

## **PEACE BUILDING THROUGH RECONCILIATION**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper considers the strengths and weaknesses of reconciliation as an approach to peace building. While there is much that is necessary and innovative in this technique, when applied at the national level in transitional societies, practice to date indicates it has several limitations directly related to the political contexts in which it has been attempted. Among these are an uneasy coexistence with legal processes, problems associated with the question of reparations, and a tendency not to address broader issues of violence in post-conflict society. It is suggested that a more proactive model of reconciliation is necessary if the goals of peace building are to be achieved over the longer run.

*People cannot live apart and in agony forever. (Galtung, 1998a: 14)*

### **Introduction**

Though as old as society itself, processes of *reconciliation* have taken on special significance since the end of the Cold War. Both the theoretical and the praxis-oriented literature on contemporary conflict resolution acknowledge that hearts and minds are as ravaged by war and violence, and in as much need of reconstruction, as burnt out towns or villages. Thus, the success of peace building depends, at least in part, on assisting antagonists to put their pasts of violence and estrangement behind them. Reconciliation is currently applied on a variety of levels, from small encounter groups, to high profile truth commissions to Presidential apologies for past wrongs.

There are, in fact, more and more people talking about reconciliation, but the question arises as to whether they are talking about the same thing. Some writers give the impression that the phenomenon is essentially the same at all levels; groups and nations can be healed through similar processes as individuals. Others argue that reconciliation is quite differentiated; it can take diverse forms and fill a variety of roles in post-conflict society. The literature diverges further on whether reconciliation is an end or a means, an outcome or a process; whether it is politically neutral or unavoidably ideological, and the extent to

which it is conservative or transformative in orientation. In what follows, these issues are explored with the intention of highlighting both the innovative, and essentially hopeful, dimensions of reconciliation and its more contested and controversial aspects.

### **Highlighting the Subjective**

One can derive from the expanding literature on reconciliation a number of different formulations of what it is and how it works. Kriesberg (1998: 184), for instance, provides the following definition:

The term 'reconciliation' generally refers to the process of developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between antagonistic or formerly antagonistic persons or groups. It often refers to a relatively amicable relationship, typically established after a rupture in the relationship involving one-sided or mutual infliction of extreme injury.

Montville breaks down this process of accommodation into the oft cited formula of acknowledgment and contrition from the "perpetrators", and forgiveness from the "victims." He (1993: 113) argues that each of these three elements is essential if those who feel themselves victims are to be reassured that they will not suffer the same abuses in future and the relationship can move beyond a cycle of revenge and retaliation to something more positive. Montville envisions reconciliation occurring in specially designed "workshop" contexts where participants from both sides feel secure, and trained neutral third parties conduct various therapeutic exercises such as "walks through history". Fisher also supports this approach because "...full, successful reconciliation between alienated groups cannot take place without an adequate degree of genuine dialogue and conflict analysis of a mutual, interactive nature..." a process he terms Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR) (1999: 82). Lederach (1997: 30) promotes reconciliation as a systems, and therefore more holistic, approach to conflict which focuses attention on the dynamics of relationships in what he calls the conflict system:

Reconciliation must be proactive in seeking to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationship and share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences with one another, with the goal of creating new perceptions and a new shared experience.

For Lederach if new perceptions on intergroup relations can be gained by group members, those relations themselves are, in turn, changed and improved: actors who no longer feel the same will no longer act the same, and are better equipped to deal with the legacy of conflict.

All of these scholars share Kelman's (1997: 194) view that conflict is an "interactive", "intersocietal" process, driven as much by "collective needs and fears" as by rational

calculation of power and interests. Fisher (1999: 85), for instance, states that while conflicts may start because of "objective and ideological differences" the dynamics of escalation result from such subjective factors as "... misperceptions, mistrust, and frustrated basic needs." Lederach (1997: 13-15), among others, shows that contemporary conflicts are primarily *intra* rather than *inter*-state and occur between factionalized identity groups who live in close proximity to each other. These factors combine to produce the intensely negative relationship dynamics characteristic of "intractable" conflicts.

The importance of dealing with these issues is further underlined by an appreciation of how the individual and collective trauma left behind by large scale violence is passed from one generation to the next, perpetuating cycles of violence. Galtung (1998a: 3), for instance, argues that violent conflict over real stakes, what he calls the "root" conflict, generates a "meta conflict", a "...conflict that comes out of, or after, the root conflict, the over layer." The meta-conflict has its own dynamics and can become deeply embedded in a group's culture, perpetrating militarism, the "glory" of killing the "other", and the legitimacy of violence as a means for dealing with conflict. Lumsden (1999: 3) writes in a similar vein, that: "The imagery and mythology of war can become an *unconscious organising principle*, determining how people see the world a generation later and how they choose to act" (emphasis in original). Both authors also make the crucial point that the challenge of conflict can be dealt with positively or negatively; some people dedicate themselves to relieving suffering while others become "schizoid, manipulative, depressed" or "paranoid" (Lumsden, 1999: 3). Thus, violent attitudes, and their consequences, need not be perpetuated if the right peace building strategies can be implemented but they will persist if nothing is done to counter their influence.

Such insights have grown out of a deep dissatisfaction with traditional power and interest approaches to conflict which have not dealt effectively with the new realities of the Post-Cold War era. Lumsden (1991: 1) for instance, presents evidence to show that mainstream approaches have not had much impact on cycles of violence citing that "...the worst atrocities in Bosnia in the 1990s were exactly in the areas most affected by the World War II massacres" and that "two of the Bosnian Serb generals involved were themselves child survivors of World War II massacres in which their whole villages and families had been wiped out." Lederach (1997: 27) feels reconciliation is exactly the kind of innovative approach which is lacking in international politics and diplomacy while Montville (1998: 2) argues his model is more "realistic" than traditional *realpolitik* because the latter omits the subjective dimension of experience. Some further implications of this shared dissatisfaction with political approaches to conflict are discussed below.

This brief overview shows there is certainly much that is positive in highlighting relational dynamics as an essential complement to settling the material stakes of a conflict. In this sense, reconciliation builds on the work of John Burton (1990) by giving priority to such human needs as security, identity and social bonding in both the theory and practice of peace building. From a human needs perspective, reconciliation represents a long overdue innovation in conflict resolution, since needs theorists have been arguing for years that

conflict will persist until such basic needs are incorporated into the process. Needs theorists would agree that by stressing healing relationships and re-humanizing antagonists reconciliation offers the possibility of ending the conflict cycle in many societies where it is deeply rooted. Furthermore, all of these writers are scholar-practitioners; their views are grounded in extensive field experience in conflict resolution. They can testify that reconciliation, understood in Kriesberg's (1998: 184) sense of replacing negative attitudes and relationships with something more positive, *works*, and one should not underestimate the implications of this fact for mainstream thinking in international relations and political science. If reconciliation is possible, then we should reject the "pessimistic inevitability" thinking characteristic of political realism and not be resigned to the presence of recurring widespread violent conflict. In that sense, reconciliation may indeed represent something of a paradigm shift in thinking about conflict.

However, it is important here to be clear. We know that the "workshop" approach, what Fisher calls ICR, can work. That is, it can work among members of groups in conflict who wish to participate in intensive exchanges in safe environments directed by trained third parties. As Fisher (1999: 98) describes:

In the context of an increased complexity of thinking and the establishment of a working trust, participants in ICR workshops often become able to openly recognize and accept responsibility for the actions of their side that caused hurt--physical, psychological, moral--in the other.

In this context relational dynamics can be changed and participants can start to see beyond their reciprocal feelings of victimization and begin to experience "reconciliation." At the risk of being repetitive, it should be emphasized that this is reconciliation among *individuals*. Of course, if these individuals are selected because of their prominence and influence within the groups they represent it is not unreasonable to think this experience may have a positive impact on a broader political "peace process" between/among these same groups. This is certainly how Kelman sees his work with Israelis and Palestinians. While for him (Kelman, 1996: 507) the primary purpose of a workshop is to "...produce changes in the workshop participants themselves..."; the second purpose is "...to maximize the likelihood that the new insights, ideas, and proposals developed in the course of the workshop are fed back into the political debate and the decision-making process within each community." However, even successful workshops of this kind do not involve those "average" people who could be considered the real victims; nor do they often probe those dimensions of social inequality, or structural violence, which underlie most contemporary conflicts.

### Broadening the Scope

Proponents of reconciliation do not, however, limit its application to the workshop context, and it is in trying to apply what has proven effective at the interpersonal level to the collective or group level that reconciliation both loses clarity and becomes more controversial as an approach to peace building. Kriesberg (1999: 113), for instance, sees reconciliation occurring at a variety of social levels; which seems to suggest that publicly acclaimed instances of reconciliation--truth commissions, war crimes tribunals, apologies by political figures--are all on the same continuum as the problem solving workshop because they are all, presumably, aimed at bridging the gap and healing the relationship between alienated groups. This may to a certain extent be true, but it is also true that once one moves from the interpersonal to the collective and public level all such efforts in the name of reconciliation *inevitably* have a political dimension. Hamber and van der Merwe (1998) have even written about *ideologies of reconciliation*, suggesting that several of the key participants in South Africa's post conflict experience have brought very different viewpoints and agendas to this aspect of peace building. The literature considered so far, however, having emerged in reaction to the limitations of mainstream political science, seems to miss or deliberately de-emphasize this political dimension; despite its emphasis on coming to terms with the past, seems to be both apolitical and ahistorical to some degree.

Consider in this regard, the following statement by Fisher (1999: 83): "Reconciliation involves *re-establishing* harmony and co-operation between antagonists who have inflicted harm in either a one-sided or reciprocal manner" (emphasis added). Does this formulation really describe any of the contemporary attempts at post-conflict reconciliation? In how many cases--whether South Africa, Chile, Guatemala or Argentina--is it realistic to suggest that "harmony and cooperation" ever truly existed among the groups concerned, and that what is needed is to *recreate* it? This is not just a semantic point since it raises the issue of how much reform is necessary in a transitional society. If there was a past when the state and the social arrangements it ordered were, "all right" until communal conflict (somehow) upset them, then reconciliation may indeed be about re-establishing something that existed previously. This would be, somewhat paradoxically, a conservative form of reconciliation. If, however, it is acknowledged that the type of inter-group relations envisioned as the goal of reconciliation have never existed in a given society, then reconciliation is equivalent to not just conflict transformation but, in fact, social, political and economic transformations on an unprecedented scale. Reconciliation seen from the latter perspective really calls an entire social system, and not just a particular group conflict system, into question. (This is considered in more detail below.)

Furthermore, following Keohane's (1984: 51-52) well known analysis, "harmony" as a condition in which there is an the inherent compatibility of groups' needs and interests requiring no adjustment or coordination among them is not relevant to the context of peace building. Whereas, "cooperation", defined by Keohane (1984: 51) as a process which requires "...actions of separate individuals or organizations--which are not in pre-existent

harmony--be brought into conformity with one another through a process of negotiation..." is a more reasonable goal for post-conflict transitions. At the best of times, most societies are characterized by multiple *cleavages*, defined by Lane (1994: 53) as "...a division on the basis of some criteria of individuals, groups or organizations among whom conflict may arise." He (Lane, 1994: 53) goes on to explain further that:

The concept of cleavage is thus not identical with the concept of conflict; cleavages may lead to conflict, but a cleavage need not always be attended by conflict. A division of individuals, groups or organizations constitutes a cleavage if there is some probability of a conflict.

Race, caste, ideology, or religion are important bases for social cleavage, and groups divided along these lines compete, one way or another, for resources. How this core political process is handled is fundamental to the quality of political life in any society:

Whatever the size of the amount of resources to be allocated the distribution of utilities in societies raises vital moral questions about equity, equality and justice. Such matters activate interests, which define groups and motivate individuals or collectivities to move against each other (Lane, 1994: 53).

Thus, conflict among groups is really politics as usual, but when it takes an overtly violent form it indicates the political system can no longer contain this inevitable competition for material and non-material stakes. We should not, therefore, expect relations between any politically significant cleavage groups to be definitively transformed into a state of harmony. Rather, the groups involved need to acquire what Galtung (1998b) calls "...the capacity to handle conflict creatively and non-violently..." This is, in fact, what Galtung defines as "peace." It is also close to Keohane's notion of cooperation and represents a kind of reconciliation compatible with the politics of a pluralistic society.

Reconciliation is, quite frankly, politically expedient during democratic transitions. Post-conflict regimes besides wishing to heal the wounds of the past, also want to distance themselves from their predecessors and increase their legitimacy and support. Though some countries seem to have successfully followed a policy of collective amnesia in the course of democratization (Spain), since the Latin American experience of the late 1980s and early 1990s, public truth telling has become the preferred path to national reconciliation. On balance, these varied experiences have undoubtedly been helpful in promoting closure with a painful and destructive past. However, the political context inevitably has an impact on the practice and consequences of truth telling and, by implication, on its contribution to reconciliation. *National* reconciliation has, in fact, other goals besides improved group relations. Liebenberg and Zegeye (1998: 544) argue that truth commissions and related initiatives are intended to consolidate new democracies by fostering a national consensus around the "never again principle" of avoiding a return to the systematic abuse of human

rights. To them (Liebenberg and Zegeye, 1998: 544), the most important challenges "...in the aftermath of sustained collective violence..." are to:

...enhance social and political tolerance, to facilitate the institutionalisation (in the broadest sense possible) of democratic processes, to allow for transparency; to inculcate the notion of accountability amongst community members or citizens and their political leadership.

National reconciliation is really part of the broader agenda of political change intended to promote good governance in post conflict society and enhance thereby the new regimes internal and external credibility.

It is worth re-emphasizing that such a change is without precedent in societies characterized by historical cycles of violent conflict (and meta-conflict), a fact appreciated by some commentators on democratic transition. In regard to Guatemala, for instance, Palencia Prado (1998) has explained that:

The central concerns of the peace accords include the need to transform existing relations between state and society, so that political institutions are capable, *for the first time*, of mediating the interests of all social groups in a poor, unequal, multi-ethnic, and multilingual Guatemala (emphasis added).

The author goes on, however, to catalogue a number of ways in which political life in the new Guatemala either falls short of the ideals embodied in the accords or diverts from them completely. In other words, while national reconciliation in Guatemala, and elsewhere, has helped create a vision of a better social order, the realization of such a vision is far from guaranteed in the tumultuous environment of transitional politics.

### **Problems in Practice**

When the truth is made known at the national level, either through commission reports or perpetrators' testimony, there is no guarantee that Montville's three stages of reconciliation will be experienced. It is one thing to make public that security forces engaged in torture or disappearances. It is another to establish a consensus on what these facts mean. In this sense, there is not one truth, but many truths (Ignatieff, 1996). Both the Apartheid South African security forces and the Latin American generals apparently believed they were fighting Communist subversion under emergency conditions which necessitated extraordinary measures to protect national security, and they do not seem to have relinquished this view in the course of national reconciliation. Also, if amnesty/impunity is the price for public truth telling, the seemingly logical progression from acknowledgment to contrition becomes muddled. For instance, a former torturer might well feel regret for the

act of torture, and even apologize to a surviving victim, but still believe the act was necessary, if not entirely legitimate, at the time. In this case, there would be contrition without full acknowledgment of an act's wrongness.

Widespread forgiveness is probably not a realistic goal or criterion for national reconciliation. There are certain crimes which, on moral grounds, *should not* be officially forgiven through amnesty (abusing children, real genocide) and which, at least for some time afterwards *cannot be* forgiven by those who suffered from them (for instance, in the immediate wake of the mass killings in Rwanda). Where the line should be drawn is controversial and there may indeed be some who would refuse to draw it; but in practice it is clear that in certain post-conflict situations a discourse of reconciliation is not (yet) appropriate. Furthermore, truth telling may, and has, provoked a wide variety of reactions in a population. Though there seems to be much agreement that knowing what happened is a necessary condition for forgiveness, it is not a sufficient condition. Knowing may indeed make some people more angry, more unwilling to let go of what they have suffered. Perhaps the most interesting example of this are the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who have consistently refused any government sponsored efforts at reconciliation short of full legal investigation of all the disappearances in Argentina and full punishment for all the perpetrators. Though the Madres have broadened their agenda to include a variety of social justice issues, the fact is they have not been able to counter a general acceptance of the government's concessions to the military in the transition process.

Rather than requiring forgiveness, at the collective level reconciliation should create cultural "space" where legitimacy is accorded to all these reactions, where people are encouraged to forgive but also allowed to find other ways of dealing with their sorrow, anger and resentment if they are not willing to forgive. Also, though the government may wish to move the society away from "ethnicism" or "racialism" to "national unity" this cannot be imposed. People(s) may first need to reaffirm their sense of communal identity when this identity has been threatened and denied, and reconciliation should accommodate this as well. Otherwise, there is a distinct danger of what Ignatieff calls "false reconciliation." Writing critically about Latin America he warns that:

The societies in question used the truth commissions to indulge in the illusion that they had put the past behind them. The truth commissions allowed exactly the kind of false reconciliation with the past they had been expressly created to forestall (Ignatieff, 1996).

This threat should be taken seriously since equivocal public exercises in "coming to terms with the past", like public monuments, can in fact provide a rationale for no longer thinking about the real implications of what actually happened and stifle the necessary commitment to work through its effects. Skepticism might be particularly justified when the "...attitude that it would be proper for everything to be forgiven and forgotten by those who were wronged is expressed by the party that committed the injustice" (Ignatieff, 1966), or when

reconciliation is presented as a discrete event rather than a process which should be at least quasi institutionalized as part of the political transition. Or, to return to the point made above, *reconciliation* should really lead to more effective on-going practices of conciliation in the political institutions of a society. Otherwise, fissures giving rise to alienation and deep-seated conflict will emerge in the new order as they did in the old, eventually necessitating further efforts at reconciliation — efforts which would certainly be greeted with more cynicism than enthusiasm.

This raises, in turn, the question of whether truth commissions are a substitute for, or even an improvement on, courts as a way to redress wide spread human rights abuses. What is at issue is the degree to which justice, and indeed what kind of justice, should figure into reconciliation. Here again, the decision to "pardon or prosecute" seems most often to be made on political grounds. In many cases, new governments have been unable or unwilling to bring the "old guard" to court, particularly if impunity is a condition for political transition. This should be acknowledged as a genuine dilemma in both the theory and practice of peace building. In this context, a truth commission is certainly better than doing nothing in the wake of massive human rights abuse. The Guatemalan case typifies this problem since, as Wilson (1997) writes:

...a maximalist 'Nuremberg option' for addressing war crimes is not even remotely possible in Guatemala. This is not to say that the legal route to justice should be abandoned altogether...What is essential is that the limitations of the legal system be recognised so that the Commission and other initiatives can complement its work.

Views about this aspect of reconciliation are also influenced by contemporary thinking about "restorative justice." Though this subject cannot be treated fully here, suffice to say that the positive experience of programs involving interaction between criminals and victims and community service punishments has led some to argue that the truth commission and forgiveness/amnesty approach to national reconciliation is actually more just than the traditional practice of "retaliatory" justice. However, it should be born in mind that, to date, restorative justice has been limited to less serious offenses, and while mutual "rehumanization" of conflict protagonists is an important dimension of reconciliation, it is hard to see how the new political order can gain credibility without at least addressing the question of punishment for offenders.

This issue has even broader ramifications. Most writers on this subject seem to overlook victims' rights under international law. Many international instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, require as Edelstein (1994) has pointed out, "...States Parties to provide 'effective remedies' *by national tribunals* for acts violating human rights, or provide for the 'right to be compensated' for acts violating fundamental rights (emphasis added). Thus, to advocate truth telling over

prosecution on any other than purely pragmatic grounds undermines the legitimacy of international law and weakens the already tenuous foundations of the international human rights regime. That national reconciliation efforts expressly intended to redress the effects of widespread human rights abuse could have such consequences is both ironic and disturbing.

There is certainly evidence that in the practice of transitional politics the relationship among truth telling, justice and reconciliation has become rather unclear. Consider the following statement by then South African Justice Minister Dullah Omar in support of the TRC as a way to redress the wrongs of Apartheid:

If the wounds of the past are to be healed, if a multiplicity of legal actions are to be avoided, if future human rights violations are to be avoided and, indeed, if we are to successfully initiate the building of a human rights culture disclosure of the truth and its acknowledgment are essential... Truth-telling responds to the demand for justice for the victims and facilitates national reconciliation (cited in van der Merwe and Johnson, 1997: 42).

Though one can be sympathetic with the underlying purpose of this statement, this argument can not easily be reconciled with the international covenants mentioned above. Omar seems to be attributing the quality of legitimate redress, normally associated with legal actions (which he suggests should be avoided) to truth telling--a transfer which even the TRC's final report indicates was not entirely successful (see van der Merwe, 1998). Some of these issues take on another significance if one considers the longer term. In the early days of transition one might well wonder, as Omar suggests, if pursuing legal solutions might jeopardize the prospects for reconciliation—again, this can be a genuine dilemma. However, over the longer term, it is hard to imagine more constructive inter-group relations persisting without the support of what is perceived to be an effective and fair system of legal redress.

A related issue here is reparations, and most commentators agree that they are an important part of the reconciliation process. They can also be one way to address the issues raised in the international conventions mentioned above. Questions arise, however, in regard to who should pay what to whom under what circumstances. It would seem most logical that the perpetrator, in the wake of acknowledgment and as an expression of contrition, should take some action to redress, even to a very small extent, the wrong he has done. However, it has most often been the new government who offers some form of material restitution to those deemed to be victims. When this same government has been obliged to offer amnesty to high profile perpetrators there is possible grounds for invidious comparisons. Hamber (1998) felt, for instance, that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may have given the impression that perpetrators gained more through amnesty than victims did through reparations. Chilean legal provisions for reparations, despite several creative aspects, were also perceived as offering significantly less to victims than would have been available through the court system--an alternative eliminated through amnesty provisions. Similar

critiques have been made of reparation provisions in Argentina, El Salvador and elsewhere (Edelstein, 1994). Basically, no matter how sincere and innovative, reparations of this kind always run the risk of being perceived as a "buy off," since they can never really compensate the individual victims for their loss.

Another limitation of contemporary models of reconciliation is that the problems of war-torn societies cannot be reduced to the conflict interface between "victims and perpetrators." For instance, the reconciliation literature has only just begun to address the close relationship between widespread political violence and burgeoning criminality. In this regard, Simpson (1997) points to "...the prevalence of well-organised criminal activity, very often associated with high levels of violence, in societies going through major transition..." and in South Africa "... there has been a tendency to blur the dividing lines between political and criminal violence." He suggests that the transition itself may be to blame since militant African youth do not "demilitarize" just because they are "demobilized." These people, rejected and disempowered by Apartheid society, had a home and an identity in their political organizations, but this changed when Apartheid started to collapse:

The irony about the shift from the struggle in the streets to the negotiating table is that it compounded the marginalisation of those people. The Party had given people a new uniform, a new language, new songs of liberation, but now the criminal gangs offered ready-made alternatives. Membership of these gangs provides an identity, social clothing, a language of its own, and the added advantage of providing some alternative forms of wealth creation (Simpson, 1997).

This pattern raises disturbing questions about the real impact of reconciliation. In effect, the violence associated with a specific conflict system may only be, to some extent, displaced rather than eliminated. The rising crime rate in South Africa has helped focus attention on this syndrome, but most post-conflict societies have proven vulnerable to this and related phenomena. This problem also highlights the fact that reconciliation efforts should be accompanied by other dimensions of peace building, such as economic reconstruction. Otherwise, there is a danger that class-related issues may replace ethnicity as the primary social cleavage during transition-- a trend some commentators feel is accentuated by the accelerating pace of neo-liberal economic globalization (Lerche, 1998).

Gender issues also don't seem to figure prominently in writing about reconciliation. It is, nonetheless, well documented that women, who do much of the essential work and domestic production in society, are most affected by widespread conflict. They are also the most victimized by other forms of direct and structural violence and tend to be politically marginalized. Therefore, as has been generally accepted by the World Bank and many NGOs, women's concerns should be central in conflict resolution and peace building. However, the literature doesn't focus much on women, since they are not a "group" in the same sense as an ethnic nation. As with criminality, such an omission runs the risk of leaving several of the root causes of social violence and victimization unacknowledged in the

course of reconciliation. Fortunately, women's groups such as the Madres are asserting their right to have a say in post conflict society and are playing an ever more important role in the new civil society which has emerged during democratization in many countries.

### Looking Forward

The question of structural violence, and more generally the relationship between interpersonal or inter-group conflict and underlying patterns of resource allocation merits further consideration. Van der Merwe (1993: 270), for instance, emphasizes that one cannot be separated from the other:

One cannot deal with...micro-processes as if they can be fully resolved independently from the broader social context. The conflictual social system has a very direct impact on the way people come to define their interests and their ability to pursue them at a personal level.

He explains further that South Africa has developed a "culture of violence" in which violence is seen as the norm and a functional response to conflict (van der Merwe, 1993: 273). Thus, as several institutions and commentators have observed, over the longer term the problem of how to improve historically disastrous inter-group relations is a cultural one. After they start talking to each other, group members who have inherited and imbibed legacies of hate should start asking hard questions about what aspects of their societies and cultures got them where they are. As Clark (1993: 51) has argued, only when social values and institutions are required to give account of themselves, when their fundamental assumptions are questioned, is there any hope of creating a political culture which fulfills rather than frustrates human needs. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (1997) goes even further with this theme suggesting that finding and implementing a more proactive model of peace building represents a critical evolutionary threshold for our species:

In our world of unprecedented levels of destructive weaponry and increased geographic and social proximity, competition between groups has become extremely dangerous. In the century to come, *human survival may well depend on our ability to learn a new form of adaptation*, one in which intergroup competition is largely replaced by mutual understanding and human cooperation. Curiously, a vital part of human experience--learning to live together--has been badly neglected throughout the world (emphasis added).

However, it is unlikely that in the short to medium run, many societies except those that have experienced near or complete breakdown would be ready to face the political implications of calling so much of the status quo into question.

But should we really wait for "breakdown" to start thinking about peace building? Couldn't reconciliation be more proactive? Up till now, it has been attempted as a reaction to overt violence associated with widespread human rights abuse, but there is an increasing interest in "early warning" to prevent conflicts of this kind. The costs, both in human and material terms, of protracted communal conflicts and the time required to repair their effects suggest the international community as a whole should invest in preventing their occurrence (Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997) Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that such factors as widespread human rights abuse are closely associated with the onset of conflict; a fact which suggests that if political will and legitimate means existed, it could indeed be possible to intervene in potentially violent conflict systems before they become intractable. On the one hand, effective early warning and action might obviate the need for the type of reconciliation discussed in this paper; but, on the other, they might also open the way for a new kind of reconciliation as part of a more proactive paradigm of peace building. In this context, peace workers (whether indigenous or third parties) would seek opportunities to promote improved group relations before victimization and dehumanization reached extreme proportions. To be effective, however, such interventions should establish more equitable social relations and not seek only to shore up the status quo. If such initiatives still seem unlikely for the foreseeable future it is because, sadly, the international community is more ready to spend on responses to the humanitarian emergencies which result from violent conflict than to invest what would likely be more limited sums in preventing them. Nonetheless, a logical longer term goal for reconciliation is the elimination of the social conditions which have made it necessary in the first place.

### Conclusion

The survey and critique of reconciliation presented here suggests a few concluding observations. First, while there are real benefits from certain approaches to reconciliation, other initiatives are more ambiguous. This ambiguity arises from the transitional political context in which programs of national reconciliation have been conceived and executed. National reconciliation, as a political exercise, may through "coming to terms with the past," save the state but not necessarily heal the society; and post-conflict societies run the risk of exchanging political for criminal or structural violence. Unless specifically and directly addressed, violence as a symptom of a violent culture will remain.

Second, *national* reconciliation cannot be limited to Montville's three steps of acknowledgment, contrition and forgiveness. Rather, justice, understood as some form of legal redress, has to figure into the process somewhere. However, it is precisely the inability of transitional democratic institutions to provide this kind of justice that constitutes the most compelling rationale for truth telling alternatives. Here again, there is need to see reconciliation in a context where, instead of replacing or undermining retributive justice, it can potentially serve as a "bridge" from a past where such justice was denied and a present

where it is not yet practically and politically possible to a future where, hopefully, it can become an integral part of the social order. Put more simply, successful peace building should include establishing an effective legal system, or reinforcing the foundations of one that already exists. Over the longer run, however, the legal system must itself come to reflect and reinforce human needs.

Third, building on the previous point, reconciliation should include the search for a model of governance and social relations that enables all groups in society to deal equitably and creatively with conflict. This is a long term project involving hit or miss efforts to found and perfect new institutions in both the public sector and civil society. Otherwise reconciliation will only be a stop gap measure necessitated because the powers that be have not yet found the courage and commitment to assess their country's particular "cultural pathologies."

Fourth, and finally, the international community—including broadly, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and state actors--should, as argued above, become more proactively involved in ameliorating inter-group tensions *before* violence erupts. Such a course of action, fraught as it is with political difficulties, represents an essential step forward in global governance and can not be delayed forever. We know that widespread human rights abuse leads to conflict with a high potential for turning violent, and the international community is increasingly unwilling to accept national sovereignty as a "shield" for such abuse. As long ago as 1991, the then U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar wrote:

It is now increasingly felt that the principle of non-interference within the essential domestic jurisdiction of states cannot be regarded as a protective barrier behind which human rights could be massively or systematically violated with impunity (cited in Danish Institute of International Affairs, 1999: 14).

This could be seen as the next step in international support for democratization (i.e., going beyond superficial institutional reform to influence the political culture within which new democratic institutions exist and function). For, as Galtung (1995: 12) has argued, reconciliation, and peace building in general, should really seek to move post conflict societies out of their ingrained structural and cultural violence by "...making peace-making itself a model of structural peace..."

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