Can we learn from comparing violent conflicts and reconciliation processes? For a Sociology of conflict and reconciliation going beyond Sociology

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential for a sociology of ethnic conflict and reconciliation in ethnic divided societies. It provides the basic framework to address barriers and conceptual difficulties in connecting knowledge across disciplines and paradigms, bridging the knowledge gap from the fact that the study of conflict is often detached from the study reconciliation processes. It critiques conflict resolution and liberal peace models with their Eurocentric biases and envisions a multidisciplinary approach to the subject. It proposes a sociology of conflict/reconciliation that is global, contextual, universal and particular to treat violent conflicts and reconciliation processes as distinct dynamic modes within a single social phenomenon. Such an endeavour would merge theory and praxis thus allowing for thinking across disciplines, beyond sociology and beyond conflict in societies.

“It is possible, in short, to negate the stale pieties of identitarian politics with other means than violence.” Edward Said, Identity, Negation and Violence (1988)

Introduction

This chapter attempts to provide a basic framework for a sociology of ethnic conflict and reconciliation in deeply divided societies which have suffered from ethnic-related violence. Despite the specialised knowledge and literature on the subject, ethnic conflict and reconciliation has received relatively little attention in sociological debates.

This inadequacy derives from a number of causes. First, interpretations of acts and practices of historic violence often fail to appreciate the institutional aspects, the duration and the variety in which ‘force’ is manifested. For instance, borders and partitions (visible, overt and covert) are often manifestations of initial violent ‘acts’

1 A more basic format of this paper was presented at a plenary session on violence and reconciliation conference at the International Sociological Association to be held in Gothenburg (Sweden), July 11-17 2010. The paper grew from debates on reconciliation in Cyprus, South Africa, Israel/Palestine, India and Ireland. Such matters were raised in the debates rehearsed in the conference, Learning from Comparing Conflicts and Reconciliation Processes: A Holistic Approach, PRIO Cyprus Centre Annual Conference, 18-20 June 2009, Ledra Palace, Nicosia. For an extensive sociological treatment of the subject, see Trimikliniotis 2013.
and ‘practices’ of different forms, which may retain some of their historic rationale/functions (e.g. repressing and fragmenting), and they are constantly transforming the shapes, forms and magnitudes of violence in unexpected manners (Balibar 2002b; 2004; Calame and Charlesworth, 2009; Brown, 2010). Secondly, in recent globalisation-dominated literature there is inadequate sociological linkage between the macro and micro levels of violence in ethnically divided societies. Thirdly, the dialectic between ‘violence versus non-violence’ and ‘conflict versus cooperation’ is somehow under-theorised and under-researched. We have rather simplistic assumptions about what is the ‘rule/norm’ and what are the ‘exception’. Fourthly, comparative studies of ethnic conflict-ridden societies generally lack sociological and contextual historical depth and/or are not based on deeper knowledge of all the ‘case studies’ under examination. Moreover, reduction of societies into ‘case studies’ reduces them into mere ‘examples’ in already thought-out global paradigms or other stereotypical regionalised models, often disguising Eurocentric and ethnocentric readings, as well as other heuristic distortions, such as intellectual dependency and exceptionalism. Fifth, studies of ‘ethnic-conflict’ are dominated by conflict resolution paradigms taken from comparative political science. Here, as a rule, no reference is made to insights provided by contemporary sociological debates. What is required in this regard is a paradigm shift. Finally, the fragmentation derived from disciplinary expertise and specialisation tends to disconnect the specificity of the conflict from the reconciliation processes, as these are studied by different sets of experts. Hence, the connections made are based on superficial modelling rather than in-depth comparative sociological studies of conflict and reconciliation as processes.

The aim of this paper is to emphasise the need to link theoretically and empirically our study of conflicts, focusing on specific ideas, modes and practices of reconciliation which develop subsequently and dialectically in ethnically divided/polarized societies. This requires a sociology that is by its’ inception interdisciplinary; one which possesses the conceptual and methodological frames capable of bridging the gap between disciplines and specializations through which, ‘violence’ and ‘conflict’ have so far been studied separately. This sociology would draw on various dimensions of knowledge without becoming an eclectic ensemble. It would be a sociology that allows for creative integration of various approaches from different disciplines into a broad interdisciplinary perspective that is theoretically and
empirically sound and policy-relevant. It would be a *sociology of conflict/reconciliation* that is global as well as contextual, universal as well as particular. Hence, it would have the potential to provide a frame for explaining and understanding violent conflicts and reconciliation processes *as distinct modes and processes within a single social phenomenon*.

The paper starts by making some preliminary considerations on the notions of conflict and violence. Next it considers the Conflict Resolution (CR) approach, focusing on its history and limits. The final part of the paper presents the basic frame of a sociology of conflict and reconciliation.

**Conflict and Violence**

‘Conflict’ in sociological debates is often juxtaposed to ‘order. Functionalists sought what maintains order in society (common values, social cohesion/solidarity and consent to hierarchical relations and ranking in society), while ‘conflict theorists’ (Marxists, Weberians, followers of Simmel and others) sought to understand how the nature and modalities of ‘conflict’ derived from oppressive, exploitative and unequal relations and polarisations derived conflicting interests, ideologies, priorities and ways of life. Coser’s classic work (1956) laid the foundations for studying “the functions of social conflict”. Until the development of the specialised interest in ethnic related phenomena, with the study of nations, nationalism, ethnicity, race and racism, it was mainly historical sociologists who had an interest in dealing with such phenomena. However, in contemporary studies of collective violence and war neither has there been proper interface with sociological scholarship (Malesevic 2010), nor has there been much sociological interest in peace and reconciliation processes (Brewer 2010). Moreover, there has been no comparative sociological study linking ethnic conflict phenomena to peace and reconciliation practices and modalities.

Conflict is a generic term which entails different types, forms and intensities of ‘violence’ and ‘force’; from wars, mass murders and genocides to ‘milder’ forms

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2 It has become a broad well-established branch of study with various subcategories and a large number of journals and vast numbers of publications.
like exploitation, oppression, restriction, exclusion and discrimination. In dealing with violence related ethnic conflicts, what is often missed is that violence operates in multiple ways, often unexpected and unintended. A case in point is the violence which is institutional rather than direct, wherein the violent impact of rules and regulations are made to bear on the individual. A case in point are borders, frontiers and boundaries which are frequently a source of violence and exclusion.\(^3\) There is little doubt that:

“… whenever a delineation of boundaries takes place - as is the case with every ethnic and national collectivity processes of exclusion and inclusion are in operation.”\(^4\)

Violence is a force in society and history. It is a force that operates even in its absence. Fear and anger of outbursts of violence may operate at an individual and collective level. Memories of violence are also powerful tools in shaping political, cultural and social institutions and behaviour. Wars or violent incidents of the past shape physical borders of states and mental and ideological boundaries of people. They are active forces in shaping population movements, settlements as well as perceptions of history, politics and policy-making. A case in point is the situation of Palestine/Israel. Another case is the protracted de facto partition/ceasefire line in Cyprus.

What must be properly contextualised and seen in inter-connected terms is the specificity of violence. This should be related to features like unequal socio-economic positions and power-relations, class, cast, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, sexuality and other features. Yet, however, specific, localised and particular the forms of violence that exist are, these may also be compared and related to one another. In this regard it is worth noting that in the 21\(^{st}\) century, violence has become simultaneously more global and more localised at the same time.\(^5\) For instance the issue of torture of ‘terrorist suspects’ by US security services in Guantanamo or Iraq is simultaneously a ‘global’ as well as a ‘local’ i.e. both in USA-related and Middle East: such a human rights violation has certainly become more ‘globalised’ as more

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\(^3\) Balibar (2002; 2004); Brown (2010); Came and Chalesworth (2009).

\(^4\) Anthias and Yuval-Davies (1992: 39)

\(^5\) Panitch and Leys (2008)
news are spreading faster; moreover, such events often generate political reactions in many part of the world and the responses by various groups are endowing and politicising these issues in their own ‘local’ contexts. In the Middle East for instance, such violence has an immediate effect in local politics.

The dialectic of violence versus non-violence has been a key issue in the arguments between those who believe in the necessity of violence to overcome oppression, colonisation, exploitation and others that do not. In some cases, the use of violence by liberation movements generated contradictions which essentially undermined the emancipatory, revolutionary and progressive potential of these forces/movements. Revolutionary movements, once in power or on the way to power, are faced with systemic factors which generate more and/or new types of violence, oppression and exploitation. Fanon’s dictum that ‘violence is cathartic’ has definitely not been substantiated. Violence, rather than allowing expressions of oppression to come out and eventually subside by paving the way to new potentials in politics and societies, often breeds more violence and may spiral into new cycles of injustices and violence.

**Violence, Sociology and Conflict Resolution Theory**

Sociological interest in the general category of violence is not new. Macrosociological and historical-sociological systems of analysis have examined the role of violence in the shaping of nation-states. Attention has recently shifted to micro-sociological aspects. However, a sociology of ethnic conflict and reconciliation processes as a singular mode of reading these phenomena is distinctly absent. Sociologists have either focused on the causes and logistics of conflict, or on reconciliation. Regarding the latter, a major role has been played by Conflict

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7 Fanon claimed that violence frees oppressed natives from their inferiority complexes.

8 See Sitas (2008; 2012a; 2010b); Trimikliniotis (2012)

9 Apart from the founders of sociology, in the late 20th century, scholars like Barrington More (1966), Tilly (1990), Skocpol (1984), Mann (2005), Giddens (1985), Castells (1997) have contributed to the debates. Moreover, important in this field are the development of a critical reading in class, gender and race studies (see Rex 1996; Miles 1989; Balibar, Wallerstein 1990; Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Walby 1996; Yuval-Davis 2006; Bulmer and Solomos 1999).

10 Collins (2008)

11 In an effort to bring together these two aspects of social science and expertise the author organized a conference in 2009, (Learning from Comparing Conflicts and Reconciliation Processes: A Holistic Approach, PRIO Cyprus Centre Annual Conference, 18–20 June 2009, Ledra Palace, Nicosia).
Resolution (CR) theory. Many CR approaches criticise compartmentalisation and differentiation in social sciences, proposing a ‘multi-disciplinary and holistic approach’. They also blur the demarcation of ‘internal’ and ‘external factors’, adopting models of multiple causal factors and dynamics that refer to features like ethnicity, religion, language or culture.

The sociological foundations of CR theory are found in Georg Simmel’s work on conflict. Another seminal work is Coser’s book on the functions of social conflict (1953). However, the field of CR as a distinct and influential area of study really took off in the late 1950s and 1960s, with American conflict resolution scholars. Across the Atlantic, the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, developed his own schema, through the formation of a peace institute and the launching of a journal.

Since the 1970s, there has been remarkable innovation with CR theory and practice, as scholars drew more from the various critiques and nuanced analyses within CR, as well as from other studies. Various approaches developed. The ‘needs-based’ CR which assumed eight fundamental needs (control, security, justice, stimulation, response, meaning, rationality and esteem/recognition) by the Burton school, by Roger Fisher and by the Harvard Negotiation Project developed the ‘interest-based negotiation’ and as well as several others. In the 1990s one of the most innovative developments was the ‘conflict transformation school’.

Post-1990s development within CR have seen an increasingly self-critical field of research. Many contemporary CR theorists have adopted Galtung’s distinction between structural (i.e. the result of oppressive/unequal social, political and economic structures), cultural (i.e. the expression cultural differences or practices in the ways of life of ethnic or social groups) and direct types of violence. Lederach refers to the domination of International Relations (IR) and Political Science both in CR theory and practice. As a result of this criticism, subtler versions of CR theory appeared.

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12 (1953) Coser is often quoted and cited by the main textbooks on the subject, as the sociologist’s insight into conflict, see for instance Zartman and Rasmussen 1997.
13 See Ramsbotham et al, (2011)
14 For instance scholars like Jon Burton. The relevant the Journal Conflict Resolution was founded in 1957, http://jcr.sagepub.com/.
15 The Peace Institute Oslo was founded in 1959, see http://www.prio.no/
16 The Journal of Peace Research was founded in 1964, http://jpr.sagepub.com/
17 See Ramsbotham et al, (2011)
18 Galtung (2000)
19 (1997)
Thus, Ramsbotham et al provide a more sophisticated and dynamic model of CR. Nevertheless, the study marks an evolution, rather than a paradigm shift or scientific revolution. Their ‘hourglass model of conflict containment, conflict settlement and conflict transformation’ for instance, is seen to entail a long-drawn process rather than a highly non-linear, fluid and contradictory process within a fragmented and polarised social structure as in many cases they are. Assumptions about polarisations still tended to be ridden with ‘ethnicist’ assumptions of communities assumed to be unified and homogenous, ignoring political, ideological and social characteristics and identities such as gender, class and religion. The rich debates around social identity and inter-sectionality are missing from conflict resolution theorisation and praxis.

Regarding the relation between CR and sociology some of the key innovative texts, (whenever these refer to ‘what sociologists say on conflict’) send us back to the 1956 text of Lewis Coser on the functions of social conflict or to James Coleman’s work on ‘community conflict’. This is not to undervalue the importance of the above texts, but merely to indicate how the CR studies persistently fail to refer to current, and I would argue rich, debates taking place within Sociology.

**Shortcomings of CR theory**

Conflict Resolution perspective offers valuable analytical tools worth exploring and developing in the theory and in the practices that relate to conflict situations. However, there are a series of analytical and practical problems related to CR approaches, even in its most sophisticated versions.

The inadequacy of CR paradigms and reconciliation models has long been subjected to criticism. The feasibility of the peace models presented is seriously questioned on different counts. The CR theories of the 1980s and 1990s for instance, were problematic on the following counts:

(a) They relied heavily on ‘behaviourism’. ‘Actors’ are seen more or less corresponding to some pre-programmed creature. Human behaviour was

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20 (2001)
21 Within so-called ‘identity communities’ there may be fragmented groups which have a developed or enhanced reconciliation with sections of the ‘enemy community’, whilst other sections of the population may be highly polarised and hostile.
23 Lederach (1997: 182); Ramsbotham et al (2011); Zartman (2005: 36)
assumed to be predictable as it is acquired through ‘conditioning’, which assumes that humans can be somehow programmed in to behaving in a particular ways, leaving no room for freedom to act otherwise, reacting to social conditions in unpredictable ways, rebelling or exercising their own will against the expected behaviour. Ethnic or social groups or political actors are assumed to be caught in the so-called ‘prisoner’s dilemma’: this is where each side assumes that the ‘other’ side is acting as an individualist will behave in a manner to gain advantage in what has been seen as a zero-sum game. For instance, if the warring factions which have agreed to disarm for the benefit of peace, each one of them would assume that the other side is secretly cheating by arming to gain advantage; therefore they will both cheat increasing the risk of war.

(b) They suffered from ‘negative functionalism’, whereby every social actor and action is generally assumed to have some utilitarian value to the actor.

(c) The made assumptions regarding the actors being rational and operating on the basis certain patterns of behaviour, leaving little room for contradictory behaviour, uncertainty, crisis-crossings, unintended consequences and chaos in the models provided.

(d) The fact that they tend to refer to ‘actors’ assumed some homogeneity within and between these. This is hardly the case with ethnic state conflicts. In these cases the ‘actors’ in question are States, political parties, politicians, organisations, the UN, military establishments, social groups and classes and individuals, all of which are diverse and dissimilar.

In the introduction to the third edition of what can be considered to be a key text, ‘the book of the year’ by the Conflict Research Society, Ramsbotham et al (2011: 7) attempt to respond to the critiques of CR through an innovative approach that seeks to incorporate the criticisms and enrich the CR into an all-encompassing synthesis. They avoid the early behaviourism and accept the current prevailing thinking that ‘violence is not unavoidable and integral to the nature of conflict’, taking

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24 The Conflict Research Society (CRS) is the prime interdisciplinary forum linking professionals and academics concerned with co-operation and conflict and provides a meeting point for sharing their work, [http://www.conflictresearchsociety.org.uk/CRS%20book%20of%20the%20year.html](http://www.conflictresearchsociety.org.uk/CRS%20book%20of%20the%20year.html)
conflict transformation\textsuperscript{25} as the ‘deepest level of CR tradition rather than a separate venture’. Moreover, they attempt to ‘rescue’ the CR traditions from its ‘liberal peace underpinnings’\textsuperscript{26} and advocate the need to ‘enrich western and non-western traditions through their mutual encounter’.

Yet, even sophisticated versions of Conflict Resolution theory that recognise the importance of wider and diverse social, international and political factors tend to essentialize and effectively reduce conflict to individual factors like psychology rather than addressing the complex and multi-faced social, economic and political aspects. A case in point are the recommendations for the creation of decentralised models of government and definite state structures that are based on the premise that these structures can be:

“… designed to serve psychological, economic and relational needs of groups and individuals within nation-states.”\textsuperscript{27}

The designing of governmental structures in regime-changes that followed US-led invasions or the various aid developmental reform programs in societies are ridden by ethnic conflicts are generally based on such essentialist perceptions. Rather than relying on the development of the local or autonomous historical traditions and structures of governance, the programs funded, promoted and often imposed tend to be models imposed from above: these models are designed by ‘experts’ premised on political, economic, cultural and socio-psychological assumptions that allegedly fit ‘essential characteristic’ of the groups of people involved. Therefore both the ‘diagnosis’ and the ‘remedies’ for ethnic conflicts are ridden with specific interests, biases and simplistic assumptions about the kinds of ‘solutions’ to the various conflicts.

One of the most common assumptions made by CR theorists concerning the nature of ‘ethnic conflict’ is that these conflicts result primarily from ‘historical hatred’ and ‘ethnic antagonism’ i.e. ethnic or national groups which are assumed to be

\textsuperscript{25} The term ‘conflict transformation’ refers to the transformation of the structure of the conflicts, whereby one of the dimensions of the conflict (structure, attitudes and behaviour) is altered (Mial 1992: 55).

\textsuperscript{26} The notion of liberal peace is based on the idea of imposing the model of Western liberal of democracy as a framework of resolving conflicts. This model includes features like elections, the rule of law/ human rights and neoliberal market relations See Richmond (2008); Ramsbotham et al (2011).

\textsuperscript{27} Azar (1986: 33-34).
homogenous and somehow naturally compete. This would be the ‘core’ of the ‘problem’, the essential aspect of the conflict. Both at a theoretical and at a concrete level this approach is highly questionable as it consistently underplays the role of other factors, including modern ones, in the continuation of the conflict. A consequence of this is that whether by default or by intention some ‘specialists’ tend to remain rather uncritical of the role the West plays in many conflicts. This is because emphasis is shifted to factors that existed since time immemorial.  

Sophisticated models that contain different types of ‘actors’ (such as individuals and states), include international linkages and involve state-related institutions as mediating forces, often also reduce ‘ethnic conflict’ to ‘human needs’ for identity and security. ‘Identity’ is taken as a given. The ‘ethnic’ dimension becomes an essential part, if not the core part, of ‘identity’. In most cases even the social order is taken as ‘given’ and ‘necessary’. There is often a conservative bias towards the particular social order, even within CR theories.  

A cogent criticism of CR is that it promotes: ‘a standardization of peace interventions in civil war situations [and] often fails to deliver’ or ‘a widely enjoyed peace’ which addresses the content of ‘peace’ which is such that is best enjoyed by the mass of local populations. Such approaches:  

“… in many cases fail traditional and indigenous approaches to peace-making and reconciliation can offer a corrective to the failings of the Western peace-making model.”  

The persistent failure of various peace and CR efforts in the Arab world is indicative. Hidden premises of Western conflict resolution about Arab political

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28 Edward Said’s concept ‘Orientalism’ as a systematic way in which the East (the Orient) is distorted by Westerners in many ways applies here (1978). Having said that, CR has also been criticised by American right-wing thinkers who consider it to be left-Wing and to promote agendas foreign to the West’s interests. Criticisms have come both from outside the realms of university system (claiming that “Peace studies do not produce practical prescriptions for managing or resolving global conflicts because “ideology always trumps objectivity and pragmatism” and that CR is bent on putting a “respectable face on Western self-loathing”) as well as from right-wing academics like Donald Horowitz. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_and_conflict_studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_and_conflict_studies)

29 E.g. Long and Brecke (2003)

30 See Mac Ginty (2008)

31 Mac Ginty (2008)
culture for instance, illustrate the inadequacy of Western assumptions; assumptions like the supposition that the Arab world is ‘more conflict-prone or less conflict resolution-oriented than the West’.\textsuperscript{32} Transporting Western conflict resolution theories and techniques to the Arab world or elsewhere, requires that the latter undergo considerable cultural adaptation if they are to be successful.\textsuperscript{33}

Another area of failure of Western mediation is Africa. CR in Africa emphasise \textit{individualism} at the expense of traditional collective approaches or individual rights, disregarding African traditional perspectives on family and kinship.\textsuperscript{34} Even the differentiations according to regions i.e. in sub-regional terms as the five Africas (West, southern, East and Central, Horn and Maghreb North) are ‘stereotyped and simplified depictions’ which ‘mask the important fact that Africa is diverse, heterogeneous and complex’.\textsuperscript{35} The dominant interpretations have failed to appreciate the importance of real societal processes and political problems in post-colonial settings as well as the potential for peace and reconciliation utilizing local resources and traditions. Even the so-called ‘conflict–sensitivity’ approaches suffer from the ‘mainstreaming of conflict analysis in Africa’.\textsuperscript{36} A diagnosis often made is that there is inability to strike a balance between identity, peace and justice; however such ‘diagnoses’, which may be credible in many cases, often fail to take into account the universal and local traditions and contexts. For instance the exporting of the South African ‘liberal peace’\textsuperscript{37} transition in Africa has been successful in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, but has failed to resolve the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire, and resulted in a chain of failures of interventions based on the liberal peace model in Angola following the death of Savimbi in 2002.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{A Sociology of Conflict and Reconciliation: Going Beyond Sociology?}

\textsuperscript{32} Salem (1993; 1997)  
\textsuperscript{33} Salem (1993)  
\textsuperscript{34} Fischer (2000: 25)  
\textsuperscript{35} Francis (2008: 4)  
\textsuperscript{36} Porto (2008)  
\textsuperscript{37} As per footnote 26, the concept of ‘liberal peace’ has been defined as a western the concept of liberal capitalist democracy as a universal model; in the African context, the assumption is that African elites and population need to be ‘trained’ and ‘educated’ to able to receive such a model.  
\textsuperscript{38} Hagg and Kagwaja (2007: 22)
For a deeper understanding of what are profoundly social issues we need a sociology of conflict and reconciliation. Introducing sociology to the peace specialists and practitioners or highlighting the sociological contribution to the understanding of conflict, peace and reconciliation processes is only one reason for developing further this branch of the discipline. Sociology itself is a discipline, like all others. It is in constant need of renewal. The world is getting more complex, more unstable, more uncertain about its’ future, and arguably more polarized. Social scientists are forced to develop our explanatory frames in areas which constitute protracted ‘social problems’ and are threatening the lives and wellbeing of people. Whilst recognizing that there are crucial political, psychological and anthropological aspects requiring collective ‘solutions’ which are political and legal. A sociological analysis should uncover essentialist social underpinnings, meanings and practices.

The shape of such sociology of conflict and reconciliation is matter of debate; this paper proposes the following as parameters for a framework of a sociology of conflict/reconciliation:

First, it must be a public sociology in the way Burawoy defines it an engaging discipline that goes beyond the university community. It will also ‘merge’ and draw upon professional, critical and policy-orientated sociology. The debates on ‘public sociology’, with the pitfalls and nuances articulated within it, can be extremely valuable in defining the territory of a sociology of conflict/reconciliation. Activism, critical thinking and professionalization of the fields of war, conflict resolution, and cooperation reconciliation make the debates all the more relevant. Moreover, increasing expert-specialisation and professionalization generate professional, economic and ideological interests in the field which require sociological unpacking. There are however contradictions in such an endeavour on there is a need for sustained critical engagement and activism where sociology is not an elite-based ‘science’ but draws on popular struggles and local traditions striving for rights. On the other hand the ‘expertise’, even if this is from the development of critical sociology generates power-relations, professional interests and ‘disciplining’. There is no

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39 Both Brewer (2010) and Malesevic (2010) refer to these as rationales for their respective publications.
40 (2007)
easy answer to this problem; however we can put some checks on these processes by making sociology engaging and insisting on popular participation, accountability and scrutiny.

Secondly, it must study reconciliation together with conflict (i.e. conflict/non-conflict, post-conflict as well as reconciliatory/cooperation forces) as the two cannot be separated. Whilst it is recognised that there may be a focus on one of the aspect, it must be clarified that the two are intimately connected. Moreover, one cannot cut corners with superficial conflict analysis without a deeper reading into the context in which conflict occurs. Any notion of transitional justice must be closely scrutinised and properly rooted in the socio-historical, political, economic and cultural setting. This requires a ‘thick’ sociology produced within the specific society but fully versed and engaged with an ever more globalised sociology, and more globalised knowledge.

Third, the underlying assumptions (philosophical, political, moral), the related political agendas and policy-implications of various readings of conflicts and reconciliation processes must be closely scrutinised, questioned, exposed and criticised. Important critiques of established models of reading specific conflict, peace and reconciliation processes have emerged over the recent years, illustrating how political and ideological underpinnings can hinder understanding and encourage the promotion of specific models of conflict resolution and reconciliation as some kind of ‘recipe’. For instance, the imposition of the ‘liberal peace model’ in Africa is not only producing partial, distorted and western-biased readings of the conflicts and their resolution, but is neglecting and undervaluing the potential of home-grown resources and the traditions of struggle and reconciliation.41 Where ‘local traditions’ are utilised, these are often distorted by appropriating and subordinating them to western models. Due to the structural prevalence of Western peace-making models, even when ‘traditional’ approaches are adopted as alternatives peace-making methods, what we see is not a coexistence of both but: ‘we are more likely to see the co-option of indigenous

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41 Francis (2008).
and traditional by Western approaches’. The disastrous western entanglement in Afghanistan, Iran, the Middle East, the Balkans and most recently Libya evidence the limits of such approach. The sociological enquiry into the subject should take note of important critiques of western traditions conflict resolution. It is high time that the debates around sociology is no longer a discipline developed and derived from a Eurocentric or northern hemisphere perspectives, but draws on knowledge developed in the ‘global south’ as there is serious scholarship and activism engaged in research and praxis related to the making of war, peace and reconciliation.

At the same time, it is crucial that the various ‘non-western’/southern traditions are neither idealised, nor uncritically accepted as ‘the norm’ in what are assumed to be ‘non-western’/southern settings. They also must be subjected to a deep sociological enquiry and test.

Fourth, it must be comparative. Needless to say, from its’ inception Sociology was a comparative discipline, as evidenced by Durkheim. This is not to argue that single societies cannot or ought not to be investigated. On the contrary, the best sources for a global sociology of conflict and reconciliation must draw and depend on the richness of existing sociological studies, most of which delve into the specificities of particular societies. Such studies provide the kind of sociological depth necessary to draw out the comparisons in terms of the similarities and differences between various conflicts, peace and reconciliation processes. Studies which compare and contrast cases require the necessary tools to properly analyse the context, but also define the differentia specifica in the case studies. How else can we understand why and how certain violent conflicts develop, escalate or deescalate, or how reconciliation processes come about? Important conceptual tools can and are drawn from different disciplines - conflict resolution, comparative politics, international relations, social psychology and anthropology. However, caution is required as to the reasoning behind the comparisons. It is trendy to compare in order to ‘go global’, but there must be rationale behind such comparisons.

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42 Mac Ginty (2008)
43 Ramsbotham et al (2011: 3)
44 See Sitas (2006); Alatas (2006); Patel (2006); Elizaga (2006)
What is essential is that we need to locate what the primary features of the conflict in a particular society are and only then we can decide what is comparable and what is not comparable with some other country or countries. As Ehrlich (2009) notes, only if we have a good grasp of specific context, the historical and structural aspects, the dynamics and balance of forces and their potentialities and contestations in the regions and states we can really engage in meaningful comparisons. Comparisons may fail to throw light, even though they are based on relevant features. For instance, a shared past under the same colonial master may make sense in understanding common features in different ethnic conflicts. However, this may be irrelevant in terms of presenting models for reconciliation. Take the case of Israel/Palestine and Cyprus. Both are located very near to each other and both have been subject to British colonialism. Both are ‘partitioned’ and the partition is ‘dysfunctional’ (i.e. causing harm and misery in different ways that make the status quo not sustainable). Yet, the possibilities for reconciliation and the trajectories that may be followed differ immensely. In the two cases, violence is quantitatively and qualitatively different and this influences the possibilities of resolution that exist in the two cases. In the case of Israel-Palestine; talk of reconciliation seems to be far-fetched and there is violent death on an almost daily basis. In the case of Cyprus things are much milder.  

Fifth, the inter-disciplinary nature of the exercise must be such that is cross-disciplined but not a-disciplined. The terms of engagement with other disciplines must be carefully observed to avoid becoming an eclectic ensemble with little coherence or sense. We need a sociology that draws on different aspects of knowledge that allows for creative integration that is theoretically sound, empirically robust and policy-relevant. It will be a sociology that seeks to break of self-referencing, examining the potential for reshaping ideas, practices and modes articulation.

Sixth, the sociology of conflict and reconciliation is best located within or at least be capable of properly drawing on the rich debates generated by the sociology ethnic-related phenomena, the study of nations and nationalism,

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ethnicity, race and racism and war. Moreover, these debates are entangled with questions relating to the inter-relation between ethnicity/race, class and gender, the sociology of the state and power as well as global sociology, postcoloniality and globalisation.\footnote{See Balibar, Wallerstein 1991; Balibar, 2002a; Anthias 1992; Balakrishnan, 1996; Gellner 1983.} The theorisation of ‘nations’ and nationalism as well as global/international power relations must be properly theorised. Questions relating to the various political projects and ideologies and the complexities of state formations, contradictions and class–relations must be developed.\footnote{An attempt to theorise such has been made in the context of Cyprus, see Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt 2012; Bozkurt and Trimikliniotis 2012; Trimikliniotis 2012.} In order to address the global tasks before an ever-uncertain humanity, the sociology of conflict/reconciliation needs to feed on the above branches of sociology so as to understand wars/ethnic-related conflicts (intra-state and inter-state) and the potential for peace, cooperation and reconciliation.\footnote{See Trimikliniotis (2012)}

Seventh, the specificity of gender-related violence in conflicts, cooperation and reconciliation processes must be considered not as ‘add ons’; the gender factor needs to be properly incorporated as an analytical category that allows for vital insights in such phenomena. The use of the image women as ‘biological producers of the nation’ or the images of motherhood in conflicts produces gender perspectives on the nature of war, peace and ‘solution’ to the conflicts (see Anthias and Davis 1992; Yuval-Davis 1997). Also, as the wars in former Yugoslavia illustrate, part of the warfare and mobilization by different groups for support globally made great use of the image of specific violence directed against women (e.g. rapes or threats of rape) or the USA-led intervention in Afghanistan was justified using the oppression of women as making the intervention necessary. Moreover, women have played a key role in peace and reconciliation initiatives, e.g. in Palestine/Israel or northern Ireland.

Finally, this paper is calling for a sociology beyond sociology and a reconciliation from below as much as we need a reconciliation ‘from above’. I am calling for an expansion of the scope of reconciliation. I realise that this probably runs counter to what appears to be ‘common sense’ amongst many
practitioners and theorists of CR and reconciliation. They insist, with good reason, that the narrower the scope, the more effective the policy and practice of reconciliation, as (a) attention and resources are more focused and (b) one should not open too many fronts at the same time in building coalitions and consensus. This paper is not denying the merits of having a sense of priority strategy, tactics and timings. What I am proposing is that we need to broaden our conception of reconciliation within society. In other words, one must locate the processes of reconciliation within a dynamic, conflict ridden and polarised social reality as it exists. For instance, in attempting to reconcile two ethnic groups who have been in conflict for years we cannot ignore the presence of a possible third or fourth group (for instance the presence of a sizeable number of migrants) or of other issues that may affect social relations (gender-relations; class relations and struggles; homeless and excluded/marginalized/ landless etc.; migrant struggles e.g. undocumented). All significantly alter social and political relations in ways which are not always predictable and linear.

Such factors often complicate and aggravate issues as they add various dimensions to conflicts and complex social realities. Gender, ethnicity, religion and class are ‘hard variables’ which may reinforce polarisation and division. However, in other contexts gender, religion and class can become issues that open up the terrains of struggle for peace and reconciliation. in this sense, women’s groups for peace (e.g. Women in Black in former Yugoslavia, Parents Circle in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland etc.) liberation theology-inspired reconciliation initiatives South America and religious peace activism in Africa and Asia, trade union-led, worker and subaltern class initiatives transcending the ethnic or national divides in numerous countries and continents all together are formidable forces for peace transcending conflicts making it possible to realise the emerging global and local ‘ethic of reconciliation’ (Sitas 2008; 2011). To retain hope in a fragmented and polarised world, we can and must learn from the historical and contemporary struggles be educated and to educate about world peace-in-the making. Sociology is a vital tool and component in this learning process.
Bibliography


Brewer (2010)


Fischer (2000: 25)


