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Alternative Truths as Reconciliatory Mechanisms in Post-Conflict Societies

A Comparative Analysis of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa and Timor-Leste

Otilia REHNSTROM

Graduate student at the Department of History, Uppsala Universitet
otilia.rehnstrom.7937@student.uu.se

Abstract
Truth and reconciliation commissions (TCRs) make use of truth-seeking and truth-telling as reconciliatory mechanisms in the aftermaths of intrastate and intra-ethnic conflicts. TCRs are the subject of scrutiny by many scholars who argue that these mechanisms are incompatible with some local needs, norms and contexts, and therefore suggest that other reconciliatory methods may be more successful. This essay argues that truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms can be successfully used for reconciliation efforts if they are reimagined. This is because any incompatibility between these mechanisms and the realities of some local contexts are rooted in the narrow understandings of what truth(s) are relevant for reconciliation, stemming from the fact that they were founded within 'regimes of truth' that reflect Western liberal normative ideals. Two TCRs will be examined through engagement with survivor and victim testimony: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, deemed largely successful, and the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, deemed largely unsuccessful. It will be illustrated that the understandings of truth that informed both TCRs reflected the local norms and needs of survivors and victims in South Africa than it did those in Timor-Leste. Ultimately, the essay finds that truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms need to better align with: one, local practices for reconciliation and addressing conflicts; and two, the needs of the victims in regard to what truths, or what information, they need for healing and reconciliation.

Keywords
Conflict resolution; truth commissions; local norms

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1. Introduction

Truth-seeking and truth-telling as reconciliatory mechanisms are intended to help achieve restorative and rectificatory justice in the aftermath of conflicts and have frequently been utilised in intrastate and intra-ethnic contexts in the past forty years. Varying slightly from case to case, the purpose of finding truth according to the truth and reconciliation commissions set up to uncover it is to promote individual and communal healing, to peace-build and shape a collective memory, and to acknowledge the past and the suffering of victims and survivors (Robins, 2012: 84; Vella, 2014: 93; Villa-Vicencio, 2010: 45).

Truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs) are the subject of scrutiny by many scholars who examine the successes, failures, and limitations of TRCs. Theories on the viability of TRCs presented by scholars Louise Vella, Rosalind Shaw and Simon Robins will directly be engaged with in this essay to determine how TRCs, truth-seeking and truth-telling can best align with local needs and norms in the contexts of which they are implemented. The aforementioned scholars all emphasise an incompatibility of truth-seeking and truth-telling with some local contexts and therefore suggest that other reconciliatory mechanisms may be more successful.

This essay builds on this idea that reconciliatory processes need to align with local needs and norms, but it asks a vital question: are truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms actually incompatible with the realities of some local contexts or is the reason for the incompatibility rooted in what truth(s) are sought and how they are collected? This essay will consider how 'regimes of truth,' a concept proposed by Michel Foucault, have led to narrow understandings of how truth factors into reconciliation that reflects Western liberal normative ideals. Truth-seeking and truth-telling can be made compatible with local norms and needs if their uses are reimagined. This essay will analyse the successes and failures of two TRCs to determine how the commissions used truth-seeking and truth-telling to meet–or to not meet–local needs and norms. First, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC), which has generally been deemed successful, will be inspected. Second, the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR) will be examined, which was comparatively unsuccessful. The local contexts of South Africa and Timor-Leste in the aftermath of their respective conflicts will be analysed through testimonies from victims and survivors and by the engagement with prominent scholars' research on the cases.

It is concluded that the current understanding of what truth is necessary for

reconciliation and how it should be collected suited the local norms and needs of victims in South Africa better than it did victims in Timor-Leste. Likewise, it will be argued that if a broader understanding of what truth is necessary for reconciliation had been adopted in the case of Timor-Leste, truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms would have been more successful. Ultimately, to be effective, truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms need to better align with: one, local practices for reconciliation and addressing conflicts; and two, the needs of the victims in regard to what truths, or what information, they need for healing and reconciliation.

2. The Theory: Challenging the 'Regimes of Truth' of TRCs in Favour of Alternative Truths

Several scholars have examined the effectiveness of TRCs in the environments they have been implemented in and many find a similar fault in many of them: the truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms are at odds with local expectations and practices surrounding truth, memory, justice, and reconciliation. In her critique of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Louise Vella (2014: 94) argues that truth-seeking reflects normative values that were incompatible with local normative understandings and cultural practices of truth, justice, and reconciliation in the Solomon Islands and thus, the TCR was limited in achieving its peacebuilding goals. Likewise, Rosalind Shaw (2007: 186-7) warns of the actual non-universality of what she calls 'universals'–the presumption that mechanisms of transitional justice are built on universally applicable norms like human rights and democracy–and that when applied in some local contexts, unexpected and unwanted outcomes ensue. Finally, in his analysis of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) in Timor-Leste, Simon Robins (2012: 84) argues that because truth-telling as a mechanism can overrule local approaches to addressing conflicts, the use of this mechanism in Timor-Leste did not align with the needs of the victims and survivors and therefore did not promote individual and communal healing. Furthermore, Robins (2012: 84) proposes that a victim-centred approach is necessary to any successful reconciliatory process, meaning that "the goals of transition [are] defined by those most affected by conflict."

A victim-centred approach to using truth-telling and truth-seeking in reconciliatory processes can be achieved if the 'regimes of truth' that developed these mechanisms, and

continue to dictate how they are used, are challenged. According to Foucault (1980), 'regimes of truth' determine how pasts are retold. He argues that these regimes dictate:

> [The] types of disclosure which [the society] accepts and makes function as true; mechanisms and incidences which enable one to make true and false statements; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; [and] the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (1980: 131)

Current transitional justice discourses stem from Western liberal normative ideals, and these ideals in turn control the 'regimes of truth' of TRCs implemented to address conflicts. It is from this that the incompatibility between truth-telling and truth-seeking with some local norms and needs is rooted. Truth-seeking and truth-telling are largely victim-focused and the processes predominantly consist of either publicly or privately collecting victim testimony and data on their experiences to construct a pattern of events and, to ultimately, publish a public report (Hayner, 2002: 11, 20, 22). Additionally, truth-telling is considered vital for individual and collective healing and that the very act of telling one's story is therapeutic for victims (Robins, 2012: 84).

The Western liberal epistemological approach to knowledge and fact-finding therefore influences TRCs' 'regimes of truth.' The most important truth is the kind that can be collected as empirical data for the sake of the empirical data: it is collectible and investigable; it can be written down in reports and books; it can, ideally, be backed up by numerical data; it can be read and re-read; it is made up of the intangible stories of many so that one, collective, 'macro-truth' can emerge that is accessible to everyone. Truth-seeking and truth-telling for the sake of this kind of knowledge is what is ultimately at odds with local norms and needs. The current 'regimes of truth' that informs TRCs procedures–and most scholars' bias in judging these procedures–favours this kind of truth and knowledge. This kind of fact-finding, after all, provides TRCs with as close to an "objective" and all-encompassing truth–a 'macro-truth'–as possible. It is evident by Vella's, Shaw's, and Robins' writings that they, too, do not question what truth-telling and truth-seeking could be. Instead, they immediately conclude that these mechanisms, as used by TRCs currently, do not suit the needs and norms of the local contexts they write about.

Testimonies from victims and survivors make it clear, however, that they still want and need some truths. But these may be truths that do not fit into the current 'regimes of truth' because it begs for a different kind of technique and procedure for acquiring knowledge and requires that TRCs consider this knowledge vital to truth-finding. Therefore, this essay

suggests that truth, and the truth-seeking and truth-telling procedures that go with it, should be reimagined. They should include other investigative processes not currently utilised for finding truth but that, at their foundation, are looking to establish a truth just as important as the empirical 'macro-truth' depending, of course, on the needs of the locals. What kind of alternative truths these could be will be elaborated on in the case-study of Timor-Leste. Here, suggestions will be made about what kind of truths and procedures for truth-finding would have better suited the local needs and norms of the victims and would thus have successfully promoted healing and reconciliation. Specifically, it will be illustrated that truth-telling and truth-finding can be reimagined as procedures that include a more active kind of acknowledgement of suffering. To provide an example of this, it will be suggested that physical investigations into finding out the truth about missing and dead victims should, and can, be encompassed into TRC efforts when local norms and needs indicate a larger need for these kinds of truths.

3. The Cases: South Africa and Timor-Leste

To determine why the 'regimes of truth,' as informed by Western liberal normative ideals and utilised by TRCs in the aftermaths of conflicts, suit some local norms and victims' needs better than others, two cases where TRCs were implemented will be analysed: first, the essay will analyse the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) established in 1996 at the end of apartheid, which was deemed generally successful in its truth-seeking and truth-telling efforts; second, the essay will analyse the arguably unsuccessful Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor (CAVR, according to its Portuguese acronym) established in 2001 to address abuses from all sides during the Indonesian invasion from 1974-99. These cases were chosen primarily for the equally important similarities and differences in their local contexts. The many similarities are what make a comparison possible to begin with. However, the fact that so many similarities exist between two cases that have such drastically different outcomes in terms of success–or lack thereof–indicates that analysing these differences will yield an answer to why. Likewise, being one of the earlier cases wherein transition justice mechanisms were adopted, the SATRC, regardless of its successes and limitations, is often used as the model truth commission against which other truth commissions are compared to (Villa-Vicencio, 2010: 44). It will then be illustrated that the successes of each respective TRC was not rooted in the fact that victims and survivors needed truth-seeking and truth-telling to heal and reconcile in the South African case, but not

in the case of Timor-Leste. Instead, it will be suggested that a reimagination of what truth-telling and truth-seeking could entail in order to better suit local norms and needs could have resulted in better successes for CAVR.

The SATRC was created in 1996 in response to the dismantling of apartheid – the oppressive system of institutionalised racial segregation officially implemented in 1948 and designed to maintain South Africa's white minority's authoritarian domination over political, economic and social spheres in South African society. South Africa has a long history of colonialism; the region was first under Dutch colonial control and then under English colonial control, from which South Africa gained its full independence in 1931. The majority of the white minority living in South Africa were and are Afrikaners, settlers of predominantly Dutch descent. In 1948, the National Party came to power and officially implemented the system of apartheid, responding to any domestic opposition to the oppressive and abusive laws by the majority Black African population with detentions, torture, killings, disappearances and massacres. The dismantling of apartheid and the truth-seeking of crimes committed by perpetrators under the system were considered vital to the anticipated transition to democracy that had started in the decade before the SATRC was set up. It is on these grounds that the truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms are considered by many scholars to have been successful; the uncovered truth created a foundation on which national healing and the subsequent development of a South African citizenship and democracy could occur, and the truth-finding efforts by all actors involved indicated that reconciliation was, in fact, underway (Fullard and Rousseau, 2009: 2; Buckley-Zistel, 2014: 152).

The truth-telling and truth-seeking endeavours by the SATRC was, for many victims, much more about the official acknowledgement of already well-known abuses and crimes against humanity, and not about clarifying uncertain motives, causes and events, which is made the primary focus of some TRCs (Hayner 2002: 20; Villa-Vicencio, 2010: 45). The techniques of these truth mechanisms were carried out in a way that aligned with Western liberal approaches to collecting and compiling information. Truth-seeking and truth-telling occurred predominantly in public hearings where subjective truths were encouraged and where the desired outcome was the findings of patterns of abuse to form a national narrative and for victims to experience a therapeutic catharsis (Hayner, 2002: 2, 36; Villa-Vicencio, 2010: 49). Giving victims a 'voice' was thus a principal truth-seeking and truth-telling technique. But not only was this approach suitable for finding the 'macro-truth' that was deemed necessary for the transition to a democracy, these techniques also aligned with individual needs, expectations

and local norms. The next section of this essay will explore this theory through testimonies from victims and survivors and by examining common local approaches to dealing with conflict and reconciliation.

The CAVR was established in 2001 to investigate human rights abuses and crimes against humanity committed against East Timorese nationals from 1974-1999 from all sides involved in the Indonesian invasion that commenced in 1975. Timor-Leste, or East-Timor, as it was known prior to 2002, was a Portuguese colony for centuries but remained underdeveloped and unconnected to the global commercial network throughout that period (Dunn, 1997: 283). In 1975, in response to the dwindling interest from Portugal to continue the colony's gradual decolonisation process and the threat of Indonesian military attacks at its borders, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) declared Timor-Leste an independent state (Dunn, 1997: 283-86). Indonesia saw this as an opportunity to fully invade and did so with the intent of subduing FRETILIN and any local resistance; the Indonesian army's campaign of "encirclement and annihilation" from 1977-1978 forced resistance members into the countryside and mountains to hide (Robins, 2012: 86). The next twenty years was marked by fighting between the Indonesian army and Timorese resistance, which exposed Timorese civilians to rape, massacres, killings, displacements, disappearances, detention and torture predominantly at the hands of Indonesian forces, but some at the hands of the resistance movements. CAVR was set up to prioritise reconciliation, both domestically and with Indonesia, over criminal justice, and any effort to consult with local populations and victims of the conflict to determine their expectations and needs of transitional justice was limited in both scale and scope (Robins, 2012: 88). The truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms therefore ended up mirroring Western liberal notions about what kind of truth was valuable for reconciliation, and how it should have been collected; namely, they prioritised writing a 'macro-truth.' By the time CAVR submitted their report to parliament in 2005, they had collected 7669 statements and conducted over 1000 interviews with victims (Robins, 2012: 88).

There was an attempt by CAVR to engage local restorative practices to promote reconciliation; the Community Reconciliation Process (CRP) was created to deal with less serious crimes and had community leaders lead public hearings in which victims and perpetrators could participate (Robins, 2012: 89). However, the outreach by both CRP and CAVR was so poor that few people knew the two were related and only a small minority of the population had any contact at all with either body; according to Robins (2012: 97) between

three and four per cent of people participated in the CRP and only two per cent of the adult population were contacted by CAVR to provide statements. Despite the poorly executed attempt to engage with local norms for reconciliation, the approach taken by the CAVR to truth-seek did not align with the local needs and expectations. This ultimately led to a failed truth-seeking mission and missed opportunities for reconciliation. However, the issue with CAVR lies not only in the outreach, as Robins claims, but also in the narrow understanding and limited techniques of truth-seeking and truth-telling. The following section will consider victim testimonies and Robins' research findings to determine that victims and survivors did, in fact, need truth to heal and reconcile. By reimagining what truth in the context of reconciliation and healing can entail and how it can be collected, this essay will illustrate how CAVR could have approached truth and reconciliation and achieved better results.

The SATRC and CAVR operated in vastly different post-conflict societies and contexts, but there are certain similarities in both cases. For one, both commissions deal with long-running conflicts. In the case of South Africa, the apartheid era lasted for 46 years and was preceded by decades of similar racial policies. In Timor-Leste, the conflict lasted for 25 years. Both commissions also aimed to use truth-seeking and truth-telling as mechanisms for reconciliation and healing; this is particularly important for the sake of this comparison because the inherently similar goals of both TRCs yet differing outcomes demands study. It is also notable that Christianity is widely practised in both countries, with Catholicism dominating in Timor-Leste and Protestantism in South Africa (Robins, 2012: 87; Office of International Religious Freedom, 2018: 2). Both conflicts also occurred in post-colonial societies. However, South Africa was a former British and Dutch colony that was, compared to Timor-Leste, much better connected to the global commercial and communication network. The conflict also occurred between colonial settlers and local populations with the government and its associated bodies being the primary perpetrators. Timor-Leste, on the other hand, was a former Portuguese colony with little colonial settlement and development in comparison; the conflict in Timor-Leste occurred instead due to the invading Indonesian forces who perpetrated most of the atrocities. Moreover, compared to the fact that few Timorese knew much about CAVR and its efforts, Villa-Vicencio (2010, 47) points out that "few, if any, South Africans failed to have an opinion on the [SA]TRC." Wide-reaching public engagement and general outreach by the TCRs is one of the most notable differences between the two. Furthermore, the transition to democracy was a propelling force that brought apartheid to an end in South Africa, thus informing the SATRC's end-goals, whereas independence and self-government factored into

the conflict in Timor-Leste and the subsequent efforts of the UN's intervention (Dunn, 1997: 281). Finally, the most important difference in both cases culminates in the differing needs and expectations in the context of the local post-conflict norms by the affected victims; this will be explored in the section below.

4. Discussion: Reimagining 'Regimes of Truth' and the Value of Alternative Truths for Reconciliation

Through testimonies and collected research by other scholars it becomes clear that victims and survivors from South Africa and Timor-Leste both needed truth-seeking and truth-telling to heal and reconcile, but that local contexts and specific needs meant that the sought-after truth looked different in each case.

In South Africa, the truth-seeking and truth-telling mechanisms as they are commonly implemented by TRCs were largely what victims and survivors wanted and needed. One survivor, Thembi Simelane-Nadimeng, expressed her need to know what happened to her sister who was abducted by the South African security police, saying that she favoured knowing the truth over retributive justice: "I am favouring prosecutions now because it is the only option I have, but it I had an option to sit down and talk [with Nokuthula's abductors] I would choose that" (Villa-Vicencio, 2010: 63). It also becomes clear that truth through testimony is what some victims wanted by how they express their frustration over what they perceived to be untruthful confessions from perpetrators. Monica Godolozi, a widow whose husband disappeared, learned of his fate when several policemen testified that they had kidnapped him and two other men, killed them, and dumped their bodies. Godolozi believed the policemen were lying about not torturing the men before killing them and that therefore, she could not forgive them: "There's nothing they could do to make me forgive them—except, if they told the truth, then yes. Anybody who tells the truth, I can forgive them" (Hayner, 2002: 2). Another woman, Elizabeth Hashe, whose husband had died in the same circumstance as Godolozi's husband, readily welcomed the truth. In a hearing the policemen's confessions she said "At least now I know a bit of the story" (Hayner, 2002: 2).

In the same interview with Hayner, Hashe also emphasised her desire for peace: "How are we going to find peace if we don't forgive? My husband was fighting for peace for all of South Africa. How can you correct a wrong with a wrong?" (Hayner, 2002: 2-3). Another survivor, Simpson Xakeka, when asked by Hayner how he felt about giving his statement about

being shot during a march in Daveyton said that "Emotionally it helped a great deal. It helped me to come to terms with it" (Hayner, 2002: 151). Hayner then asked why Xakeka thought it helped, and he replied, "There's a saying in our culture that 'coughing it out relieves everything.' I'm not going to forget what happened to me, but talking about it provides emotional relief" (Hayner, 2002: 151). Not only does Xakeka admit that this kind of truth-telling was what he needed to heal, but he also alludes to the local norms on how to address conflict that informed his belief in this. Chairman of the SATRC, archbishop Desmond Tutu, shared similar sentiments about how local practices influenced the willingness of victims and survivors to engage with truth-telling. He observed that "Retributive justice is largely Western. The African understanding is far more restorative - not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew. The justice we hope for is restorative of the dignity of the people" (As cited in Villa-Vicencio, 2010: 66). Truth-seeking and truth-telling, being mechanisms of restorative justice, are therefore particularly well suited to the South African context.

Furthermore, the truth-telling and truth-seeking in South Africa allowed for a 'macro-truth' to emerge. This 'macro-truth' was essential in nation-building and any participation in the creation of this shared memory allowed for individuals to feel as though they contributed to building the nation directly; this phenomenon suggests that reconciliation through a 'macro-truth' in South Africa was successful (Buckley-Zistel, 2014: 152). Finally, it has already been established that the truth-telling and truth-seeking efforts by the SATRC was less about uncovering and revealing suffering, and more about officially and publicly acknowledging suffering. It will be illustrated shortly, in the analysis of Timor-Leste, that the power of truth-seeking and truth-finding to acknowledge suffering is just as important and powerful to healing and reconciliation as uncovering facts and collecting data to create a 'macro-truth' is, dependent, of course, on local needs.

Testimonies collected from, and interviews conducted with, victims and survivors in Timor-Leste after the CAVR's report was released reveals two things: first, that they were unsatisfied with the truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms and that CAVR was largely unsuccessful in helping them heal and reconcile; second, that despite the disappointment with CAVR's truth-finding, truth was still something that was very much needed for them to heal and reconcile. Robins (2012: 93), in his field research, found that justice for victims and survivors was perceived as "economic support, recognition, truth about the fate of the missing and access to remains." One mother of a missing man said that "the main thing we ask is to tell

the truth: what have they done to them, to give clear information that we took them away" (Robins, 2012: 96). The brother of a missing man said "Now we have independence we want to investigate and ask why you killed Timorese people that looked for food to eat. You can tell us why you shot unarmed people" (Robins, 2012: 96). The information this man seeks is the kind of truth the CAVR sought to deliver in its final report, but the limited outreach of the commission's efforts means confusion and anger remains in many victims' and survivors' minds. The overwhelming number of families that Robins interviewed had not received any information about their missing and presumed dead relatives and they had therefore not had access to their bodies; regardless of their relatives' fates, access to their bodies was considered of utmost importance (Robins, 2012: 95). Even though most Timorese are Catholic, beliefs about malign spirits resulting from a lack of the proper burial rituals are pervasive across the country (Robins, 2012: 95). In an interview, a man with a missing brother said:

> We cannot live in peace, because the spirits are too strong ...[They are the spirits of] those who died without knowing where they are buried ... You know, us Timorese, how we deal with the spirits. We know they died, but just think we did not get to bury them, and they died disgracefully, because we were not able to do any rituals. (Robins, 2012: 95)

The lack of knowledge, or truth, about the fates of loved ones means many Timorese cannot heal and reconcile. Moreover, the kind of truth that many Timorese seek is official acknowledgement and recognition of their suffering and sacrifices. Specifically, the majority of families wanted memorials erected in the name of their missing family members, especially when there were no bodies to bury (Robins, 2012: 94). One woman whose husband is missing iterated her sentiments about this when asked what she needed to heal: "Firstly, something that can't fade with time: a monument that will stay, for those who died in order to always be remembered by everyone, [including the] next generation" (Robins, 2012: 94). Monuments and memorial sites can, and should, be considered a kind of truth-telling through acknowledgement. These sites are a way of making collective memories tangible, visible, and surviving – all of which are outcomes that align with contemporary notions of what truth-telling and truth-seeking should achieve. Finally, Robins discusses the success of the valorisation program in Timor-Leste by the Veterans' Commissions which recognised the sacrifices of tens of thousands Timorese military and civilian veterans of the liberation struggle by giving them medals of honour and, in some cases, monetary compensation (Robins, 2012: 89). Robins (2012: 99) found that this program best addressed the victims' and survivors' needs of families with dead or missing relatives and had, overall, excellent outreach. Arguably, the reason this

program was so successful was because it provided the kind of truth-telling that the victims and survivors needed: official acknowledgement of the suffering and sacrifices of the individuals and families. The children of a missing man who received a medal to honour his participation in the fight for independence said that "Yes, we are happy [with the medals and pension], it means a history of my father's sacrifice to help free the country; although he is not here with us but this is something that honours him" (Robins, 2012: 99). The daughter of another missing man who also received a medal said "If we receive [a medal], we will consider we have received the body of my father" (Robins, 2012: 99). Robins does not consider the valorisation program to be an example of truth-telling because the goal of the program was not to truth-tell.

This essay argues that programs like the valorisation program should, and could, be considered a viable method of truth-telling. Acknowledgement is evidently an important part of the truth-telling process for victims and survivors and the 'regimes of truth' that inform TRCs approaches to truth-finding recognises this. But, acknowledgement is rarely made the prioritised outcome of truth-telling, rather it is considered an automatic outcome of a process that has it as a primary goal to construct a 'macro-truth' for the sake of nation-building and an empirical historical understanding of events. Acknowledgement needs to be considered a primary goal, too. If this is done, TRCs are more likely to consider reimagining techniques of truth-finding to expand their metaphorical toolbox of mechanisms to include, perhaps, the erection of monuments as a method of truth-telling. It is worth noting that some TRCs do recommend actions for the local government to take to continue the reconciliation process, but these are not always acted upon. In the event that these actions consist of acknowledgement or further truth-telling that actually align with the local populations' needs, the TRC should reallocate some of their efforts to acting upon these recommendations themselves if they are able to.

Of course, it could be argued that expanding truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms like this means that TRCs will act beyond their purview. But, the TRC's purview, as well as the 'regimes of truth' that informs it, should be challenged to determine how TRCs can be adapted to best serve local norms and needs. If local populations and elites consent to, and participate in, the erection of memorials, the buttressing of recognition programs like Timor-Lester's valorisation program, and the physical searches and uncovering of graves, these mechanisms should arguably be included as truth-seeking and truth-telling techniques. Had CAVR expanded their truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms to specifically meet the local

needs for truth and considered local norms dictating the importance of burial ceremonies, truth could have been more successfully utilised as a tool for healing and reconciliation.

5. Conclusion

Truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms do not have to be incompatible with local needs and norms for reconciliation and healing. Rather, by challenging the current 'regimes of truth' informing TRCs' approaches to truth-finding and reimagining what truth-telling and truth-seeking processes can entail, in accordance with local needs and norms, these mechanisms can, in fact, be successful. This essay examined the SATRC in South Africa and the CAVR in Timor-Leste to determine why, in South Africa, truth-seeking and truth-telling were considered successful by many victims and survivors in bringing about healing and reconciliation, whereas in Timor-Leste, it was not. Ultimately, it was found that local contexts, norms, and needs by victims dictated that although truth was needed by victims and survivors in both countries to heal, the kind of truth that was needed had to be uncovered and told in vastly different ways. This essay concluded by suggesting that truth-seeking and truth-telling should have been reimagined in Timor-Leste's case to include processes that prioritised acknowledgement of suffering and more physical methods of finding truth, like uncovering mass graves and finding the bodies of missing people. Therefore, in future implementations of TRCs in the aftermath of conflicts, stronger engagement with victims and survivors to determine what truths are needed and wanted, and how these truths should be revealed, is vital for the success of the commissions in helping the local populations heal and reconcile.

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