

## Chapter 2

# Reconciliation as a Puzzle: Walking Among Definitions

Valerie Rosoux

Political thinkers and official representatives have traditionally been reluctant to consider reconciliation as a relevant concept in their field. Because of the religious connotation of the term, they have generally regarded reconciliation as an intimate process limited to interpersonal relationships. Since the end of the Cold War however, more and more specialists in history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, criminology, international relations and political science pay attention to what is designated as probably “the most important condition” for maintaining a stable peace (Bar-Siman-Tov 2000: 237) and the “most effective and durable way of resolving and preventing destructive conflicts” (Reychler and Paffenholz 2001: 342). Three particular contexts favoured this evolution: the transition from military regimes in Latin America and Africa; the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the demise of apartheid in South Africa.

At the official level, national and international representatives persistently refer to the notion. In less than two years, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, mentioned “the power of reconciliation” in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Israel, Liberia, Angola, Kosovo, Burma, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Thailand. As First Lady, she had already emphasised the need for reconciliation in Rwanda, El Salvador and Uganda. In statements regarding “conflicts that have tormented generations”, she insisted that “reconciliation has to be a part of the solution” (Afghanistan, 10 October 2010). In the same line, the United Nations former Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, constantly reminded that there is no way to avoid violence without “a spirit of compromise and reconciliation”. Since 2007, he combined almost systematically the concept of reconciliation to the notions of peace, democracy, stability, justice, truth and human rights. Beyond these general goals, he seemed to see reconciliation as a way to “bring a sense of closure” to harrowing chapters in history (Cambodia, 27 October 2010). Two days after the

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arrest of Laurent Gbagbo in Ivory Coast, the US Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human rights referred no less than 22 times to the notion of reconciliation. And indeed, in his first official statement, new Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara presented reconciliation as the main challenge faced by his country.

There is no need to multiply the examples to illustrate how recurrent the notion of reconciliation has become on the official stage. However, this increasing use does not necessarily favour a clearer picture of the phenomenon. A certain conceptual vagueness forces us to raise a basic question to avoid any confusion: what are we talking about when we talk about reconciliation?

## 2.1 Three Major Pieces of the Puzzle

Beyond the flourishing and sometimes competing theoretical classifications, three main approaches to political reconciliation can be distinguished: structural, psycho-social and spiritual. However, the concept is so rich that any classification system could be easily challenged.<sup>1</sup> Since the aim of this book is not to settle the issue from a theoretical point of view, though, we will not get involved in an academic debate about labels and categorizations. The first approach prioritizes security, economic interdependence and political cooperation between parties (Kacowicz and Bar-Siman-Tov 2000). The second underlines the cognitive and emotional aspects of the process of rapprochement between former adversaries (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004; Ahluwalia et al. 2012). The third accentuates a process of collective healing based on the rehabilitation of both victims and offenders (Tutu 1999; Amstutz 2005). In short, the structural approach generally deals with the interests and the issues at stake, whereas the two others concentrate on the relationships between the parties.

### 2.1.1 Structures and Institutions

After the cessation of violent acts, parties in conflict can establish mutually accepted structural and institutional mechanisms to reduce the general perception of threat and to resolve any possible and critical disagreement. When former

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<sup>1</sup>Gardner-Feldman(1999) distinguishes philosophical-emotional and practical-material components of reconciliation. In the same line, Long and Brecke (2003) analyze two main models of reconciliation: a signalling model and a forgiveness model. Hermann (2004) discerns cognitive, emotional-spiritual and procedural aspects of reconciliation. Nadler and Liviatan (2006) put an emphasis on socio-emotional and instrumental reconciliation. Schaap (2005) emphasizes restorative and political reconciliation approaches. Galtung (2001) refers to no less than twelve different conceptions of reconciliation.

belligerents live in different states, these mechanisms can take the form of confidence-building measures like exchanging representatives in various political, economic, and cultural spheres; maintaining formal and regular channels of communication and consultation between public officials; developing joint institutions and organizations to stimulate economic and political interdependence; and reducing tensions by disarmament, demobilisation of military forces and the demilitarization of territories. The Franco-German case illustrates the effectiveness of such structural measures. Six years after the end of World War II, an economic union for coal and steel production was created; in 1963, Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer signed the Elysee Treaty which institutionalized regular meetings between foreign, defense and education ministers; in 1988, the Franco-German Council was established and in 1995, joint military units were formed. When adversaries live together in one single state, structural measures mainly concern institutional reforms. Their purpose is to integrate all the groups in a democratic polity, restore human and civil rights and favour a fair redistribution of wealth (see Chaps. 7 on development and 13 on land). The negotiations that made the South African transition possible exemplify the complexity of this process.

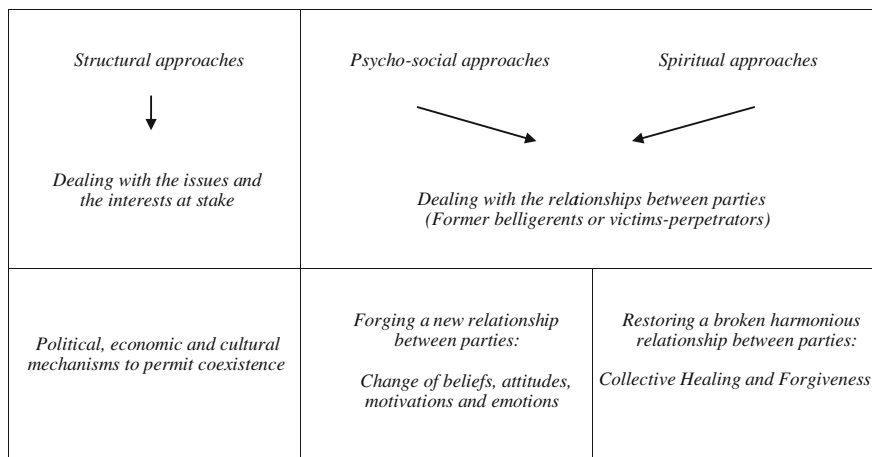
### 2.1.2 *Relationships*

Although some structural changes can be implemented relatively quickly after the end of a conflict, the transformation of relationships does not occur in the same way. Many studies are dedicated to this slow and arduous process between former belligerents or between victims and perpetrators. They are often interconnected but their visions of the transformation process diverge. Cognitive and psycho-social approaches analyse what they call a “deep change” in the public’s psychological repertoire. This evolution results from a process of reciprocal adjustments in beliefs, attitudes, motivations and emotions shared by the majority of society members (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004: 17; Stover et al. 2004: 202; Klar and Brascombe 2016). From that perspective, the goal pursued by the reconciliation process is to forge a *new* relationship between the parties (Ackermann 1994).

### 2.1.3 *Spiritual*

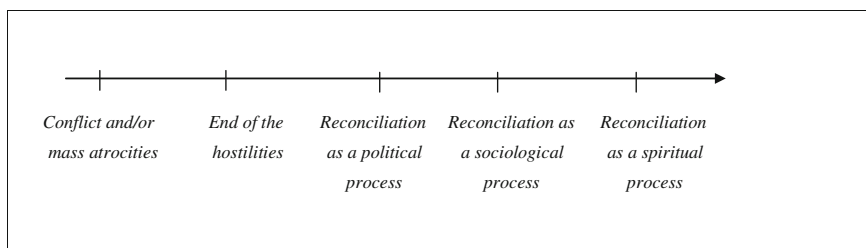
By contrast, the so-called spiritual approaches attempt to understand how parties can *restore* a broken harmonious relationship between the parties. They go a step further by asserting that reconciliation attempts to lead to forgiveness for an adversary’s misdeeds (Shriver 1995; Lederach 1998; Staub 2000; Philpott 2006). The reference to the “spirit of reconciliation” is not only made by theologians and

scholars, but also by policy-makers. Former German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, for instance frequently mentioned this “spirit” as being at the origin of the mutual trust which made European integration possible (Pristina, 27 August 2010; Zagreb, 25 August 2010; Berlin, 29 October 2010). Former Australian Prime minister, Kevin Rudd, went even further in emphasizing the “sacrament of reconciliation” (Sydney, 11 February 2011). The last ‘apartheid’ President of South Africa, FW de Klerk has often argued that forgiveness is less an outcome than a precondition for reconciliation.

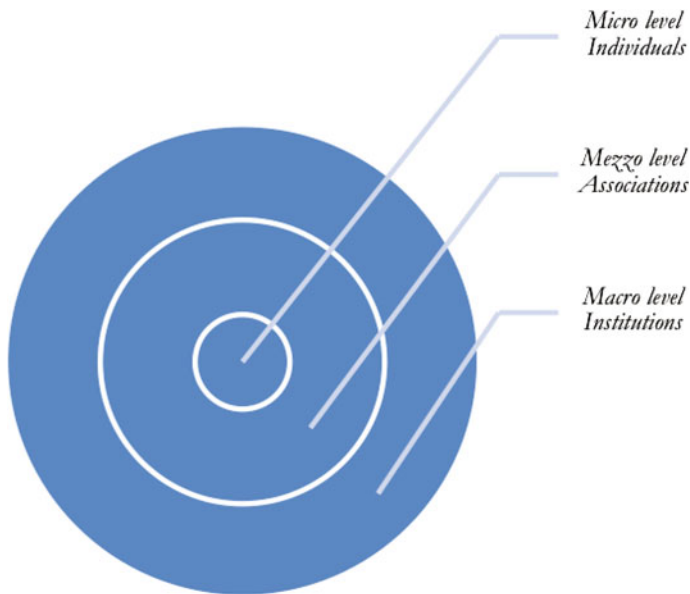


## 2.2 Complementary or Competitive Frames?

Facing this plurality of interpretations of reconciliation, two main approaches can be adopted. The first consists in combining them in order to encompass the whole picture of reconciliation efforts. This attitude makes sense particularly if one realizes that each of these conceptions focuses on a specific piece of the puzzle to be understood. Accordingly, the approaches can be conceived as successive stages of a long-term process. It can indeed be argued that in some specific cases, the rapprochement that took place between former adversaries started with a pragmatic deal between parties, leading to common projects and institutions; that these confidence-building measures created conditions for a progressive transformation of relationships; and, lastly, that this process impacted every single individual affected by the violence in a way or another. One could argue that the Franco-German case is to some extent illustrative of such a process.



Framing reconciliation in terms of a timeline is not only illuminating, it also allows us to look at the process under the lens of agency. The focal point becomes the variety of protagonists involved in the rapprochement process as it evolves. From this angle, the process is generally described as being launched by the political elite who propose and implement structural changes at the macro level. In a second step, at a mezzo or intermediary level, people-to-people activities attempt to create links between groups. This level is typically where schools, media, NGOs, churches, or local councils play a role. A third step eventually concerns individuals at a micro level, knowing that at the end of the day, reconciliation is all about individuals. Reconciliation at a political level then creates a context for societal change, and eventually a transformation of individual relationships. Former South African President, Nelson Mandela, regularly envisioned this kind of evolution. In an address to Parliament in 1998, Mandela enunciated these successive steps, asserting that the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) established three years before was “not the end, but the beginning of the process of reconciliation” (6 February 1998). “In the final analysis”, he had already explained, reconciliation largely depends on “the performance of local councils” (Cape Town, 9 February 1996) and, ultimately, on the attitude of each individual. His words are unequivocal: “Each of us, he urged, should make our contribution to reconciling the nation” (Ahmed Timol School, 29 March 1999).



This way of combining the three approaches puts into perspective the length and the multilevel aspect of any reconciliation process. However, it rapidly reaches its limits when it is used in a prescriptive way. On the ground, practitioners involved in conflict transformation face major difficulties if they present reconciliation as a “kit for stabilizing peace”. Indeed, how can strict sequencing be pertinent when the phenomenon actually requires a simultaneous change at different levels of relations? Further, the changing shape of a polity may not achieve the transformation of relationships hoped for across a society but see some groups alienated and hostile to further change. Change can be conflict generative as much as it may produce reconciliatory energy. Positive relations may emerge between some old belligerents but see new cleavages emerge—conflicts mutate through time within and across societies.

As we will see, case studies indicate that reconciliation process may begin either with the leaders or the grass roots. To be effective, this process actually proceeds bottom-up *and* top-down simultaneously. In other words, reconciliation requires both a political and a public momentum. Without political support “from above”, the efforts of some individuals and/or groups will not be sufficient to influence the whole population and sufficient to give clear signals to the other party. Conversely,

without the support of the population, official discourses and public ceremonies are sterile and vain. The success of the reconciliation process depends to a large extent on the dissemination of the ideas associated with it among the grass roots. At the top level, statements and speeches, but also symbolic acts to manifest the change of attitudes towards the former enemy reveal to be crucial (Bargal and Sivan 2004: 128–143). Similarly, middle-level leaders such as prominent figures in ethnic, religious, economic, academic, intellectual, cultural or artistic circles, play an important role to initiate and implement policies of reconciliation (Lederach 1998).

However, the focus on this multilevel aspect does not allow questioning of the appropriateness or usefulness of each of the approaches to reconciliation. The second way to consider them is to contrast them and to put into question their respective premises. Does a rapprochement between former adversaries depend more on institutional, psycho-social *or* spiritual changes (all or some of these and in what mixes)? Is each of the approaches totally relevant to the field of international and/or intercommunity relations?

The advocates of a realist stance perceive risk in sentimentalizing and depoliticizing the processes (see Chap. 4 on power), while others claim that a substantial change cannot be imagined in emphasizing only institutional and legal instruments. This debate can be illustrated by the following spectrum between a minimalist conception according to which reconciliation can actually be seen as synonymous with conflict management, and a maximalist conception would support the idea of reconciliation as a transcendent process.



Accordingly, at least three distinct goals can be emphasized. Some reconciliation advocates conceive their objective in terms of coexistence between parties. Their aim is that former enemies live together non-violently, despite a mutual enmity. The progress lies in the ability of the parties to comply with the law instead of killing each other. From that viewpoint, they tolerate each other because they have to: they stop fighting each other because it is in their own interests. This *modus vivendi* is certainly more satisfactory than violent conflict. Stability may be achieved but positive relations remain tenuous, sustained by commitment to procedures rather than the quality of interpersonal commitments (see Anstey's chapter on power). In order to prevent any potential recurrence of the violence, other voices consider that parties should attempt to do more than simply coexist in respecting each other as

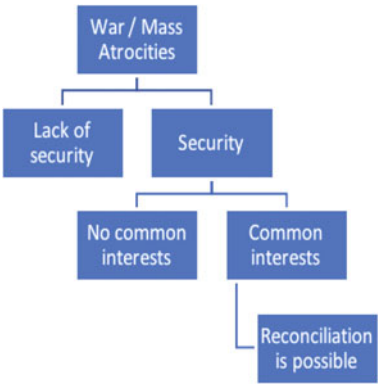
fellow citizens. In this view, former enemies may continue to strongly disagree and even to be adversaries, but they should be able to enter into a give-and-take about matters of public policy and progressively to build on areas of common concern. This intermediary conception is based on the perception that some mutual interests exist and allow the parties to forge compromises. Last, more robust conceptions of reconciliation conceive a goal in terms of mercy (rather than justice), harmony and shared comprehensive vision (Crocker 1999).

The minimalist conception forces us to question specific features of reconciliation. If reconciliation refers to any accommodation between former adversaries, what is the difference between a political deal and a reconciliation process? Is there any distinction between coexistence and reconciliation? In the aftermath of civil wars, former enemies sharing a same territory often coexist for survival, but does this *de facto* coexistence mean that they are involved in any process of reconciliation? It could be argued that if survival is the question, people can hardly afford the luxury of dwelling on old grievances. However, does silence mean that the wounds related to these grievances are genuinely healed—when can they be? On the contrary, shouldn't we consider that the bitterness of victims who are obliged to live with their perpetrators without a minimal form of recognition can lead to even more festering wounds (see Chap. 8 on Rwanda)? The case studies presented in the next chapters indicate that reconciliation, when it is appropriate, is to be distinguished from a basic coexistence. They also show that in many circumstances, more than one can actually think of, the only realistic—and already remarkable—goal to pursue is precisely a pragmatic coexistence. On the other side of the spectrum, the maximalist conception raises the delicate question of forgiveness in the aftermath of grave human rights violations (see the next chapter on ethics). Once again, beyond any theoretical debates, the case studies clearly manifest the rapid limits, and the potential detrimental character, of the exercise.

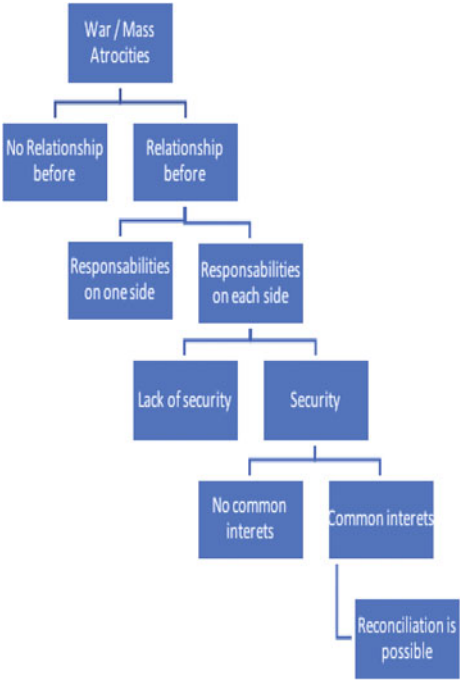
### 2.3 Impact of the Labels

It is useful to highlight the concrete impact on labeling reconciliation in various ways. According to the minimalist conception of reconciliation, any mutually conciliatory accommodation between former protagonists has to be taken into consideration. That means that reconciliation can occur as soon as two major conditions are present: security on each side and major interests in a rapprochement. Without reaching a certain level of safety *and* without a form of interdependence between parties, sustained efforts towards a minimal cooperation vis-à-vis the former adversaries are not likely. Conversely, as soon as the parties perceive themselves secure and inevitably linked to the other, reconciliation becomes a pragmatic option.





Case studies show that these conditions are necessary but far from being sufficient to entail a form of reconciliation. Besides these *sine qua non* conditions, other variables merit consideration to understand to what extent protagonists can move forward. At that stage, it is striking to realize that a maximalist conception of reconciliation is far more unlikely to occur. If the process is defined as a restoration of a once-harmonious relationship, requiring a form of collective healing and a mutual acknowledgement of past crimes, reconciliation can only happen in quite restricted circumstances.



Calling for a ‘transcendent’ process requiring a mutual acknowledgement of the crimes is a theoretical impossibility when certain circumstances are present. For example, when the previous relationship between the parties has only been conflictual it is illogical and demeaning to the victimized group to expect them to put aside their differences and focus on some phantasy of a shared, harmonious past. Certain colonial projects—though not all—fit this model, such as Native-Americans and Europeans in the United States, indigenous and non-indigenous people in Australia, or local population and Belgians in Congo. Moreover, reconciliation projects seem similarly misguided when there was no shared responsibility in the mass atrocities committed in the past. In cases of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, reconciliation based on a mutual acknowledgement of the crimes simply cannot be appropriate.

Despite these theoretical restrictions, numerous policy-makers, practitioners, scholars explicitly refer to the notion of reconciliation in these cases. In Australia, for instance, Kevin Rudd insisted on the indispensable “journey of reconciliation” between “first Australians” and “later Australians”. Doing so, he considered with some scholars that the ‘re’ in reconciliation does not only refer to an original harmony between parties, but can also reveal “a community that is not yet”. Such a reference to a “community-to-come” or, to phrase it otherwise, to a “counter-factual society” is based on the attempt to imagine how “the relations between colonizers and colonized might otherwise be” (Schaap 2006: 616, 2008: 254). Thus, reconciliation becomes a form of “hope” rather than a political process.

Isn’t it also under the lens of hope that we can understand that some policy-makers and diplomats estimate that “reconciliation must always occur” (Verveer 2010)? This call for reconciliation in any circumstances requires questioning even further the notion. Why do policy-makers, scholars or practitioners indefatigably highlight the “tremendous need” for reconciliation (Reychler and Paffenholz 2001: 339), despite the lack of knowledge about how to operationalize it? Is it based in the absence of clear guidelines or alternatives about appropriate steps to take in the context of increasing numbers of very violent civil wars? While it may be relatively easy to separate the conflicting parties after an interstate war, it is much more troublesome to do it in the absence of any clear boundaries between them. Therefore, it is argued, reconciliation processes are needed to transform negative relationships into positive ones. However, the existence of deep social links between the parties does not systematically favor a reconciliation process. It can, on the contrary, be the reason why a transformative reconciliation *cannot* be the right way out, at least in the short term.

The psychology of hatred is pertinent. It is an emotion most intensely felt it seems when there has been a breakdown in previously intimate or close relationships. Ferguson has asked why genocides have taken place in societies regarded as quite deeply integrated across ethnic lines—in Europe the Jewish community was deeply integrated into German and Polish society before the holocaust; in Rwanda there was extensive Hutu/Tutsi intermarriage before the 1994 genocide. Are reconciliations between ‘distant belligerents’ more likely to succeed than those where a deep existential crisis or betrayal has been experienced in previously close relations?

## 2.4 A Change of Structures and Narratives

To go beyond the euphoric view of reconciliation, without becoming cynical, it is paramount to adopt a realistic posture in observing the popular adherence and/or resistances entailed by reconciliation advocates.

To do so, at least two main indicators merit attention. The first concerns the existence of credible structural changes. What are the concrete changes that can be observed in terms of common institutions, political and economical cooperation, or specific bodies explicitly devoted to favor reconciliation? The second indicator regards changes in terms of narratives, and especially narratives of the past. Did the former enemies put the past into a manageable perspective so that it no longer precluded the development of a cooperative relationship? To answer this question, it is critical to observe the plurality of narratives emphasized by the protagonists. Is there any overlap between the various narratives of the past or are they completely distinct? Are they diverging or totally incompatible?

One of the arguments of the book is that the transformation of the relationships between former adversaries implies a basic agreement about the meanings given to the past. A *basic* agreement does not mean a homogeneous and consensual view on it. Neither does it have to necessarily respect the truth about the past. Being able to live with the former adversary can, in some circumstances, be antithetical to the historical truth. However, any form of rapprochement implies at some point a certain work—be it minimal—on memory (Rosoux 2004). Such “work of memory” does not concern the events that occurred (which cannot be denied by anybody), but rather the *meaning* that is attached to them. While working on this meaning, the protagonists attempt to establish a common language that may favor a rapprochement among the parties. To what extent is this exercise a necessary—even though not sufficient—condition for reconciliation? Three questions will be kept in mind in the framework of each of the chapters of the book: when is the work of memory appropriate? If it is appropriate, when is it undertaken? If it is undertaken, when is it effective?

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