

Reconciliation And Its Socio-Cultural Dimensions

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Abstract

Reconciliation is a phenomenal process that in the socio-cultural context discusses the course of repairing and fostering the relations between war-torn and deeply fragmented societies. In this research, different socio-cultural dimensions have been probed to understand the inclusive dimensions of social and cultural values and how reconciliation is implicit, adopted, and experienced. In deeply fragmented societies it recognizes the past injuries and problems with the understanding of all fragments of society involved along their perspectives. This involves making a framework that leads to a reciprocal understanding of issues with the help of truth commissions, justice, forgiveness, social healing along the role of different levels of leadership to bring peace. The focus of this research is to explore and analyze the difference between reconciliation and conflict resolution along the socio-cultural dimensions of reconciliation. An analytical and descriptive approach has been adopted to understand the different aspects of reconciliation.

Keywords: *Reconciliation; Truth Commission; Conflict resolution; Justice, social healing.*

Introduction

Although the idea of reconciliation is very old, it has only recently been used in political science, international relations, peace studies, and conflict studies. This word was mostly used in religious contexts before 1994, but due to the abrupt change in South Africa's political landscape, the creation of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and associated efforts to resolve conflicts in other conflict areas, political scientists are now likely focusing on this as a novel idea (Kelman, 2008). When working in conflict areas, UN peacekeeping teams now utilize this word the most. In general, practitioners, professional peacekeepers, and academics view reconciliation as a crucial step needed to bring about peace in cultures that are experiencing severe violence. Surprisingly, there hasn't been a single, comprehensive definition of reconciliation up until now. Political scientist Susan Dwyer describes it as, there is no clear account or definition of what reconciliation is, and what are its requirements, defensibly alerting the cynics among us. Reconciliation is being counseled upon individuals who have been vicious and murderous enemies, upon sufferers and culprits of terrible human rights violations, and upon people whose very self-conceptions have been regulated in terms of

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historical and sometimes state-indorsed relations of dominance and compliance. (Dwyer-1999).

This is the rationale behind the various definitions that social scientists and practitioners have provided. In factionalized cultures, reconciliation, to put it simply, offers an opportunity to atone for past transgressions and atrocities while paving the way for a more peaceful future. To put an end to political violence, reconciliation has been pushed in the politics of split nations such as Northern Ireland and the African countries. Rajeev Bhargava, a political scientist, summarises it like way:

“By reconciliation, I mean a cancellation of enmity or estrangement, via a morally grounded forgiveness” (Bhargava-2000).

However, few other political scientists disagree that forgiveness is a necessary component of reconciliation, but many others do.

Definitions of Reconciliation

As it is already said, there is no unified accepted definition for reconciliation. Political scientists have since provided definitions based on their expertise and real-world experience in the fields of political science, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. Following are some definitions to help scholars to better understand this terminology.

- a. As per Joanna Santa-Barbra, Reconciliation entails returning to a peaceful state in a relationship, where the involved parties refrain from causing harm and can gradually rebuild trust, thus eliminating revenge as a viable choice. (Santa-Barbra, 2007)
- b. According to Lisa Schirch, Reconciliation involves a process among opposing factions to recognize fundamental grievances and find mutually acceptable resolutions to cease hostilities and establish normalized political ties. (Lisa-2011).
- c. Kelman defines Reconciliation as results from effective conflict resolution, emerging as a culmination of the process that fosters it. However, it's important to note that reconciliation isn't solely dependent on reaching an agreement; rather, it encompasses both a journey and an end goal (Kelman-2004).
- d. In the views of John Galtung, Reconciliation is a complex concept rooted in deep psychological, sociological, theological, philosophical, and fundamentally human aspects, yet achieving it successfully remains an elusive endeavor. (Galtung-2001).
- e. Leadreach explains reconciliation that At its core, reconciliation revolves around individuals and their dynamic connections, evolving through an adaptive process focused on fostering growth and healing. It involves a continuous journey of transformation and redefining relationships. (Leadreach-2001).
- f. In the words of Brounéus, Reconciliation is a societal endeavor encompassing the mutual recognition of historical pain and the transformation of harmful attitudes and actions into constructive relationships, aiming for lasting peace. (Brounéus -2003, p-20).

Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution

Understanding the conflict and how to resolve it is essential. The process that results in a mutually acceptable and long-lasting agreement between two or more groups or cultures is referred to as "conflict resolution." The research on conflict resolution exposes the strategies, demands, along tactics used by the opposing groups to settle their disagreement amicably (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004). Reconciliation, on the other side, is a general term that includes both the post-conflict situation and conflict settlement.

From a conceptual standpoint, conflict resolution is merely one aspect of reconciliation; reconciliation itself is not synonymous with it. On the other hand, reconciliation is a comprehensive process that deals with the conflict at all its stages and helps the community to heal its wounds over time through reintegration and rehabilitation. According to Lederach, the act of fostering relationships amongst adversaries is what makes reconciliation essential to resolving conflicts in societies that are sharply divided (Lederach 1998, P-142). Since it involves a shared goal between opposing parties, conflict resolution is far more than just settling disputes. Denial Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink state that,

“Reconciliation goes beyond the agenda of formal conflict resolution to changing the motivation, goals, beliefs, attitude and emotions of the great majority of the society members regarding the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the parties themselves” (Bar-Tal & Bennink -2004, P-12).

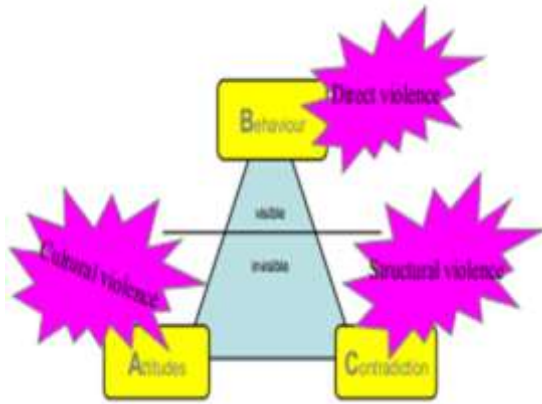
Conflict resolution, in Kelman's view, is the result of interactive agreements between disputing parties rather than an agreement imposed by a foreign authority. Resolving conflicts indicates a shift in the partnership. Stated differently, conflict resolution and reconciliation are two distinct approaches to achieving distinct goals that occasionally overlap rather than two distinct methods of reaching the same objective. The reconciliation process is an ongoing procedure that is connected to conflict resolution but does not take its place. Reconciliation and conflict resolution typically complement one another, although occasionally they could be at odds (Kelman, 2010).

John Galtung Model of Conflict and Violent Response

Understanding the causes of any conflict and the types of violence involved is also essential. The ABC triangle of conflict, as proposed by Johan Galtung, illustrates three elements: A. represents the attitudes of the actors; B. represents their behaviour, and C. expresses the conflict among the actors in terms of mismatched principles or goals. These three elements are interconnected, and every one of them has the power to reduce animosity among rivals. This is a great model for comprehending any kind of dispute.

Using his well-known violence triangle model, Johan Galtung has defined three types of violence by this concept. First, there is direct aggression, which encompasses both verbal and physical abuse. When there is a victim and an offender, the violence is frequently more severe. The second type of violence is structural violence, which includes societal injustices and inequality such as nepotism, corruption, and unequal resource allocation. The third type of violence is cultural violence, which is always a result of societal beliefs related to culture, religion, or ideology. Usually, it is used to justify the practice of structural or direct violence (Galtung, 1996).

Figure 1: The ABC Triangle of Violent Response and Conflict



Source: John Galtung-1996

The Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Reconciliation

It is important to always understand the dispute in terms of its sociocultural components and values. Since every civilization and culture has its unique beginnings, every effort to bring about peace (or to change society from one of conflict to one of harmony) must begin with and be grounded in that society's unique cultural heritage and societal ideals. Every culture is a synthesis of intricate and varied traditions, beliefs, practices, attitudes, and behaviours ranging from politics to cuisine, art, and, in certain cases, religions. According to Starcken, a society's culture shapes how the outside world perceives its citizens. (Starcken, 1999)

Old myths are transformed by battle and war's violence, hatred, and terror (Kaufman, 2001), and each party involved explains the actions of its own or other groups. The fabric of society and culture is rife with injustice, war crimes, and post-conflict ideologies.

Everybody has a unique tale, which influences their media (print and electronic), educational ideals, language, and local stories and historical narratives. Thus, to change and allow people to live in peace, these ideas must be challenged (Brounéus -2003, p-22). To comprehend the good or bad effects that could aid in the process of reconciliation, it is crucial to look for the identification of cultural elements of conflict. John Paul Lederach has described it as the primary foundation for maintaining peace over time that always lies within the native populace plus their cultural heritage (Leadreach-1998, p-94).

Reconciliation besides Truth Commission

Distinguishing between forgiveness, truth commission, and reconciliation is quite challenging. When we discuss reconciliation as a whole process, it is necessary to use a variety of instruments to attain the intended outcome, which is unquestionably lasting peace. All opposing sides must be made aware of all historical events, whether positive or negative, in their real form, and they must acknowledge them as a fundamental prerequisite for reconciliation (Bar-Tal, Bennink -2004, P-18).

Comprehension of the Truth Commission's goals is essentially required. A truth commission is neither the same nor required to be combined with testimony given in court. The goal of the Truth Commission is to give sufferers of inhumanity and war crimes a chance to share their experiences for society's collective record, preventing future historians from favoring one party over another.

Recognising, acknowledging, and shedding light on society's hidden segments is another goal of this (Nordquist-2006, p-24). Truth commissions are a crucial component of efforts to promote reconciliation. A well-thought-out and focused truth commission has the potential to change the dispute and affect the victims psychologically as well. This can be accomplished by providing a safe area where victims can express their fears, hopes, and stories of injustice and war crimes committed against them.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu asserts that South Africa's Truth Commission continues to be a highly successful tool for bringing people together and for changing the social and political climate of the nation (Nguyen Vo, 2008). Truth commissions are also responsible for formulating recommendations about the organisational, legal, and formal steps that need to be implemented to prevent human rights breaches from occurring again (Connolly-2012, p-7).

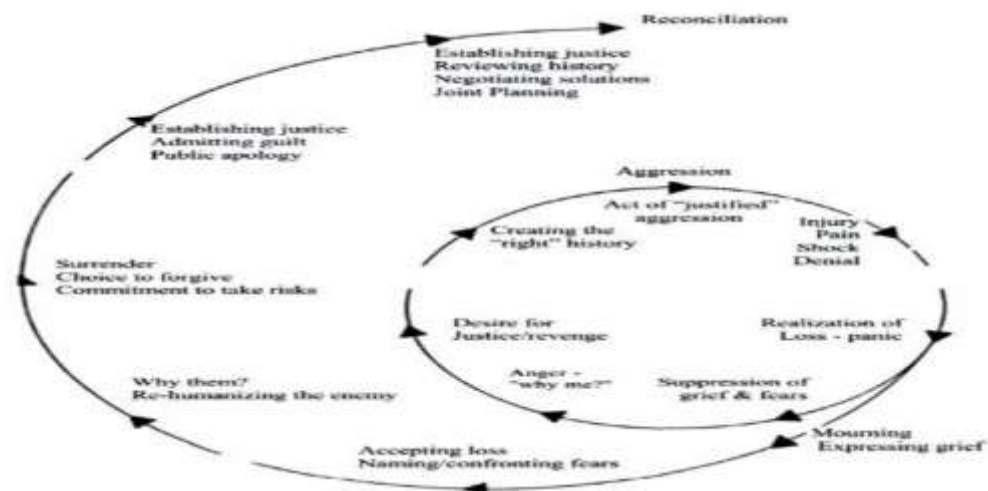
Reconciliation and Forgiveness

It's critical to comprehend the connection between forgiveness and reconciliation. When examining reconciliation through the lens of religion, particularly Christianity, academics aim to create a strong connection between forgiveness and reconciliation. As per the theological guidelines of the Catholic Church, reconciliation is central to faith in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness holds a vital place in Christian reconciliation, initiating with the victim as it precedes conversion. Protestants stress that the sinner must first seek forgiveness for the process to begin (Caritas-2002, pp-15,29).

It is significant to note that forgiveness is included in some capacity in all major religions. For example, Hindu religious texts list forgiveness as a virtue and give examples of divine examples of forgiveness. Buddhism emphasises letting go of anger before hurting other people and discusses the idea of Karma. The concepts of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation are central to the Day of Atonement in Judaism.

In the name of Allah, Islam similarly prioritises forgiveness over retaliation, however, mild retaliation is allowed (Santa-Barbra -2007, pp-173,174). Botcharova Olga created what is known as Botcharova's Seven Steps to Forgiveness, a conceptual cycle that explains the transition from hostility and retaliation to reconciliation (Botcharova -2002)

Figure 2: Botcharova Olga's Model: Seven Steps to Forgiveness



Source: Botcharova Olga -2002

Nonetheless, a large number of social scientists disagree with the reconciliation model based on forgiveness. According to Colleen Murphy, Forgiveness doesn't aid our comprehension of what must transpire post-forgiveness. (Murphy-2007, p-855).

It is crucial to remember that reconciliation is meant to be the very minimum between two people, but forgiveness is an individual process requiring no reciprocal action. When forgiveness is declared at the state or political level, it may undermine the entire process (Nordquist-2006, pp. 16–17). The victim should have the choice of whether or not to forgive. The mechanism that fosters this climate is reconciliation. It is not appropriate to employ coercion to get it granted (Bloomfield-2006, P-23). The forgiveness concept of reconciliation is completely refuted by Dwyer in his piece *Reconciliation for Realists*. According to him, reconciliation and forgiveness are distinct concepts. This distinction is valuable, as it suggests that reconciliation could be achievable psychologically even when forgiveness is not feasible. Any understanding of reconciliation, whether on a small or large scale, that hinges on interpersonal harmony and positive emotions will likely fall short as a practical model for most individuals. To promote reconciliation effectively, it's crucial to frame it in terms that are believable and relevant to the involved groups. (Dwyer-2003, p-96)

Reconciliation besides Social Healing

To understand the process of reconciliation in the truest sense in a comprehensive way, it is vital to investigate the relationship between social healing and reconciliation. It is important to recognise that traumas experienced by the people in that particular region or nation follow war and warfare. As a result, these experiences affect many people, including children, psychologically and physically and make it difficult for them to adjust to life after conflict.

Healing includes not just physical recovery from illness but also offering consolation to those who are grieving. Not many social scientists see the connection between forgiveness and healing. Healing the past is essential for the future since reconciliation is a protracted process (Difäm, 2004).

Healing and reconciliation go hand in hand, particularly in communities where violent groups that were once engaged in conflict now coexist side by side. But before trauma survivors can start the healing process, they need to feel somewhat secure. In addition to relieving the discomfort associated with psychological wounds, healing makes room for the processes involved in reconciliation (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, and Hagengimana- 2005).

It is impossible to overstate the value of healing in civilizations devastated by conflict. According to Jeong and Lerche (2002), rebuilding damaged villages is just as important as healing the hearts and minds of those affected and traumatised by conflict and violence. Johan Galtung has described the relationship between healing and reconciliation using a mathematical equation. He asserts that healing and closure add up to reconciliation. "Reconciliation = Closure + Healing". He has also defined healing as the victims' process of rehabilitation and closure as the cessation of hostilities with no return of conflict (Galtung-2001).

Truly restoring peace and blocking the path to future conflict are the two main goals of reconciliation. It's critical to realise that achieving reconciliation will not be possible if the wounds of conflict are not healed. As a result, the healing and reconciliation processes must be considered as a whole and as a relationship between the body and the soul.

Reconciliation and Justice

The pursuit of justice is essential to the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation following a violent conflict is impossible to achieve without the application of justice in its purest form. Professor Bar-Tal asserts that reconciliation cannot occur without justice (Brounéus -2003, p-29). According to Mark Drumbl, the justice and judicial systems give victims a chance to tell their story through a trial, and by rendering a decision, announcing a punishment, and carrying it out, the judicial system enhances the victims' social solidarity and sense of security (Drumbl -2007, p-17).

In Rama Mani's perspective, social justice eliminates laws and practices that discriminate, laying the groundwork for any community. According to Mani (2007), social justice is also indirectly impacted by the legal actions taken against predators.

According to Lederach, justice is the pursuit of "individual and group rights," which would remedy the wrong, permit the repair of society, and restructure it so that opportunities are distributed fairly among the populace. According to him, reconciliation is the confluence of four key ideas: justice, mercy, truth, and peace (Lederach-1998, pp. 28–29).

Lederach's Pyramid of Peace and Leadership Tiers

It's critical to comprehend the various leadership tiers involved, the impact they may have, and how they contribute to the reconciliation process. In addition to outlining the many levels of leadership that are involved in the reconciliation process, John Paul Lederach has also elaborated on the intended outcomes and their role in the process. Additionally, he has established the three methods of reconciliation: grassroots, middle-range, and top-level. "Peace Pyramid" is the name he has given it.

He has attempted to provide a conceptual framework for the reconciliation process with the use of this Peace Pyramid. As per the Lederach Peace Pyramid, there are three primary categories into which the leadership of opposing parties engaged in conflict can be classified (Lederach-1998, pp-37-43).

1. Leadership and Approach at The Top Level

The most important political or military figures in the fight are typically the highest-ranking leaders or actors in any civilization. Because of the current dynamics of the media, these players or leadership represent the highest echelons of the government or the opposition and are constantly visible.

Without a doubt, they are strong, and because of their prominence, many people follow them. However, their following puts them under tremendous pressure, making it difficult for them to make any unpopular decisions that go against their positions. The pyramid's apex is reached at this level.

As per the Lederach peace pyramid, the strategy at the top level is also referred to as the "trickle-down" or top-down approach. The fundamental and main goals of the peace negotiators, who are themselves supported by international players like the UN, at this stage, are to establish a cease-fire and to bring the opposing parties to the negotiating table for peace talks.

2. Leadership and Approach at The Middle Level

Typically middle-level leadership encompasses well-regarded individuals from different ethnic, well-read, religious, corporate, scholarly, and public-spirited backgrounds within a

society. They often hold prescribed positions that command boundless respect, serving as vital links between top leadership and the masses at the grassroots level. They are responsible for leading middle-level population groups such as colleges, business groups, and minority ethnicities, their power shoots from their personal relationships rather than political or armed power. They operate modestly, away from the media limelight; and possess greater flexibility in their engagements. Taking leverage of their widespread networks, they play a key role in conflict transformation. The middle-out approach focuses on training these middle-order leaders to institute viable peace infrastructure by using approaches like problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training, and peace commissions.

3. Leadership and Approach at The Grassroots Level

This category includes the vast majority of people in any given civilization. These form the cornerstone of any nation or area. This level of living is most impacted by any conflict or war. Their daily needs for food, drink, shelter, and family security occupy the majority of their time. For daily survival, the leadership at this level collaborates and integrates with their political, religious, and ethnic groupings.

At this stage, the conflict is faced head-on with human rights abuses, racial, political, and cultural prejudice, violence, and unstable social and economic conditions. They are the ones who have personally experienced ingrained animosity and contempt for daily prejudices.

The top-level and middle-level approaches are not the same as the grassroots or bottom-top strategy because of the completely different types of obstacles that are encountered. The vast and enormous quantity of individuals is the main issue or difficulty. Because of this, it is impossible to affect every person; at best, only local or community leadership can be impacted.

Second, as was previously mentioned, the majority of people at this level are primarily concerned with survival and have little regard for anything save the necessities of life. As a result, individuals require psychological treatment for their post-trauma. This can be accomplished by providing grassroots training to local peace commissions.

Figure 3: Level of Leadership and Approaches to Peace



Source: Lederach, 1998

Conclusion

Reconciliation is a multi-dimensional process that can be understood and improved by studying, analyzing, and examining different case studies. It is important to understand that reconciliation is not a one-size-fit process for all rather it is a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and social values of any society. It is important to understand that without the acknowledgment of past wrongdoings, and injustices, fostering dialogue, and promoting understanding within the conflicting factions, it is crucial to achieve reconciliation with meaningful results in these societies. However, continued research and practical steps are needed to steer the challenges and opportunities of reconciliation in diverse socio-cultural frameworks. This will ultimately contribute to peace, harmony, and justice in the societies.

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