

TRUTH-TELLING AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS: LESSONS FROM NATIONAL PEACE AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION UNDER THE NEW REPUBLIC IN ZIMBABWE (2018-2024)

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Abstract

Resolving historical conflicts and violent incidents is the constitutional and legal task of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), founded in 2013. Concerning covering government's past impunity on the one side, and attempting to promote peace, healing, and reconciliation on the other, the NPRC in Zimbabwe seems to be a patchwork endeavour. From a surface-level perspective, the aim of the NPRC appears to be about bringing out the desired results of healing and reconciliation without confronting the underlying causes that led to the violence and disagreements in the past by revealing the truth. The first phase in the reconciliation process, truth-telling is the cornerstone of all truth commissions. It provides a wide path for parties in disagreement to reconcile and engage in negotiations. Thus, the main objective of this study is to establish if the NPRC has been managing to fulfil its mandate of truth-telling and healing. Qualitative research methods were employed as they allowed the research to delve deep into issues surrounding the reconciliation process. Determining whether the NPRC has been able to carry out its mandate of healing and revealing

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the truth is, thus, the primary goal of the study. The use of qualitative research methods allows for a deeper exploration of the problems related to the reconciliation process.

Keywords: *conflict resolution, peace building, violence*

INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation has been regarded as the basis for people to move forward despite differences that might have existed in the past. In Africa, post-independence liberation struggles often gave way to intra-state conflicts marked by widespread human rights abuses and atrocities. In response, the African Union (AU), through its Agenda 2063, underscores the importance of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms, epitomised by the establishment of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) in Zimbabwe. The NPRC was constituted under the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 and the National Peace and Reconciliation Act Chapter 10:32 of 2018. The establishment of the NPRC is the realisation of the social and political will and aspiration of Zimbabweans to transition from a conflictual past to a harmonious future. This study seeks to contribute to the discourse on reconciliation in Zimbabwe by examining the role of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, drawing on lessons from the NPRC's experiences between 2018 and 2024.

BACKGROUND

It is customary that after every conflict or gross violation of human rights, a commission is established to gather facts, causes, and consequences of the conflict or actions to initiate a reconciliation process. This practice has now gained legal, constitutional, and statutory ambits as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Patterns of this practice can be traced from history. For instance, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to deal with past apartheid violations of human rights and atrocities in

1998 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998). In the United States, several truth and reconciliation commissions were set up to deal with various matters (Vermont Legislative Research Service, 2021). In El Salvador, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established as part of peace accords that put an end to a lengthy period of violent civil conflict (Cuevas *et al.*, 2002). A Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in Sierra Leone after an 11-year-long civil war (Shaw, 2005). In 2006, the United Nations published a document outlining core principles, successful establishment strategies, ideal functions, potential governmental partners, and a guide to evaluating a commission's success (United Nations, 2006).

In Africa, after liberation struggles, intra-state conflicts arose that resulted in massive violations of human rights and unspeakable atrocities. In response to this, the AU, through a design of Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063, calls for a peaceful and secure region, and paragraph 32 emphasises the functionality of peaceful prevention and conflict resolution mechanisms (Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi, 2021). The NPRC was established within these bounds with the constitutional mandate of addressing past conflicts and disputes through a peaceful road of conflict resolution.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission defined by Hayner (2002), cited by Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi (2021), is a provisional body that holds a constitutional or statutory mandate, established with the target of identifying the causes and consequences of abuses by oppressive regimes or armed groups. The motive for the establishment of truth commissions was amplified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2006) as the effort to reach out to victims to facilitate the process of understanding the extent, patterns, causes, and consequences of violence or violations of human rights. In concert with this submission, Mhandara (2020:39) argues that a commission, under normal circumstances, should conclude with the

submission of “a report which contains findings and recommendations, which the convenor must act upon to rectify the situation”. The NPRC in Zimbabwe was established on this basis to facilitate a reconciliation and healing process in the country by addressing the past pressing issues of violence and gross violations of human rights.

Zimbabwe’s social and political matrix has been characterised by a series of recurring patterns of conflicts and disputes that amount to the gross violation of human rights (Moorcroft and McLaughlin, 2008; Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013; Mhandara, 2020). The major event of violence occurred in the Southern parts of the country as Mhandara (2018), described it as a dissident-cleansing operation known as Gukurahundi. This incident left an indelible dent in the social and political relations of the people. Other series of violence were recorded and documented in the country which include the violent land reform programme, operation Murambatsvina of 2005, and various trends of intra and inter-political party violence that include the August 2018 killings (Bratton and Masunungure 2007; Impunity Watch 2008; Mhandara 2018 and Sachikonye 2011). The central focus of this study is on the major incident of Matabeleland disturbances known as Gukurahundi. The Gukurahundi was a major conflict that divided Zimbabwe to this day. Several attempts failed to usher in the reconciliation process with noticeable results. Numerous scholars wrote about reconciliation in Zimbabwe offering different views and suggestions. Some provide a prescriptive approach to reconciliation and others suggest judicial means for retributive justice (Mashingaidze 2011 and Machakanja 2010).

It is against the aforementioned backdrop that the NPRC was established with the constitutional mandate of resolving past conflicts and disputes through reconciliation. Bloomfield *et al.* (2003:1) define

reconciliation as a process of “creating trust and understanding between former enemies.” Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru (2013:81) argues that reconciliation seeks to re-connect, to re-establish the harmony disturbed or destroyed by the conflict through arriving at a common understanding. The scholar underscores that the reason for reconciliation is to establish a long-lasting peace by avoiding the re-occurrence of a similar past conflict by dealing with the real causes of the conflict and its consequences through a transformative institutional programme of the reconciliation process. These are angles that the NPRC was ideated and established to usher in reconciliation and healing in Zimbabwe. The NPRC was entrusted with the duty to ensure reconciliation in the country by all means possible that enshrouds healing, transformative programmes, and the encouragement of people to tell the truth (Mhandara, 2020).

Truth-telling or truth is central to the reconciliation process. Asmal *et al.* (1997) define reconciliation as a matter of telling unwelcome truth. Mhandara (2020) names truth-telling as an opening step in the reconciliation process. Mawonda (2009) cites truth-telling as a central tenet of the reconciliation process. All these studies suggest a direct relationship between truth-telling and the reconciliation process. The NPRC was instituted with the big mandate of facilitating reconciliation and healing in the country. Several research conducted on reconciliation in Zimbabwe concludes by recommending truth-telling as a way forward (Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi, 2021; Chinyonga and Kurebwa 2023). This study intends to contribute to the debate on reconciliation in Zimbabwe by interrogating the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, drawing lessons from the NPRC from 2018 to 2024.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zimbabwe experienced several occasions of gruesome incidents in the fashion of violence and conflicts and the indelible one is that of the

Matabeleland disturbances that occurred in the early 1980s. Such past conflicts and violence left Zimbabweans divided and the state polarised. Today, the aggrieved parties are still heaped with the experience that they incessantly retrieve time and time again. Reconciliation efforts have been made with fruitless results. In 2013, the reconciliation efforts were constitutionalised through the establishment of the NPRC. The commission was granted an enabling act in 2018 and since then, no fruitful results have been recorded. Several literature and researches contribute to this subject from all perspectives, including the investigations of the independence of the commissioners, and proposals for a 'local turn' approach (Mhandara 2020; Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi, 2021; Chinyonga and Kurebwa, 2023). However, less effort is being given to the importance of truth-telling as a magic bullet for reconciliation in Zimbabwe. The past attempts at reconciliation and the disinclined efforts from the NPRC are contributing insignificantly to the desired full-fledge reconciliation process. The tenacity of this scenario means that Zimbabwe will remain divided and polarised, whilst aggrieved parties consistently nurse the retrievable anger of past violence and conflicts. It is upon this basis that this research is framed, to show the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, drawing lessons from the NPRC of Zimbabwe from 2018 to 2024.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the trends and patterns of violence and conflicts in Zimbabwe, spanning the period 1980 to 2018.
- To explore the development and constitutional mandate of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission in Zimbabwe.
- To examine the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, drawing lessons from the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission in Zimbabwe under the New Republic from 2018 to 2024.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, leveraging its exploratory nature to assess the significance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, with the NPRC serving as a central reference point and case study. The research is anchored in secondary data analysis, involving a comprehensive review and re-evaluation of existing data about the trends and patterns observed within the NPRC's mandate. Data sources include academic articles, journals, government publications such as gazettes, the Zimbabwean constitution, the NPRC Act, and newspaper articles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PATTERNS OF CONFLICTS AND VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe is comparable to the era before the struggle for independence in terms of conflicts and violence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera (2020) capture it in an elucidating way by asserting that the violent episodes in a pre-colonial era that are comparable to the post-colonial era were given various names, such as inter-communal raiding, and Chimurenga during the nationalist liberation struggle. Benyera (2014) argues that Zimbabwe has experienced persistent conflicts on a protracted basis. The violent and conflict culture in Zimbabwe is proclaimed to be a result of the merge of the pre-colonial violence tendencies with the complex nature of colonial brutality (Mlambo 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera 2020). The footprints of violent and conflict culture were recorded from 1980 up to the present in different violent episodes. Post-independence is characterised by a sparsely spread mixture of high and low-intensity violence. Such unstable moments create consequences of polarisation and division. Conflicts and violence that characterised the Zimbabwe political matrix range from tribal and ethnic lines to inter and intra-political party violence (Benyera, 2014; Muchemwa, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020,). From 1983 to 1987, ethnic-based violence, popularly

documented as *Gukurahundi*, erupted (CCJP and LRF, 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera, 2020; Chinyonga and Kurebwa, 2023). In 2000, the country recorded a violent Fast Track Land Reform Programme also referred to as *Hondo Yeminda/Jambanja/Third Chimurenga*, owing to the unfinished or incomplete decolonisation process (Mhandara, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera, 2020; Chinyonga and Kurebwa, 2023). In 2005, vicious violence was recorded through Operation Restore Order (*Murambatsvina*) which displaced approximately 700 000 people (Bratton and Masunungure, 2007; Benyera, 2014; Mhandara, 2020). Since 2000, the country has witnessed a series of electoral violence (Masunungure, 2011; Sachikonye, 2011; Benyera, 2014). Recent episodes of violence were recorded in 2018 (1 August shootings) and in January 2019, denoting the tenacity of violence in Zimbabwe's political matrix (Chinyonga and Kurebwa, 2023). All these trends of violence and conflicts affect the social and political integrity of the country. The major conflict that still demands urgent attention is that of the Matabeleland disturbances in the early 1980s which polarised the country along ethnic and tribal lines. The NPRC was established to address, through the reconciliation process, these past violence and conflict cycles that left the country divided and polarised.

RECONCILIATION EFFORTS IN ZIMBABWE

The efforts for reconciliation in the Old Republic (Mugabe's era) in Zimbabwe were characterised by amnesia and commissions of inquiry. Amnesia, according to Tendi (2010), as cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera (2020: 21) "is a policy which entails a conscious decision by the government not to investigate past atrocities because such investigations will jeopardise precarious peacebuilding efforts". This coincides with Rotberg and Thompson (2010), who assert that addressing past issues is viewed as a way of retrieving anger and thereby foment hostile relations. In the Old Republic amnesia was grounded in the racial reconciliation policy underpinned by the forgiving and forgetting mantra (Raftopoulos and Savage, 2004) This

was well captured in Mugabe's speeches that reiterated that 'let bygones be bygones' (Nyarota ,2006:145) By its very nature, amnesia is out of the ambits of reconciliation process, hence all amnesia attempts appear to be fruitless in the face of resolving Zimbabwe's conflicts and violence issues.

Apart from amnesia, reconciliation and justice were pursued through the commissions of inquiry in the Old Republic. In the early years of independence, two commissions were established, namely the Dumbutshena Commission of Inquiry of 1982 and the Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry of 1983, to address violence and conflict issues (Mhandara, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The commissions failed to establish meaningful progress toward reconciliation. During the Government of National Unity period, the short-lived Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration of 2008 was established. However, it dismally failed because of the tense political environment at that time (Machakanja, 2010; Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera, 2020). The commission of inquiry found its way into the post-Mugabe era and Mnangagwa established the Motlanthe Commission to address the post-election violence of August 2018 (Mhandara, 2020; Chinyonga and Kurebwa, 2023). The bottom line of the argument is that all these efforts failed to bring in a full-fledged reconciliation process and past violence and conflict issues remain unresolved.

NATIONAL PEACE AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Following in the past footprints of commissions to deal with various conflicts and human rights violation issues that dogged the country, the NPRC to the commission conundrum was added in 2013. Gwinyayi (2022) conceives the NPRC as the institutional centrepiece of the government's post-conflict justice, peace, healing, and reconciliation programme. The NPRC was established by section 251 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 20 and the

major objective of the commission is to ensure post-conflict justice, healing, and reconciliation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the quest for understanding and deducing the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, special reference should be given to the concept of reconciliation in conflict resolution processes. Reconciliation, as a concept, is very complex (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013). The complexity is derived from its means-end depiction (Bloomfield, 2003). Reconciliation is in itself a means to achieve a desired outcome and, on the other hand, it is a goal. This means that reconciliation can be treated as an outcome and a process. In this regard, this study exploits reconciliation as a conceptual guide for understanding the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process in that means-end depiction (as a process and outcome). The perspective of reconciliation as a process focuses on the transformation of the nature of the relationship between perpetrators and victims with the possibility of creating a liveable environment for both parties (Maoz, 2004). Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004) link the reconciliation process to psychological changes and argue that reconciliation begins when the parties in the conflict begin to change their beliefs, attitudes, goals, motivations, and emotions. Psychological changes can best be motivated by truth-saying that opens the room for retrospective apology (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013). It is on this basis that reconciliation, as a process and outcome (beliefs, motivations, and interests), is used as a conceptual or reference point in the investigation of truth-telling in the reconciliation process. The focus is on how truth-telling facilitates psychological changes in parties and how the changes result in the possibility of the creation of a new environment, characterised by harmony and accommodation.

For a successful reconciliation process from the initiation of the process rooted in truth-telling to the desired outcomes defined by the change in behaviour, knowledge, attitude, and interest, the NPRC needs to operate within the purview of transitional justice. This is because transitional justice, as a concept, accommodates the whole process of reconciliation and identifies truth-telling as a central tenet for a successful justice mechanism. Transitional justice is a long and accommodative concept that extends beyond criminal prosecutions, truth-telling, institutional reform, and reparations and covers commemorative practices and memory work, educational reform, and reconciliation initiatives (Gready and Robins 2014). Several points can be noted from the aforementioned concepts of transitional justice. Firstly, the concept pays special attention to the nexus between truth-telling and the reconciliation process. This means that truth-telling is more of a prerequisite element for the reconciliation process to kick-start. Secondly, the concept presents a holistic approach to reconciliation that is not only limited to prosecution, but also covers activities that will erase the memory of the harsh and condemned experience of the past through commemorative practices, memory work, and educational changes. The work and operation of the NPRC need to be situated within the mainstream tenets of the transitional justice concept that importantly demands linking truth-telling to the reconciliation process.

In addition, transitional justice is a very reliable concept in this context of showing the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process by drawing lessons from the NPRC. Transitional justice aims to achieve a noticeable transition through judicial and non-judicial means. In this regard, transitional justice, as a concept, allows the use of both restorative and retributive justice mechanisms. For this study, transitional justice can be exploited from non-judicial means, which is restorative justice through truth-telling and reconciliation. In this sense, the NPRC is mandated to promote participation that leads to

empowerment which contributes to the collective notion of truth (Wietekamp *et al.*, 2006). The aim of the NPRC is transition, therefore the importance or nexus of the truth-telling and reconciliation process with particular reference to NPRC can be interrogated within the context of transitional justice as a conceptual landmark.

FINDINGS

The NPRC was constitutionally mandated to address past conflicts and disputes in 2013. The commission operates under the key pillars of post-conflict justice, healing and reconciliation, development and implementation of programmes for national healing, unity, and cohesion, peaceful resolution of disputes, and encouraging people to tell the truth about the past and facilitating the making of amends and the provision of justice (Mhandara, 2020). In short, all these functions speak to the reconciliation process. This means that the fundamental goal of the NPRC is to ensure a reconciliation process in the nation by resolving past conflicts and issues through an intricate combination of various tactics that include truth-telling and healing programmes. Since 2018 after the commission was enabled to function through an enabling act, a disinclined effort towards the achievement or realisation of its goal is observed and displayed. This warrants the investigation of the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process, drawing lessons from the NPRC from 2018 up to the present. is important in the reconciliation process because it acts as:

TRUTH-TELLING AS A FOUNDATION TO RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE MECHANISMS

Lessons learned from history denote that truth-telling is a foundational or prerequisite element for all reconciliation and justice-seeking processes. In explaining the reconciliation process that chronologically unfolds one step after the other, Mhandara (2020) names truth-telling as the first step in the reconciliation process. Truth-telling is important

to identify the cause of conflict and, according to Mawondo (2009:4), “If reconciliation is to occur, what is important is that the initial cause of the conflict must be honestly and earnestly reappraised to find a genuine solution.” Two important points can be generated and emphasised regarding truth-telling as a foundation for reconciliation and justice mechanisms. The first point to make is that truth-telling helps to pinpoint the cause of the conflict upon which the prescription can be made in the form of reconciliation to resolve the conflict. The second point is that truth-telling helps to shape the path of the course of justice to be followed. It allows the victims to retell past experiences so that the convenor can assess and decide on the course of justice to be observed, either retributive or restorative (judicial and non-judicial). This results in the reconciliation process with justice (Mawondo, 2009). It is important to make it clear that the NPRC is more inclined to restorative justice which is the non-judicial means of justice which prioritises reconciliation as a process and outcome towards peacebuilding. Lessons displayed by the NPRC regarding the truth-telling and reconciliation process is that the former is an engine of the latter. The NPRC, since 2018, seems to be defined by the lack of truth-telling. This manifests in a complex situation of limited truth-telling programmes that mobilise people and encourage them to re-tell past events. Through an unwavering call for truth-telling, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa offers sufficient foundation for all justice processes to operate. The NPRC in Zimbabwe demonstrated the opposite position whereby the call and programmes to encourage truth-telling are limited. This makes the route to justice mechanism more confusing and ambiguous.

TRUTH-TELLING AS TOOL TO IDENTIFY VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Truth-telling plays a crucial role in the reconciliation process of helping to identify the perpetrators and victims. Past conflicts that characterise the Zimbabwe conflict episodes are of the perpetrator-victim dimension that significantly torn asunder the relations among

members of communities and between tribal groups. For instance, the major and very disturbing conflict known as *Gukurahundi*, which occurred in the 1980s in the southern part of the country, registers to this form of conflict dimension of perpetrator-victim relations (Bloomfield, 2003, Mhandara, 2020, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera, 2020). Even the 2018 August killings that resulted in the establishment of the Motlanthe Commission can be construed as the perpetrator-victim dimension that transcends to the killer-killed dimension. Truth-telling is important to identify the victims and perpetrators so that the reconciliation process can be initiated smoothly. A preliminary examination of the NPRC's operations indicates that the identification of both victims and perpetrators is conspicuously evident and robustly pursued. Gwinyayi (2020) alludes this to the suppression of truth. In concert, Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi (2021) lament the lack of truth in the operation of NPRC.

Given the fact that the operation of the NPRC is characterised by a lack and suppression of truth, efforts toward the naming and identification of the perpetrators and victims of past conflicts remain a pipedream. This is in contrast with the demands and requisites of the reconciliation process. Reconciliation as a process demands truth-telling as a fundamental starting point (Mhandara, 2020). Bloomfield (2003) states that reconciliation is an overarching process that includes truth and other issues. Truth-telling is, therefore, a fundamental element in the reconciliation process. The proponents of the transitional justice concept emphasised truth-telling as a key element in the transitional justice process. Since 2018, the NPRC has failed to identify the victims and perpetrators of past conflicts, hence the desired reconciliation process is failing to take off. In this regard, a lesson that can be drawn from the operation of the NPRC is that truth-telling is very significant in the reconciliation process.

TRUTH-TELLING AS A STIMULUS FOR APOLOGY

The NPRC structure and operations vindicate the top-down approach to conflict resolution, healing, and reconciliation. This approach has several weaknesses, including the failure of communities to cooperate and participate in the reconciliation process efforts. Thus, the reason some scholars forward an extensive prescription analysis that calls for the local turn approach in conflict resolution (Mhandara, 2020). Given the perceived weakness of the NPRC approach to reconciliation and healing, truth-telling is a tool for the integration of the conflicting parties as a stimulus factor for apology. It invokes the memory to create an avenue for retrospective apologies (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013). As assigned by the constitution together with the NPRC Act, the commission was entrusted with the duty to ensure healing, justice, and reconciliation in the country, using all means possible including programmes for justice and healing and encouragement of people to tell the truth. The absolute lack of truth-telling makes the whole process of reconciliation irrelevant without any healing mechanisms that can lead to an apology. Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004) identify apology as a method of the reconciliation process. Apology helps victims to cancel negative feelings about the perpetrators, and thereby allowing psychological changes to take place. This can be done if sufficient truth is told, reappraised, and rehearsed. For the NPRC, the truth was suppressed (Mazambani and Tapfumaneyi, 2023) and the victims are still harbouring negative feelings towards the perpetrators, hence the potential for a reconciliation process is limited.

TRUTH-TELLING AS A SYNOPSIS FOR THE COURSE OF JUSTICE

Truth-telling in the reconciliation process stands to be a synopsis of the course of justice to be followed. For a successful reconciliation process to take place, a restorative and retributive course of justice should come into play. This is important to restore and replace the values and

reputation that were damaged during a conflict (Mhandara, 2020; Bloomfield, 2003).

Table 1 shows the types of truth that can be deduced from truth-telling sessions, their characteristics, and their importance to the reconciliation process.

Table 1: Types of Truths and Indications (*Deducted from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission coupled with the literature that surrounds the NPRC in Zimbabwe*)

Types of Truth	Characteristics	Indications from NPRC
Forensic Truth	Scientific evidence-based truth	None
Narrative Truth	Story-telling truth generated from sharing experiences	None (suppressed)
Social Truth	Truth generated from social interaction of people	Available (unorganised)
Restorative Truth	Collective evidential truth based on human experience	None

The table denotes the types of truth, their characteristics, and efforts made by the NPRC. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathered all forms of truth, and the reconciliation process was initiated smoothly reaching the desired outcome. A lesson that can be learned from Table 1 with particular reference to the NPRC, is that truth is a central phenomenon in the reconciliation process and, without it, the process will not take off. This is reflected by the incomplete course of justice (restorative) by the NPRC. The path to justice and reconciliation in Zimbabwe under the championship of NPRC is weak, frivolous, and inapt. This is because the NPRC lacks the baseline of the reconciliation process that lies in truth-telling. Within the context of justice mechanisms that stand to be yardsticks for reconciliation, the NPRC is located nowhere with zero loci, pointing either to the traditional post-1945 Nuremberg-criminal justice

(Ndlovu-Gastheni and Benyera, 2016) of the perpetrator-victim dimension or survivor's justice (Mamndani, 2015) of a collective output of a new society construed and pictured as new. The bottom line, therefore, is that truth-telling is an essential component in the reconciliation process as it sheds light on the course of justice to be adhered.

TRUTH-TELLING AS A FACTOR FOR THE INTERPLAY OF ACCOUNTABILITY, REPARATIONS AND RECONCILIATION

As alluded to in the discussion above, reconciliation can be treated as a means to achieve a desired outcome or as a goal (outcome) itself that manifests in the change of behaviour, attitude, and interest (Bloomfield, 2003). Truth-telling has a positive impact on the reconciliation process by allowing the interplay of accountability, reparations, and reconciliation as an outcome. This is the formula integrated by several post-conflict societies to reach the desired point of reconciliation and justice. For instance, the successful reconciliation process in South Africa was anchored on truth-telling that facilitates the interplay of accountability, reparations, and reconciliation. In Zimbabwe, the lack of truth-telling is the stumbling block to the interplay of accountability, reparations, and forgiveness to ensure successful reconciliation. In reviewing the work and effectiveness of the NPRC, Chinyonga and Kurebwa (2023) submit that no prosecution of the perpetrators was done by NPRC (indicating the lack of accountability in matters that have to do with past conflicts) and no reparations have been paid to the victims of the conflicts. The failure of the NPRC to ensure the interplay of accountability, reparations, and forgiveness in the journey toward reconciliation, healing, and justice is attributable to the suppression of truth.

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The impact of truth-telling in the reconciliation process is unimaginable. As sufficiently indicated by several post-conflict

societies that successfully engineered reconciliation and justice processes, truth-telling lies at the heart of conflict resolution and peacebuilding through the reconciliation process. There is a direct correlation between truth-telling and the reconciliation process such that the success of the latter is determined and shaped by the former. The work and operation of the NPRC in Zimbabwe since 2018 provide the basis for the justification of this argument of the magnificent role of truth-telling in the reconciliation process. Because of the suppression of truth and lack of truth-telling efforts in general, the NPRC turns out to be fruitless and its operation futile. In this regard, one can conclude that truth-telling is important in the reconciliation process because: it is a foundational element to the reconciliation process, helps to identify the perpetrators and victims, it is a synopsis of the course of justice to adhere, it opens space for an apology and it allows the interplay of accountability, reparation, and reconciliation (as an outcome).

The investigation of the importance of truth-telling in the reconciliation process by drawing lessons from the operation and work delivered by the NPRC since 2018 trenchantly exposes that truth-telling is crucial in the reconciliation process. With such a deep understanding and appreciation of all types of truth that are fundamentally important in the reconciliation process, this article recommends that the commission needs to adjust to flexible and competitive means of encouraging people to tell the truth about past violent circumstances. Truth-telling is the foundation for any kind of reconciliation and healing in the journey to justice. In this regard, strong and, perhaps, institutionalised mechanisms, are needed to gather the truth about the past which can define the course of justice. In this regard, this article is recommending the introduction of story-telling sessions by the NPRC for truth-telling. Social truth with the possibility to heal society and individuals is likely to be generated from story-telling. Besides being a form of relief, story-telling is more of strong bones that anchor the spiritual life of human fulfilment. It

helps the victims to re-tell the past in a manner that speaks to relief, healing, and unburdening of the psyche. Such relief can prompt the former enemies to find each other and live together. It is important to note that the story-telling sessions need to be conducted in a politically-free environment that defines the new order for new outcomes.

In addition, the NPRC in Zimbabwe has been criticised as a top-down approach to justice and reconciliation process that gives too much attention to the top officials denigrating the grass-roots and locals (Gwinyayi, 2020; Ndlovu-Gastheni, 2020). As an alternative to this, Mhandara (2020) forwards the local turn of a community-based reconciliation approach drawing lessons from East Timor and the Fambul project in Sierra Leone. This study supports the decentralisation of the NPRC to incorporate communities at the grass-root level. In this regard, truth-telling, especially for social truth, should be engineered from the grass-root areas. Therefore, this article recommends the decentralisation of the NPRC from top officials to the grass-roots where social and narrative truths can be generated which is essential for the reconciliation process in Zimbabwe. This suggestion is similar to the victim-oriented approach that was used for a successful reconciliation process in South Africa (Backer, 2010). Without truth, there is no reconciliation.

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