

Preface

Reconciliation is an important component of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It is related to the crucial elements of conflict transformation where dialogue between those individuals, groups and/or entire nations involved in violent conflict is necessary to bring about peace and harmony through understanding of the core reasons for conflict and disharmony. Such understanding should enable the prevention of further conflict. However, before such an outcome is possible, rebuilding relationships between people is a prerequisite so as to enable meaningful dialogue to lead to healing and even the challenging but desirable aspect of forgiveness, thereby creating an environment in which peaceful coexistence is possible. Unfortunately, peacebuilding as this set of conditions has been labelled is plagued with issues that have little to do with liberal peace and more to do with statebuilding programs infused with neoliberalism, economic rationalism and obsession for a particular brand of state apparatus.

Conversations we have had with recently completed Ph.D. students at UNE led us to seek spaces where unadulterated peacebuilding free from a liberal peace that had been neoliberalised might be found. Emerging from these conversations were some good examples of genuine peacebuilding free from the encumbrances of neoliberalism. This is where local, community-driven efforts were aimed at reconciling differences following violent conflict, on the very ground where the effects of that violence were experienced. In looking for examples of local reconciliation attempts, we decided on research projects carried out in the Asia-Pacific where our core interests lie, with studies concentrating on locally relevant community peacebuilding issues and less on statebuilding or international conflict. All the case studies we selected for the book are based on field research, and this in itself makes this a unique book and worthy endeavour.

After a war ends or even while an armed conflict is still ongoing, it is desirable to bring about changes to relationships that will translate into peaceful futures or less violence. This is about creating a culture of peace. This requires facilitation of dialogue to address reconciliation, which does not necessarily require formal involvement of the state or international actors. Many of such reconciliation efforts are grass roots community initiatives that set out to deal with conflict and violence

locally among the people affected directly. From the perspective of peacebuilding, which gets hijacked by agendas for statebuilding so often, reconciliation involves far less of these kinds of interventions which set out to develop a certain kind of state that is acceptable to the global elite while sadly overlooking the community level where people really need to reconcile in order to move on with their lives after violent conflict. Indeed, many reconciliation initiatives are community efforts to bring about healing and a normalcy of relationships in everyday interactions between people and are largely independent of statebuilding agendas, although contributing in significant ways to building a harmonious society after violent conflict has ceased. Apart from community input, these reconciliation initiatives could gain support from the UN and other international actors, aid organisations, civil society groups as well as the state. However, through these supporting roles, these players have to be careful not to interfere in or try to control locally dynamic efforts to bring about peace through psychosocial healing. The book explores many of these issues and unpacks some of the contradictions surrounding reconciliation as a means of building peace following armed violence in the Asia-Pacific.

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