

# **Problematizing Reconciliation in Local Contexts and the Role of the International Community**

## **General Framework**

Although often used, the term ‘reconciliation’ remains problematic. It lacks conceptual clarity and is always a very complex process in local realities. Verdeja even goes as far as calling reconciliation ‘fundamentally disjunctured and uneven’ (Verdeja, 2009, p. 182). Political reconciliation is understood as a complex process where two fragile goals coincide at the same moment. Former adversaries open up to each other but also question each other. This might be viewed as a never-ending process (Schaap, 2004). According to Lily Gardner Feldman (2012), the distinction between moral and instrumental reconciliation is that moral reconciliation deals with moral issues like values and friendship while instrumental reconciliation concerns business and economic relations and benefits derived from engaging in intrastate relations. On the other hand, Verdeja proposes a closer focus on discussion, deliberation and politics based on the democratic values of the ‘others’ to achieve reconciliation, rather than ‘deep acceptance, or willful embrace of the “other”’ understood as moral reconciliation (Verdeja, 2009, p. 181). Kelman argues that the ‘key is mutual acceptance of the other’s identity and humanity’ (Kelman, 2008, p. 16).

In any case, the importance of reconciliation in Transitional Justice processes is high since it is a process rather than a goal, and is thus ‘not linear, but a continuously evolving relationship between parties: at each stage a relapse into violence is possible’ (Rosoux, 2008). Conflict may entail massive amount of civilian killings, flows of refugees, internally displaced people, child soldiers, beheadings, grave abuses of women and other forms of violence. Since it is salient to prevent relapses to conflict, delicacy is ‘required’ at every step of reconciliation after the conflict (Verdeja, 2009).

A vast literature deals with the role, design and effectiveness of the transitional justice programs implemented by the international organizations (EU, UN), international and local NGO’s, and the states. However the mismatch between the transitional justice programs, imposed and in some cases implemented by the international community, and local responses has been insufficiently analyzed. Recent literature on criminal justice and peacebuilding sheds more light on the mismatch between the top down transitional justice programs and local responses.

However, reconciliation in local contexts has been insufficiently analyzed. The results of transitional justice programs on the ground in post and ongoing conflict zones reflect an absence of the desired outcomes, ie reconciliation between former enemies, by the international and local community.

## **Aims of the Workshop**

This workshop attempts to deepen the meaning of reconciliation in the local contexts and trace the influence of the international community on reconciliation. The latter includes states represented through Embassies, IOs, NGOs, humanitarian organizations, universities, religious organizations and other groups in the respective case studies. While international community's role in conflict resolution, mediation, management, peacebuilding and nationbuilding has been analyzed in depth across Africa, Asia and the former Yugoslavia (Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Rudolph et al., 2013), it is necessary to problematize their involvement in promoting judicial and non-judicial transitional justice mechanisms. Therefore this workshop aims to analyze the role of the international community and the potential different or similar meanings of reconciliation between the local and international community in the transitional justice framework.

Furthermore, transitional justice is often criticized as a top-down approach to dealing with the past by adopting classical mechanisms such as criminal justice, reparations and semi-local/international mechanisms such as truth seeking. In many cases, there has been a backlash when the local community opposes the international community's promotion of these policies. As a response to the resistance of local communities, several approaches and theories developed in transitional justice. For instance, McEvoy & McGregor (2008) supports proposals towards transitional justice from below through grassroots activism (McEvoy & McGregor, 2008). Furthermore, a growing stream of research focuses on localizing transitional justice that prioritizes the local needs rather than international norms (Shaw, Waldorf, & Hazan, 2010). Based on an understanding of localities and culture through tracing how ordinary people respond and sometimes transform transitional justice mechanisms, more locally responsive approaches are suggested for implementation in transitional justice. For instance, theoretical frameworks emphasizing the role of identity to achieve reconciliation are promoted (Aiken, 2013). Aiken argues that

‘transitional justice interventions will be successful in promoting reconciliation and sustainable peace to the extent that they can help to catalyze those crucial processes of ‘social learning’ needed to transform the antagonistic relationships and identifications that divide post-conflict societies even after the signing of formal peace agreements.’ (Aiken, 2013)

## **Therefore the workshop wants to put the following *questions* to the fore**

- What is the meaning of reconciliation for local communities? What types of reconciliation, moral, instrumental or other, do you see emerge in case studies? Which types are deeper or have a stronger impact and why?
- What is the role of the international community (Embassies, IO's, NGO's, and other groups) in reconciliation processes? Is the international community necessary for reconciliation to occur in practice from the perspective of ordinary local people? How and when are international policy calls for reconciliation contradictory to local perceptions and local needs? How does the memory of local people develop around international

community's engagement in reconciliation? What types of international community interventions are necessary, for how long and when?

We expect the *case studies* to at least partly address these (or similar) questions. The case studies are salient for understanding further the turn to instrumental, moral or other types reconciliation in local communities and how the local communities view the international community's engagement in transitional justice. The focus lies on case studies representing post (civil) war cases, ie Rwanda, Balkans and the cases that relapsed to conflict, ie Congo, Palestine/Israel, etc. Conflict cases are chosen since many states are still experiencing a fragile transitional period (ie Balkans, Palestine/Israel) and where dealing with the past has been neglected in the agenda of the local governments and international organizations.

### **Guidelines & practical info:**

If interested, please submit an abstract of max 500 words and a short biography by **18<sup>th</sup> February 2016** at [globalaffairs@fgga.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:globalaffairs@fgga.leidenuniv.nl)

You will receive information on the final selection and programme by the end of February.

### **Date and Location: 17 May, The Hague**

The organizers will not be able to reimburse the costs for your travel and/or stay.

This workshop is organized by Centre for Global Affairs, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs (Leiden University in the Hague) and co-organized by CegeSoma (Brussels). For more info: Arlinda Rrustemi ([a.rrustemi@fgga.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:a.rrustemi@fgga.leidenuniv.nl))

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