has to master both theoretical and practical skills, and, lastly, s/he has to know how to integrate all of these things (Meeuwisse & Swärd, 2006, p 17, 19). S/he often has the role of bringing about encounters and working for social change in different ways. In this sense the social worker can be perceived as someone who helps to create the locus, the space for the reconciliation process to exist and develop. Within the locus the social worker can have the role of a mediator or counselor, trying to help to facilitate the process of negotiating reality. This task calls for tactfulness and discretion, to know when it is time to move on, to encourage the clients to think in new ways – taking the role of the other – or when it is time to give room for difficult feelings and grief. The social worker could be the one who instills hope, pointing at the possibility to reach change in the future even if the feelings at the moment say it is impossible.

This is about being able to embrace a paradox; both acknowledging the fact that what has happened really hurt and that the feelings of pain and grief are very natural, and at the same time being able to see other perspectives and point to the possibility of moving on. Perhaps it is the role of the social worker to be able to harbor these apparently contradictory facts at times when the clients are not capable of doing it. If the social worker can harbor the paradox, s/he might be able to stand by the client in his/her suffering, without losing sight of the possibility of a better future – being ready to encourage the client when s/he is ready for a contingent needed change. Maybe the social worker's experience of spanning different disciplines and concepts and grasping contradictory interests is just what makes him/her especially fit to work with reconciliation?

As many of our interviewees mentioned, the question of timing is very important when it comes to the process of reconciliation. This factor is often something that the social worker can be able to control. In his/her position, based on his/her specific competence, s/he has been given the acting space and authority to plan and put in interventions at the time that s/he deems appropriate, to make investigations, to treat and so on. The social worker often has the power over time, and the aware use of this fact could be of great benefit to the client.

The social worker can also be useful on the field of reconciliation in a bigger perspective. Reconciliation is needed not only within the individual, but within and between groups and societies. International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) asserts that social work can play an important role in reconciliation processes. IFSW highlight its "long tradition of working with coalition building and meditation in problem solving, based on knowledge of what it takes to ensure the rights of vulnerable people in society" (N Jones & Johannessen, 2008).

Further, the concept of reconciliation could be of use to the social worker. Social work is often about addressing social problems, dealing with situations where conflict, lack of trust and broken communication is common. We would like to suggest that the idea of reconciliation as harboring paradoxes offers a constructive tool to the social worker, both as something for the social worker him-/herself to hold on to, but also as something to pass on to the client. Letting the paradox be a paradox leaves space for both acting and letting be. The acknowledgement of paradoxes might be a reminder of the complexity of the situation, which may call for both a variety of interventions and for the need of awaiting the right moment. Through consciousness of these aspects the social worker may be able to develop his/her intuition of when a particular thing is needed.

In summary

Conducting this study, we have found strong connections between reconciliation and social work. Research is conducted in both of the areas, but the meeting between them have not been much investigated. Though there is no room for it in this study, we would be interested to see further studies in this field in between fields; how can the ideas from reconciliation work, for example the concept of transcendence, be used as tools for the social worker? How can the perspectives of social work, and how can social workers, contribute to reconciliation processes in a bigger perspective?

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Appendix

1) Interview guide regarding reconciliation

- After the elections in 2007, some serious events took place here in Kenya. It was on the news, many people got killed and houses were burnt down (anpassa denna del efter vilket område vi är i, vad som hände där)... Can you tell me a bit about it?
- And at that time, where did you live?
    - Were there any problems in that place?
    - What happened? In what way did it happen?
    - How did people in the area think about that?
    - How did people talk about these events? How did they explain what happened? What did they think were the reasons behind these events?
    - What did you think about that at the time?
- How did these events affect you?
- What were your expectations when you came to the workshop?
- What made you decide to take part in the workshop?
- What were your experiences when taking part in the workshop?
- What do you remember the most from the workshop?
- How did you feel when you left the workshop? How did it feel to come back home?
- What has happened since the workshop?
- What are your hopes for the future?

2) Letter given to our interviewees

To persons who have taken part in the "Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflicts" workshop.

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms....................................

We are two students from Lund University in Sweden. We study social work there, and to get our bachelor's degree we are going to do a field study and write a paper about it. The subject of this field study is reconciliation.

You who receive this letter are one of the persons we would like to interview for the study. This letter is to explain the conditions of participating so that you can decide on whether you would like to participate or not.

Our study will be based on interviews with people who have taken part in the workshop "Healing the wounds of ethnic conflicts". The aim of the study is to learn about people's experiences of reconciliation. It is not an evaluation of the workshop, rather, we are interested in hearing your thoughts on the process of reconciliation based on your own experiences.

We have been given strict rules from our university that all interviews are to be strictly confidential. This means that no other person than the two of us will have access to the material before it has been de-identified.

The interviews will be recorded with a voice recorder. Afterwards we will write them down. Some of the material will then be de-identified and used in the paper. The interview material will not be used for any other purpose than this study. The paper will not contain any names of people or places.

Participating in this study is totally voluntary. This means that you do not have to answer all the questions. It also means that you can leave the interview at any time if you should wish to do so.

You will not be paid any money to participate. Our hope is that you would like to participate in this study. Your experience will be very helpful to us in our learning.

We are looking forward to seeing you on.....................................

Please confirm your participation in this interview to the Chief XXX.

Kind regards,

Frida Ekström and Maria Gunnarsson
Mobile number: 0726-713046

3) Letter given to our interpreters

To the interpreter

Thank You for your volunteering to assist us in our study! We who conduct the study are two

students from Lund University in Sweden. We study social work there and we do this study to get our bachelor's degree.

The study is based on interviews with persons who participated in the Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflicts (HWEC) workshops. The purpose of this study is to find out more about their experiences of reconciliation work. We are interested in hearing how they discuss the possibility to achieve reconciliation, what can promote or impede reconciliation, and what reconciliation processes can be like. To get the best possible understanding of this we want the interview persons to be able to speak their mother tongue. Therefore we are dependent on someone translating for us.

All the interviews are to be strictly confidential. This is due to strict regulations from our university. The purpose of this is to make the interview persons comfortable in ensuring that whatever they say in the interview will not be heard by others. The interview material is not to be accessible to other people until it has been completely de-identified. This means that you cannot share with others anything of what you have heard during the interviews; neither now, nor any time later. Guaranteeing confidentiality to the interview persons increases the validity of our study and thus it is very important.

We wish that you translate what is said as exactly as possible. Try to avoid adding your own interpretations. If you see that a misunderstanding has occurred between us as interviewers and the interview person, you may help to clear it up, but then please be clear about what the interview person has said and what is your own interpretation.

You will be given a small token of appreciation after finishing today.

Thank You again for your assistance! Your help is very important to make our study possible.

I have understood the above and I commit myself to comply with it.

Date: _____

Signature: _____