Quest Journals
Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science
Volume 14 ~ Issue 4 (April 2026) pp: 205-215
ISSN(Online):2321-9467
www.questjournals.org

Research Paper

Institutional Frameworks and Conflict Management in Rwanda and Nigeria: A Comparative Study of the NURC Structure and Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Initiatives.

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Abstract
The institutional frameworks and structures for conflict management are key determinants of the failures and successes of peacebuilding and reconciliation in conflict torn societies. This study examined institutional frameworks for reconciliation and conflict management in Rwanda and Nigeria, with a focus on Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) and Nigeria's counter-terrorism and peacebuilding initiatives. The study is anchored on John Paul Lederach's reconciliation theory, which emphasizes truth, justice, mercy, and peace as core elements of sustainable post-conflict recovery. Using a qualitative and historical descriptive research design, the study relies on secondary data, including scholarly literature, policy documents, and official reports. Findings reveal that Rwanda's post-genocide reconciliation framework emerged from a context of total institutional collapse following the Rwandan Genocide. The establishment of the NURC provided a centralized and coordinated mechanism that integrates legal, cultural, and community-based approaches such as the Gacaca courts, civic education, and national dialogue platforms. This holistic and inclusive model has significantly contributed to rebuilding trust, restoring social cohesion, and promoting national unity. In contrast, Nigeria's response to insurgency, particularly the Boko Haram conflict, is characterized by a fragmented and security-driven framework. Although both kinetic and non-kinetic strategies exist, the absence of a central coordinating institution, limited community participation, and inadequate justice mechanisms have constrained effective reconciliation and sustainable peacebuilding. The study concludes that strong institutional coordination, inclusivity, community engagement, and integration of justice mechanisms are critical for successful reconciliation. It recommends that Nigeria adopt a more holistic and community-driven framework, drawing lessons from Rwanda's experience, to address the root causes of conflict and enhance long-term peace and stability.

Keywords: *Reconciliation, Peacebuilding, NURC, Boko Haram, Conflict Management*

*Received 12 Apr., 2026; **R**evised 22 Apr., 2026; **A**ccepted 25 Apr., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.*
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I. INTRODUCTION

The world has witnessed numerous conflicts and wars in recent decades, resulting in immense human suffering, displacement, and destruction. The aftermath of these conflicts often leaves deep-seated divisions, mistrust, and resentment among communities, making reconciliation and peacebuilding a daunting task. One of such conflicts is the Rwandan genocide. The conflict in Rwanda which eventually escalated to the form of genocide in 1994 was rooted in the history, from pre-colonial times to colonial to post-colonial. The history of Rwanda involves centuries of commingling of three identity groups: the Hutu-majority farmers (85%); the Tutsi-minorities, cattle herders/pastoralists (14%); and the small two group of hunter-gatherers and potters (1%) (Uvin 2003). However, the conflict has always been between the Tutsi and Hutu with groups such as the Twamarginalised. Under a monarchical system, the precolonial history of Rwanda reveals a centuries-long succession of interclan fighting and the expansion of a dominant ruling class (Tutsi) over a bonded labour class (Hutu).

Colonial powers exacerbated the division and hatred between the Tutsi and Hutu through a "divide and rule" strategy. Germany colonised Rwanda in 1885, but following World War I the colony became a Belgian

trustee territory. The Belgian colonisers created structural changes in the relations between Hutu and Tutsi that greatly enhanced Tutsi dominance and their exploitation of the Hutu, which intensified the Hutu hostility towards the Tutsi. The Belgian administration had given the Tutsi something like European status and declared them to be intellectually superior to the Hutu. By favouring the Tutsi elite, the Belgian colonial administration used them as the administrators of their harsh policies, and the Hutu became increasingly exploited and resentful not of their colonial masters, but of the Tutsi monarchical system, (Susan, 2013). The situation changed in the 1950s when the Tutsi elite fought against their Belgian colonisers and claimed independence. The Belgians encouraged the Hutu in a policy turnaround and in 1959, the Hutu rebelled against the Tutsi monarchy through 'social revolution'. This culminated in the Tutsi being pushed out of power. The Tutsi monarchy was abolished and much of the Tutsi elite went into exile (Staub, 2003). Rwanda achieved its independence in 19624 and became a Republic under Hutu leadership. The successive two Hutu governments maintained the ethnic identity system instituted by the Belgians and initiated a policy of discrimination against the Tutsi minority who had remained in the country. This was retaliation for the years of subjugation under Belgian/Tutsi rule. The two Hutu governments marginalised the Tutsi through a quota system of majority-minority for employment in the public sector and in schools. In the late 1980s densely-populated Rwanda was faced with an economic crisis coupled with a highly authoritarian Hutu political system and demands for a multiparty system. The exiled Tutsi and their descendants had formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and, on 1 October 1990, they invaded Rwanda from Uganda, reviving Hutu memories of past periods of exploitation and subjugation under Tutsi domination. The Hutu government sought to counteract the Tutsi invasion by intensified ethnic hostility and propaganda against the Tutsi (Lambourne, 2001). After 1992, a succession of cease-fire agreements and peace talks had been undertaken in France and other involved African countries. This culminated in the Arusha Peace Agreement, signed on 4 August 1993, between the Government of Rwanda (GoR) and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). However, the Arusha negotiations were an example of conflict resolution gone wrong. This peace process at the time reflected a successful, almost perfect conflict resolution on paper alone. These Accords were meant to end the armed conflict and at the same time to crown an internal democratisation process (Sentama, 2022). While the implementation of the Arusha Peace Accords and the installation of a new government including members of the RPF and the national opposition was postponed time and again, an assassination took place. On 6 April 1994, the Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana was murdered. This sparked the genocide and the resumption of the civil war between the RPF and the Rwanda government armed forces. The genocide claimed more than a million lives,6 mainly Tutsi who were living in the country, but also Hutu opposition members, as well as those who opposed the genocide or who protected the Tutsi.

The delay of the deployment of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR), as well as the intense ethnic polarization of the post-Arusha era also contributed to the collapse of the Accords and the genocide. The international community failed to intervene despite evidence of planned genocide, and the UN cut back its peacekeeping force after ten Belgian peacekeepers were killed. The civil war resumed and ended with the victory of the RPF, which put an end to the genocide. The defeated government fled to the former Zaire, Tanzania and other countries, as did roughly two million Hutu civilians: and about five hundred thousand exiled Tutsi streamed back into Rwanda. The Tutsi-dominated RPF established a new government on 19 July 1994 under the presidency of Paul Kagame (Sentama, 2022). When the Tutsi-led RPF took over, Rwanda had acquired the status of a failed state. The entire infrastructure of the country, ranging from schools, hospitals, factories and government departments, had been destroyed or severely looted. The government's administrative capacity had collapsed as civil servants had either been killed or had fled into exile. The entire population was displaced, having either fled to neighbouring countries or having been internally displaced (Sentama, 2022). Law and order had completely broken down, all national law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions had ceased to exist, and justice system had come to a standstill. The credibility of the state itself had been undermined as most institutions (public institutions, the army and police), as well as much of civil society (churches, NGOs) and the media had been complicit in the genocide (Sentama, 2022).

The country was left with traumatised and desperate citizens. While the Tutsi, who lived in Rwanda had very painful experiences and felt it was extremely difficult to reconcile, others, who returned from exile after the genocide also had difficult and painful experiences. They or their parents had left Rwanda after earlier massacres and they returned now to a devastated country. However, many of them had understood that the only hope for creating a functioning society lay in reconciliation (Ervin, 2012; Staub, 2003). The post-genocide government was thus faced with the challenge of reconstructing the country's socio-economic and political fabric and bringing about national reconciliation. To deal with the legacies of the genocide and civil war, in the words of the new government: national unity and reconciliation "was not an alternative; it was the only option to survival."(NURC, 2007). In fact, for the government, the goal of reconciliation has formed part of a national policy for the future development of the country. To this end, the post-genocide reconstruction process was

mainly driven by two expectations: (1) to create a capable, credible and legitimate state; and (2) to promote a united and reconciled people. These expectations had actually been formulated and agreed upon during the pre-genocide 1993 Arusha Peace Accords between the Tutsi-led RPF and the Hutu Government. The main principles of the agreement stressed power-sharing through the formation of a Government of National Unity, refugee repatriation and reintegration, military integration, the creation of a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, as well as policy and legal reforms (Sentama, 2022).

By keeping 'unity' and 'reconciliation' as inseparable concepts, the national policy on unity and reconciliation defines unity and reconciliation, as:

a consensus practice of citizens who have common nationality, who share the same culture and have equal rights; citizens characterised by trust, tolerance, mutual respect, equality, complementarity, truth, and healing of one another's wounds inflicted by their dark history, with the objectives of laying a foundation for development in sustainable peace (NURC, 2007; p1).

Thismodel emphasises the state's responsibility for creating a culture of rights based upon an inclusive notion of shared identity. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), was charged with the mandate of introducing programmes that will bring about healing of past wounds, reconciliation and unity in the country. The reconstruction process aimed at bringing unity, and reconciliation was a pressing, but difficult, task facing the post-genocide government of Rwanda. Three decades have now elapsed since Rwanda, headed by the RPF, embarked on the journey towards national reconciliation. The process has been driven by the government in consultation with elites from all walks of life members of political parties, senior national leaders, academics, businessmen, development partners, and members of civil society. To promote national reconciliation, Rwanda privileged home-based processes and mechanisms. These combined universal and local culture-driven approaches and involved preventive and responsive judicial and non-judicial responses: community-based Gacaca courts and the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission have been the core instruments. All the mechanisms adopted were essentially government-centred and involved mandatory individual and community participation. They were embedded within facilitating processes involving an inclusive government, military integration, refugee repatriation, constitutional and legal reforms, and socio-economic welfare programmes (Sentama, 2022).

Although Rwandan society is still in a recovery process, its culture has played an important role in facilitating the establishment of useful mechanisms, which have set a solid foundation for national reconciliation. There has been progress towards achieving unity and reconciliation, as a living reality in the country, and the restoration of human dignity and Rwandan values. According to Sentama (2022), the process is still hampered by the persistence of a genocide ideology, ethnic stereotyping, still open psychological and physical wounds, poverty, and a lack of restitution policy. In particular, the main criticism is that the process of addressing past injustice has been selective: it has been restricted to the genocide committed by the defeated government and the crimes committed by the RPF have been neglected.

On the other hand, Nigeria has been grappling with terrorist-related conflicts, particularly in the north eastern region, where Boko Haram has wreaked havoc since 2009. The conflict has resulted in thousands of deaths, displacement of millions, and widespread destruction. For instance, U.S State Department,, Country Reports on Terrorism in Nigeria state as follows: Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa continued attacks against government and security forces and civilians in the Northeast, which resulted in deaths, injuries, abductions, and the capture and destruction of property. Boko Haram attacks did not discriminate between civilians and government officials, whereas ISIS-WA generally, but not always, focused attacks on government and security forces. The implementation of the Nigerian military's "super camp" strategy, which began in 2019, was designed to stem losses when terrorists overran forward-operating bases. As a defensive military strategy, the decision to consolidate the posture into super camps is working.

However, Boko Haram and ISIS-WA have exploited the military's inability to patrol open space outside the super camps to abduct aid workers, attack humanitarian operations hubs, and degrade security along roads. The deteriorating security environment has worsened conditions for civilians and further constrained relief operations in northeastern Nigeria (U.S Department of State, 2022). The report further stated that Boko Haram and ISIS-WA have contributed to the internal displacement of about two million people in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, and the external displacement of more than 300,000 Nigerian refugees to neighboring countries, principally Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. According to the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) campaign, since the abduction of 276 students by Boko Haram from Chibok, Borno State, in 2014, 112 students remained missing at the end of 2020 (U.S, Department of State, 2022). Despite the differences in context and scope, both Rwanda and Nigeria face similar challenges in rebuilding and reconciling their societies. Reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts in both countries require a

deep understanding of the root causes of conflict, effective strategies for addressing them, and a commitment to promoting national unity and social cohesion.

As such, this study sought to add to the existing body of knowledge on reconciliation and peacebuilding by comparing and contrasting Rwanda's National Reconciliation Commission and Nigeria's initiatives for addressing terrorist-related conflicts with the view to highlighting their dissimilarities and similarities and identifying gaps for knowledge by both countries and beyond.

The study is divided into the introduction which we just finished, theoretical foundation and conceptual definitions, methods, data presentation and analysis and, conclusion/recommendations

Reconciliation Theory

John Paul Lederach's Reconciliation Theory (1997), is a framework for understanding and promoting reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict with the purpose of achieving peace. He defines reconciliation as a process of addressing the past, rebuilding relationships, and creating a new future.

Lederach (1997), identifies four components of reconciliation:
1. Truth: Acknowledging the past and the harm caused.
2. Mercy: Showing compassion and forgiveness.
3. Justice: Addressing the injustices and inequalities of the past.
4. Peace: Building a new future based on mutual respect and understanding

Lederach(1997) proposes a pyramid model, which consists of:
1. Top-Level Leaders: Engaging top-level leaders in reconciliation efforts.
2. Middle-Level Leaders: Building relationships and trust among middle-level leaders.
3. Grassroots: Engaging local communities and promoting reconciliation at the grassroots level.
4. The Web of Reconciliation: Lederach suggests that reconciliation involves weaving a web of relationships among individuals, groups, and communities.

Lederach (1997), further identifies four principles of reconciliations as: Understanding the specific context and cultural nuances of the conflict; Recognizing that reconciliation is a long-term process; involving all parties and stakeholders in the reconciliation process, and empowering local communities and individuals to take ownership of the reconciliation process. AgainLederach noted as follows: first, that reconciliation is a complex, ongoing process rather than a single event. Second, reconciliation requires acknowledging and addressing the past, rather than ignoring or denying it. Third, reconciliation involves building relationships and trust among individuals, groups, and communities. Finally, reconciliation aims to create a new future based on mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation.

The Reconciliation Theory of Lederach (1997), is highly relevant to the study in the following ways: Firstly, it provides a comprehensive understanding of reconciliation, which is essential for analyzing the reconciliation efforts in Rwanda and Nigeria. Secondly, the theory's emphasis on contextual understanding, long-term commitment, inclusivity, and empowerment can serve as a framework for comparing the reconciliation approaches in Rwanda and Nigeria. Thirdly, the theory views reconciliation as a complex, ongoing process. This perspective can help analyze the progress and challenges faced by the reconciliation initiatives in Rwanda and Nigeria.

Fourthly, the theory's emphasis on acknowledging and addressing the past can inform the analysis of how Rwanda's National Reconciliation Commission and Nigeria's initiative for addressing terrorist-related conflicts have addressed the root causes of conflict. Fifthly, Lederach's theory highlights the importance of building relationships and trust among individuals, groups, and communities. This aspect can be applied to analyze the effectiveness of the reconciliation initiatives in Rwanda and Nigeria in building relationships and trust among stakeholders. Finally, the theory's focus on creating a new future based on mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation can inform the analysis of the reconciliation initiatives' impact on creating a peaceful and stable future in Rwanda and Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

1. Reconciliation

The term 'reconciliation' is frequently used both in the literature and practice of peacebuilding but it is rarely defined. There is no actual consensus about what it specifically means, which activities it encompasses, or how it can be achieved. At best, reconciliation can be considered "as a spectrum, rather than a fixed definition." Most

actors in the field, in particular non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations and state actors do not actually make explicit their own understanding of reconciliation. At the policy level, the open debate organized at the United Nations Security Council on January 26, 2004on the subject of post-conflict reconciliation is very revealing: over forty speakers shared their views during a day-long debate; none of them defined or even explained what he or she understood as 'reconciliation.' Reflecting upon the minutes of this meeting, it becomes clear that participants actually had differing assumptions on the subject. This can be problematic when concrete policies and programs are discussed and is likely to lead to some argument and confusion. In post-conflict environments, 'reconciliation' as a word or a concept is also often totally alien to the local culture. However, use of the term may be widespread because of its prevalence on the peacebuilding agenda and the presence of mechanisms such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. As a consequence of the foreign nature of the term reconciliation, local populations may invoke local concepts and terminology that reflect their own understanding. For instance, in the case of Sierra Leone, field research has outlined four interlinked concepts that help frame local understandings of 'reconciliation': 'kol hart" warm hart" (cool heart/warm heart), 'wan word' (one word), 'forgetting', and economic status.

For all these reasons, the term 'reconciliation' tends to be used in very different ways and with varying assumptions by different actors, at times creating contradictions**.** These myriad understandings may also lead to programs that are not necessarily appropriate if they are not coinciding will local populations systems of reference. Tatz (1997) noted in an essay where he discussed how reconciliation and forgiveness have become somewhat fashionable, that the word [reconciliation] seems to resonate a merciful Christ…," It would seem desirable to define reconciliation in a manner that makes it possible to avoid speaking of the re-establishment of peace, as perhaps there was no peace earlier that one can re-establish, and perhaps the atrocities that were committed during the conflict make it impossible to re-establish anything that existed before. There is also the dimension of the religious associations that are connected to the word reconciliation, which can lead to the misconception of having to be altruistic in order to achieve reconciliation. Another difficulty in defining the term is the question of what is being referred to: reconciliation in society or the individual victim?([Hayner, 1996)] Priscilla B. Hayner, a leading authority on truth commissions, suggests that a distinction be made between individual and national/political reconciliation (Hayner, 1996) She states that the goal of a truth commission is to promote reconciliation on a national level through speaking openly of a silenced and conflictive past in order to avoid latent conflicts and bitterness between opposing parties. However, Hayner continues, on an individual level, issues such as healing and reconciliation are deeply personal processes. There is no guarantee that knowledge of the whole truth will lead to a survivor's reconciliation with his or her perpetrator (Hayner, 1996). Hamber and Kibble (1999) argue, however, that the term was inadequately defined during the course of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and has too often simplistically been equated with forgiveness. Daniel Bar-Tal, professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University, Israel, defines reconciliation as "a psychological process for the formation of lasting peace" (Bar-Tal, 2000) In this process, past rivals come to mutual recognition and acceptance, have invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, feel mutual trust, positive attitudes as well as sensitivity and consideration of the other party's needs and interests (Bar-Tal, 2000) This transformation of beliefs, attitudes and emotions regarding one's own group, the others and the relationship between them may take decades. According to Bar-Tal (2000), reconciliation is not needed in all societies but only in those that have been subjected to protracted, intractable conflict; that is, conflicts "…in which the societies involved evolve a widely shared psychological repertoire that supports the adherence to the conflictive goals, maintain the conflict, delegitimize the opponent and thus negate the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the conflict and prevent the development of peaceful relations."

Hayner (1996) writes that "reconciliation implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday. To ascertain whether a process of reconciliation is under way in a post-conflict society, Hayner suggests that three areas can be observed: how the past is integrated and spoken about between former enemies; if relationships are based on the present or past; and if contradictory versions of the past have been reconciled – not into one truth of the past but to versions not based on lies and denial. A leading scholar and practitioner of conflict resolution, Lederach (1997), defines reconciliation as being constituted by both "a focus and a locus". The focus of reconciliation is upon building new and better relationships between former enemies. Relationships are both the root cause and the long-term solution of conflict according to Lederach (1997). Thus, relationships must be the core focus. As a locus, Lederach (1997) argues, "reconciliation represents a space, a place or location of encounter, where parties to a conflict meet."[35] In this place, the traumas of the past and the hopes for the future must be formulated and brought together by discussing the issues of truth, forgiveness, justice, and peace. Hugo van der Merwe, Project Manager at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Cape Town, South Africa, defines reconciliation as "all initiatives which bring together, or engage, both sides in a pursuit of changing identity, values regarding interaction, attitudes, and patterns of interaction that move them to a more cooperative relationship." Van der

(1999; p.14) investigates reconciliation from three dimensions: the spheres of relationships (concerning identity, values, attitudes and behaviour), the substantive components of reconciliation (justice, truth, healing and security), and the social levels of reconciliation (national, community and individual). He argues that reconciliation is a significant component in every phase of the peace-building process.

William J. Long, professor at Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology suggests another definition of reconciliation. In his "forgiveness model", Long proposes that reconciliation is "mutually conciliatory accommodation between former antagonists" and part of the process of forgiveness (Long, 2003) From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, Long (2003), argues that maintaining social relations despite aggression and violence is fundamental for our survival and well-being. Reconciliation is here seen as a problem-solving mechanism, an emotional process the mind has evolved, adapting to the fact that conflict is part of human relations. Ericson (2001), defines reconciliation as "the establishment of a positive and sustainable peace between people involved in armed conflict." There are many different understandings of what should be focused on in the process of reconciliation. According to Ericson (2001; p.6), initiatives for reconciliation tend to focus on one of the three pillars in the conflict triangle: conflict behaviour (finding ways to end armed conflict and restore shattered relationships), conflict attitudes (challenging stereotypes, misperceptions and beliefs, and enhancing understanding and trust) or the combination of both which leads to changes in conflict structure (transforming asymmetric power relations).

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2019) defines reconciliation as a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future. The development of democratic norms in the post-war society is fundamental for this process, according to IDEA, as structural injustice creates the basis for new conflict. In the process of reconciliation, peaceful coexistence, trust and empathy evolve within this framework of democracy for sustainable peace. Other definitions of reconciliation proposed, see reconciliation as a "process of healing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators after the violence, providing a closure of the bad relation. The process prepares the parties for relations with justice and peace"(Galtung, 2001; p.13) and Kriesberg's (2001) says, it is a processes by which parties that have experienced an oppressive relationship or destructive conflict with each other move to attain or to restore a relationship that they believe to be minimally acceptable … Reconciliation also is understood to be an aspect of an existing relationship, marked by varying degrees of mutual acceptance.Assefa (1999), argues that reconciliation differs from all other conflict-handling mechanisms by way of its methodology: the essence of reconciliation is the voluntary initiative of the conflict parties to acknowledge their responsibility and guilt … the parties are not only meant to communicate one's grievances against the actions of the adversary, but also engage in self-reflection about one's own role and behaviour in the dynamic of the conflict.

As always in the social sciences, the phenomena we are interested in studying, here reconciliation, are not exact and constant but quite vague and elusive processes that we need to box into definitions that hold for scientific investigation. As we can see from the examples above, there have been many attempts to define the term reconciliation. Some focus on the dimensions of equality and prevention, others on forgiveness, attitudes and beliefs, or relationships, time, and space. What they do have in common is an emphasis on the following issues:

i. Reconciliation involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering (between former enemies)
ii. Reconciliation involves the changing of destructive patterns of interaction between former enemies into constructive relationships, in attitudes and behaviour
iii. Reconciliation is a process toward sustainable peace (Brounéus,2003).

Thus, our working definition of reconciliation after internal armed conflict will be the following:

Reconciliation is a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behaviour into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace.

In other words, reconciliation mainly focuses on remembering, changing, and continuing with life in peace Different Aspects of Reconciliation

In the following we will focus on the literature concerning six different aspects of reconciliation (religious, socio-cultural, psychological, economic, political, and juridical). The objective is to investigate the main issues of concern and dilemmas regarding reconciliation from each perspective.

Religious Aspects

As earlier noted, the term reconciliation has strong religious connotations (Tatz,1997). In Christianity, reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus is a fundamental theme. Historically, within Christianity there has also been a division between Eastern and Western traditions regarding the view of sin and thus also of reconciliation. The Eastern Orthodox Church considered sin from a relational perspective,

emphasizing the breaking of loving relations between God and man or between human beings. Western Christian traditions (Catholicism and Protestantism) were in the past more influenced by the Roman legal tradition and focused thereby on the legal dimension of sin – seeing sin mainly as disobedience of the law of God. Today, however, the Western traditions have shifted from this preoccupation with normative moral rules to considering sin and reconciliation from a relational point of view (Brounéus,2003).

One approach to the Bible's concept of justice is that it can be seen as interpersonal reconciliation, which focuses in particular on the issues of compassion, mercy and forgiveness In (Brounéus,2003). terwoven in the theological context of reconciliation is also the notion that human justice is limited. Justice can never achieve full retribution for the victims, especially not for the dead, but the theologian hope is that victims will be vindicated after death. Reconciliation is from this point of view seen as the "ultimate fulfillment of justice", requiring forgiveness (Brounéus, 2003).

In the Buddhist tradition, compassion rather than forgiveness is stressed. The fundaments of the Buddhist Middle Path are acceptance, tolerance, and above all, compassion. There are no examples as yet of a Buddhist country officially working for reconciliation after internal conflict. In Cam bodia, however, ongoing negotiations are being held between the government and the UN on how to deal with the country's conflict-filled past. In a paper on the pursuit of justice and reconciliation in Cambodia after the atrocious regime of the Khmer Rouge, Lambourne (2002) states that some Cambodians she interviewed were sceptical against replicating the "Christian concept" of truth commissions as they are based on "confessing and forgiving. One interviewee explained that it would not be applicable to Cambodian tradition where, in accordance with Buddhism, people who have committed crimes will always be held responsible for them – there is no God who will ultimately forgive. Another interviewee argued on the same lines but drew the opposite conclusion, saying that it would be easy for Cambodians to forgive because they believe the perpetrators will be punished in the next life (Brounéus, 2003).

Socio-Cultural Aspects

Culture is the rich and complex blend of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour regarding everything from food to art to politics and religion in a certain society. Culture shapes how we perceive ourselves and others. Violence, fear and hatred during war result in the modernization of old myths and stereotypes to explain one's own or some other group's gruesome behaviour and thereby justify whatever atrocities are committed. After the war, the societal and cultural fabric is drenched with these beliefs. They can be seen in how history is described, how the language is used, in education, the media, theatre etc. In order to live in peace, these beliefs must be questioned and transformed. Unfortunately there is no universal technique for this. The search for sustainable peace in a society after conflict must begin from its own roots, importing from outside whatever can be of use, but basing that society's transformation on its own unique set of traditions and cultural heritage (Brounéus, 2003).

In the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the African notion of ubuntu held important meaning. Ubuntu means that humanity is intertwined, a person is a person through other people, we are human because we belong. Through this concept, Desmond Tutu argued that "even the supporters of apartheid were victims" and "the oppressor was dehumanised as much as, if not more than, the oppressed."(Tutu, 1999) The misconduct of one person reduces everyone's ubuntu while good deeds increase the ubuntu and well-being of all. Thus, reconciliation was part of restoring ubuntu in both victims and former perpetrators, for everyone is linked together. In this way, the TRC brought together its mission for national reconciliation, which often used Christian vocabulary, with the traditional African cultural heritage in the attempt to pave the way for reconciliation. In Caritas International's handbook Working for Reconciliation a "Tool Box for Keeping a Cultural Perspective in Reconciliation Work" is proposed.The recommendations include the following: to identify cultural dimensions to the conflict (e.g. ideology, religion, social inequality), to identify cultural realities that impact negatively (prejudice, fear etc) or positively (shared values regarding cooperation, similar reconciliation customs) on the resolution of the conflict, and to explore traditional or cultural methods for reconciliation (Brounéus, 2003).

II. Methodology

This study adopted the historical descriptive research design to examine the reconciliation and peacebuilding mechanisms in post-genocide Rwanda and the initiatives adopted by the Nigerian government in addressing terrorism in the northern region. The descriptive approach was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect and analyze existing information in order to accurately describe the structures and frameworks of Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) and Nigeria's counter-

terrorism initiatives. The historical dimension of the study helped to explain past events and how they influenced present peacebuilding policies in both countries. The design also supported ex-post facto theorizing since the study relied on already existing events and documentary evidence.
The study area covered Rwanda and Nigeria.

Figure 1 Rwanda

while **Figure 3.2 Nigeria**

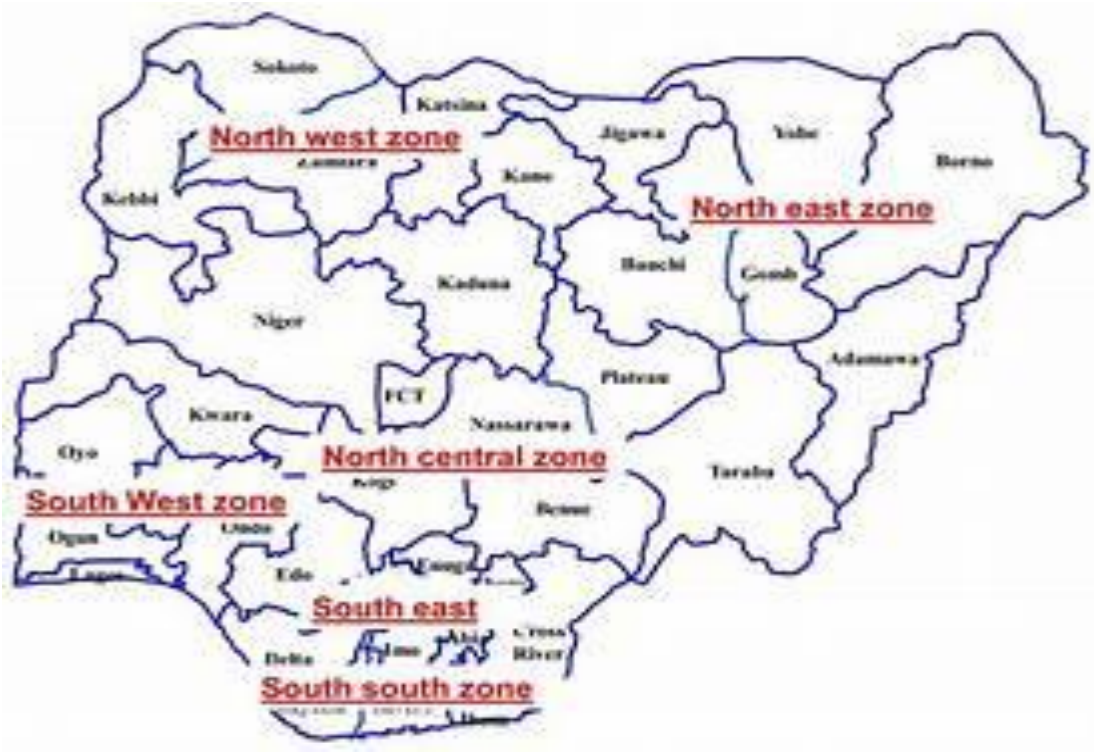

Figure 2: Map of Nigeria based on the Six Geopolitical Zones

With emphasis on the northern region affected by terrorism. The study relied mainly on secondary data obtained from books, journal articles, official reports, and credible internet sources. Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were adopted, particularly content analysis, to examine relevant documents and scholarly materials. The reliability of the study was ensured through the use of authentic and properly cited sources, as well as careful supervision and verification of the materials used.The study adopted the qualitative content analysis method. Qualitative content analysis is a method for studying the content of those types of empirical documentations which can be briefly referred to as 'mute evidence', "that is, written texts and artifacts" (Hodder,

1994, p.155) Earl Babbie defines it as "the study of recorded human communication such as books, websites, paintings and laws (Babbie 2010, p.530).

Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings of the study reveal that Rwanda's reconciliation framework emerged from an extreme post-conflict situation following the 1994 genocide, which resulted in the total collapse of state institutions, social order, and national cohesion. The country was characterized by destroyed infrastructure, absence of governance structures, a collapsed justice system, and a traumatized population. As noted in the study, Rwanda became a failed state where "law enforcement agencies and justice system had collapsed," making reconciliation a necessity rather than a choice (Uwizeye, 2019). In response to this crisis, the government of Rwanda adopted reconciliation as a central pillar of national recovery. The study emphasizes that national unity and reconciliation were considered "the only option to survival," highlighting the urgency and importance attached to rebuilding relationships among citizens (Uwizeye, 2019).

To operationalize this vision, Rwanda established the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) in 1999 as a formal institutional framework to coordinate reconciliation processes. The NURC was designed to function as a central body responsible for policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring of reconciliation programmes across the country (Clark, 2010). The structure of Rwanda's reconciliation framework is comprehensive and multi-dimensional. It integrates institutional, legal, cultural, and community-based mechanisms. One of the key elements of this framework is the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and grassroots communities. The study indicates that platforms such as the National Dialogue Council (Umushyikirano) provided opportunities for inclusive participation, bringing together leaders and citizens to deliberate on national issues (Clark, 2010).

A major feature of Rwanda's reconciliation process is the use of indigenous mechanisms, particularly the Gacaca court system. These community-based courts were introduced to address the overwhelming number of genocide-related cases while promoting truth-telling, accountability, and forgiveness. According to Longman (2006), the Gacaca system facilitated community involvement and helped restore social relationships by encouraging perpetrators to confess and seek forgiveness from victims.

In addition to Gacaca, the NURC implemented several structured programmes aimed at rebuilding national identity and promoting peace. These include civic education programmes, leadership training initiatives, trauma healing workshops, and national summits on governance, justice, and human rights. These programmes were designed to reshape societal values and foster unity among citizens (NURC, 2016). The study further reveals that Rwanda's reconciliation framework is inclusive in nature. It recognizes that effective reconciliation must involve all segments of society, including victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Clark (2010) argues that selective reconciliation processes are insufficient, and that a holistic approach is necessary to address the complexities of post-conflict societies.

In contrast, Nigeria's framework for reconciliation and peacebuilding, particularly in response to insurgency and terrorism, is less structured and more fragmented. The study shows that Nigeria adopted both kinetic (military) and non-kinetic approaches, but the overall framework is heavily dominated by security strategies (Eke, 2018).

Nigeria's initiatives include military operations aimed at combating insurgents, as well as non-military strategies such as deradicalization programmes, reintegration efforts, and humanitarian interventions. However, these initiatives are implemented through multiple institutions without a central coordinating body, resulting in lack of coherence and duplication of efforts. The study highlights that Nigeria's approach has been criticized for focusing more on military responses than on reconciliation and peacebuilding. According to Nwankpa (2017), the over-reliance on force has limited the effectiveness of Nigeria's strategy, as it fails to address the underlying causes of conflict such as marginalization, poverty, and social injustice.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that Nigeria's reconciliation initiatives face significant challenges, including lack of trust among affected communities, inadequate funding, and weak institutional capacity. These challenges hinder the successful reintegration of former combatants and the rebuilding of social cohesion (Onuoha, 2014).

Another important issue identified in the study is the limited involvement of local communities and traditional institutions in Nigeria's reconciliation framework. While traditional leaders and community-based organizations have the potential to contribute to peacebuilding, their roles have not been fully integrated into national strategies. Longman (2006) suggests that local participation is critical for sustainable reconciliation, yet this remains underutilized in Nigeria.

In addition, Nigeria's framework does not adequately address the needs of victims, particularly in terms of justice, reparations, and psychological support. Nwankpa (2017) notes that the absence of a comprehensive

justice mechanism has contributed to persistent grievances and weakened public confidence in reconciliation initiatives.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal clear differences in the structure and effectiveness of reconciliation frameworks in Rwanda and Nigeria. Rwanda's approach is characterized by strong institutional coordination, inclusivity, and integration of multiple mechanisms, while Nigeria's approach is fragmented and largely security-driven.

One of the major strengths of Rwanda's framework is the presence of the NURC as a central coordinating institution. This has ensured consistency in policy implementation and alignment of reconciliation efforts with national objectives. Clark (2010) emphasizes that institutional coordination is essential for effective peacebuilding, as it prevents duplication and enhances efficiency.

Another key finding is the importance of community participation. Rwanda's reconciliation process actively involves grassroots actors through mechanisms such as Gacaca courts and community dialogue programmes. This bottom-up approach has helped rebuild trust and foster social cohesion. Longman (2006) argues that community involvement is critical for the success of reconciliation processes, as it promotes ownership and legitimacy. In contrast, Nigeria's limited community engagement has contributed to the ineffectiveness of its reconciliation initiatives. The lack of local ownership has resulted in resistance to some programmes and reduced their sustainability.

The study also highlights the role of culture and indigenous mechanisms in reconciliation. Rwanda's use of traditional systems demonstrates how cultural practices can be adapted to address modern conflicts. This has enhanced the relevance and acceptance of reconciliation initiatives among the population. Furthermore, the integration of justice into Rwanda's framework has played a significant role in addressing past atrocities. By combining formal and informal justice systems, Rwanda has been able to balance accountability with forgiveness. In Nigeria, the absence of a comprehensive justice framework has hindered reconciliation and allowed grievances to persist (Nwankpa, 2017).

The findings also underscore the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict. Rwanda's holistic approach, which includes socio-economic development and psychological healing, has contributed to long-term stability. In contrast, Nigeria's focus on military solutions has limited its ability to achieve sustainable peace (Eke, 2018).

III. Conclusion

The study concludes that Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission provides a comprehensive and effective framework for reconciliation and peacebuilding. Its success is largely due to strong institutional structures, inclusive participation, integration of justice mechanisms, and the use of culturally relevant approaches. Nigeria's initiatives, while important, remain fragmented and heavily reliant on military strategies. The lack of coordination, limited community involvement, and inadequate attention to justice and reconciliation have constrained the effectiveness of its peacebuilding efforts.

IV. Recommendations

The study recommends that reconciliation efforts should be community-driven and inclusive, as this enhances trust and sustainability. Community participation should be strengthened through dialogue and local engagement. There is also a need to integrate cultural and traditional mechanisms into reconciliation processes, as these provide locally relevant solutions to conflict. Peace education should be promoted through formal and informal channels to equip individuals with skills for conflict resolution and dialogue.

Finally, socio-economic development should be prioritized as part of peacebuilding efforts, as addressing poverty and inequality is essential for preventing future conflicts.

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