

Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts
Second Institute: October 10-17, 2004
Report of Proceedings

Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts was the theme of the third round of the Brandeis International Fellows Program, sponsored by the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life at Brandeis University in 2003–2004. This report documents the second and final institute of that program, held on October 10-17, 2004. The institute was attended by nine of the 10 program Fellows. It coincided with *Re-Imagining Self and Other: Creativity and Ethical Action in the Aftermath of Violence*, a public symposium convened on October 13 and 14. For additional information about the Fellowship Program and for a report documenting the first institute, please visit <http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/fellowships/bif/index.html>.

Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts was designed to highlight and strengthen artistic and cultural approaches to reconciliation by engaging those who already use them in documenting, reflecting upon, creating theory about, and sharing their work. During the first institute, the Fellows established a collaborative framework for their inquiry and a research agenda for the following year. During the second institute, the Fellows shared portfolios that documented their work throughout the year, and offered each other appreciative, critical inquiry on working papers that discuss their work. They also continued to explore the meanings of reconciliation and questions surrounding the contributions of the arts and cultural work to the rebuilding of broken inter-communal relationships.

The institute was held at the Walker Center in Newton, Massachusetts. It was codirected by Cynthia Cohen, the director of Coexistence Research and International Collaborations at Brandeis University, and Jonathan Fox, founder of Playback Theatre and the director of the School for Playback Theatre. The first day was held at Cohen's home in Barrington, New Hampshire, where the Fellows reconnected after a year's separation through informal conversation, lawn games, a yoga class, canoe and kayak rides on the nearby lake, and shared meals.

Sunday, October 10

Everyone gathered in the living room of the Walker Center and began the challenging transition from being a collection of individuals with very different life paths, to a group able to engage in productive conversation about their work and the theme of the Fellowship Program. Each of the international Fellows was working in a two-person team exploring the contributions of a particular form of art or cultural work to reconciliation in a particular region. During the year, each team was to have written a paper and created a portfolio documenting the process of their work.

- Working in Burundi, Rwanda, and South Africa, Nicholas Kotei Djanie and Lena Slachmuisjlder promote reconciliation in divided communities through African drumming, music, and song. Nicholas, originally from Ghana, is a master drummer, dancer, teacher, and performer, currently working in South Africa. Lena is a musician, cultural facilitator, and an experienced radio and print journalist who directs 'Studio Ijambo,' a radio station affiliated

with the organization Search for Common Ground in Burundi. Lena's working paper explores the distinctive contributions of drumming to reconciliation in Burundi and South Africa. Nicholas brought photographs and stories about his work in South Africa and Rwanda.

- Ly Daravuth is a visual artist, designer, and art historian who cofounded Reyum: Institute for Art and Culture in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Ingrid Muan cofounder of Reyum and a Brandeis International Fellow, was not able to attend the institute in 2004. Among other projects, Reyum sponsored an exhibition exploring the legacy of the Genocide in Cambodia. It also runs an art school for some 140 children in Phnom Penh. Ly brought a partial draft of a working paper that contrasts empty gestures of official 'reconciliations' with traditional Khmer Buddhist rituals seeking reconciliation with deceased relatives.
- Bev Hosking and Jenny Hutt, from New Zealand and Australia respectively, explored the contributions of Playback Theatre (PBT) (a form of improvisational theater performed in 40 countries around the world) to the processes of reconciliation. Bev is an international PBT trainer, based in New Zealand, who works with social activists in India and with a group of indigenous and Indian Fijians who are actively working toward reconciliation. Jenny served as documenter, interviewing Bev about her work and rigorously documenting a 10-day session of the New Zealand PBT Summer School.
- From South Africa, Kim Berman and Stompie Selibe documented their work at Artist Proof Studio (APS), a Johannesburg community cultural center where young black and colored artists are educated in printmaking. Throughout the year, Kim and Stompie engaged in an action-research project exploring the meanings of "ubuntu" as well as their own efforts to use the principles of ubuntu to transform the culture and the structure of APS itself. (Ubuntu refers to respect, caring for one another, right behavior towards another, and empathy.) Kim brought a draft of a chapter that explores the relentlessness of reconciliation work. Stompie brought a large book that includes excerpts of his students' interviews with members of their communities about the meaning of 'ubuntu' accompanied by their original artwork.
- Iffat Fatima and Lisa Kois documented their work on a film that retells the stories of people from all sides who have suffered during the inter-ethnic war in Sri Lanka. They brought a draft of a working paper, written in two voices, as well as two different versions of their film-in-progress.

During a brief check-in, Fellows expressed their eagerness to continue their conversations, but acknowledged some anxieties about how the week would proceed. In the previous institute, some tensions had arisen around expectations of Fellows to present their work in public settings and to the Brandeis community. In addition, disagreements had surfaced throughout the year about the nature of the publications to emerge from the Fellowship Program.

Cohen emphasized that the primary purpose for the second institute would be to provide opportunities for Fellows to deepen their reflections on their own practice, on the meanings of reconciliation, and on how the arts contribute to it. While the Fellows' learning was to be given priority over other goals, there was an expectation that their learning would be shared with others working in similar fields. Therefore, a secondary purpose for the institute was for the Fellows to work together to strengthen the drafts of their working papers, which, she proposed, would be published in a report, rather than (or prior to) being published in a book. Finally, she said that a

third purpose would be to support each participant in their lives and in their work, “What we learn here can take back to our communities with us.”

Each Fellow proposed activities to incorporate into the week’s schedule: watching videos of their work, having fun, drumming, getting feedback on a script, viewing the exhibit of Stompie’s work, going to theater, participating actively in the symposium. All of this and more were accomplished.

After further discussion on the nature of the product that might emerge from the Institute, Cohen introduced an activity through which one can practice listening deeply. Each participant drew a representation of their journey since the previous institute. After observing an interview, the Fellows shared their own stories in dyads. Following lunch, the stories were retold in yet another way in the full group.

As the facilitators enlisted the Fellows’ responses to the proposed structure for the week, it quickly became evident that everyone wanted to know as much as possible, as soon as possible, about each other’s work. This informed the design for the next day. Each group would have about time to present their work and to get critical feedback. In response to a request from one of the Fellows for a précis from the directors (who had read all of the reports), Cohen reflected that several themes were emerging:

- The dangers of partial or shoddy reconciliation: when someone presents something as reconciliation when it isn’t, the consequences can potentially be lethal
- Dilemmas when reconciliation is initiated from outside the community rather than from within the culture(s)
- The theories of change that underlie the work we do. How do we see the link between the small, personal, and interpersonal changes that our projects facilitate and larger social change?

Monday, October 11

Monday was a long and exhilarating day, with the group focusing for a session on each team’s work. It was obvious that each participant had taken seriously the responsibility for reading and reflecting on the work of others. The exchange of ideas was constructive, appreciative, critical, and extensive, generating many questions and topics for future discussions. The emerging questions and issues can be organized as follows:

The contributions of the arts

- What is special about art-making in contributing to healing, community development, and personal transformation? In other words, how is bringing people together through the arts and cultural work different from projects that focus on sports, economic development, or some other joint activity?
- Can arts’ projects be linked with other forms of engagement for greater effectiveness?
- What are the limits of the arts in general and of particular forms and genres?
- What capacities and sensibilities are nourished by engagement with the art forms themselves?

Questions about reconciliation and issues of power

- As an artist/cultural worker facilitating processes of reconciliation, what are the possibilities and constraints on engaging with the politics of the situation?
- What is the nature of reconciliation across differences in levels of power?
- What is power? Who has it?
- Is reconciliation about a process or a goal or both?

Capacities and constraints of the artist/cultural worker/facilitator

- How can we take care of ourselves and sustain our ability to do this work effectively?
- How do we/can we work with our own biases and prejudices?
- How do our own political opinions enter the artwork and the art-making process?

Capacities and limitations of people in the communities where we work

- What if the people with whom we are working do not want or are not ready for ‘ubuntu’ or reconciliation?
- How do we work with different sensibilities around justice?
- Can reconciliation take place if not all relevant players participate?
- What kinds of preparation do people need in order to be ready to reconcile?

The response to the day of intense work was a grateful acceptance of the challenges inherent in exposing oneself to colleagues. One Fellow said, “It is interesting to project our energy on something, which is our work. What is difficult is when someone does not commit, does not engage. But ... everyone engaged and there was a level of tension. It is not bad when it is worked out.” Another one added, “I would like to explore the idea of how we disagree more, but not by going too much into the dynamics, which is not productive.”

On Tuesday, the group developed ways that they could address questions that had been raised and explore some of the issues that had emerged from discussion of their working papers. The group reviewed the list of topics and questions, and added others that had been generated earlier in the week and even last year. These issues were linked with both elements from the Fellows’ portfolios and areas of expertise of the symposium presenters, who would be spending time with group on the Friday following the public symposium. But even as they reviewed the topics and listed their questions, there emerged a sense that the Fellows wanted to articulate answers rather than simply generate more topics and questions for further discussions. To begin this process, the group linked questions and issues with resources brought by the Fellows and the expertise that would be available in the scholars and practitioners who would be joining them for the symposium.

Topics and Questions for Consideration and Potential Resources

Topic	Fellows' resources	Symposium presenters who have the appropriate areas of expertise
What is reconciliation in different contexts? Emerging understandings What is it? How do you do it and facilitate it? Questions of power	'Heroes' video from Burundi	Hizkias Assefa
Indigenous culture vs. outside cultures as tools Terms of expression from one culture to another Ritual	Jenny and Bev's video on Maori welcome and farewell	Jane Sapp Olivier Urbain
Role of outsider/insider		
Politics of situation Taking a political stand (or not) or how		Olivier Urbain Goenawan Mohamad
How much knowledge do you need to have	Rwanda and Burundi videos	
Models of leadership		
Ethical practice Stories		Hizkias Assefa Barbara Sonneborn
Kinds and issues of collaboration that emerge.		
Capacity building of self and others Taking care of yourself		
Theories of change		
What are the unique contributions of the art forms and the arts in general?	Tellers response video Drumming video	Barbara Sonneborn

Tuesday and Wednesday, October 12 and 13

The work for Tuesday and Wednesday was to continue the inquiry into shared understanding of some of these questions. The morning was devoted to small group reflection on the following four topics, followed by debriefings for the whole group.

- Reconciliation: What is it? How do you facilitate it?
- Power: How do we address inequities?
- Change: What theories undergird our work?
- Arts: What are the unique contributions of the arts? Are particular art forms more effective than others?

Reconciliation: What is it? How do we facilitate it?

Three Fellows discussed this topic and presented the following conclusions.

Reconciliation is about “the restoring of relationship so that we can use those relationships to survive. Wherever there is a breakdown of relationship, there is a need for reconciliation.”

The answer to the question about how to facilitate reconciliation is much more complex, since there are multiple variables involved in any relationship and therefore multiple strategies to heal the relationship. What was agreed upon is that the reconciliation process involves some risk, and a significant part of the work is anticipating and planning for the risks. One way to do this is to work first in homogeneous groups because whenever there are two people, groups, etc., there is probability of more conflicts.

To facilitate reconciliation, one must first understand the nature of the conflict. Some conflicts can be described in terms of who is the victim and who is the offender. Another dimension is the number of people affected in the conflict and their various roles. Given these variables, empathy, imagination, and personal flexibility are key approaches to reconciliation. “Empathy is the ability to understand the other. An important part of the reconciliation process is enabling people to feel empathy toward the other group... including to feel what it might be like to be the oppressor.”

Power: How do we address inequities?

Four Fellows focused on this topic leading to the following conclusions.

The first steps in addressing inequities are acknowledging that they exist, identifying where they exist (e.g., language, economics, or other domains), and considering the levels of inequities. The next steps are to determine what means might remedy the inequities, recognizing that some remedies may actually maintain the status quo while the other end of the spectrum may lead to revolution. Violence is a potential outcome of addressing inequities, “Not addressing the dynamics of power and inequalities leads to violence. Not addressing violence leads to violence, a cycle of violence. For reconciliation to occur depends on the capacity to understand that some forms of violence are forms of protest or challenge to the status quo.”

Other issues and questions that the group raised were:

- What you do with power is what is important. There is manipulation versus sharing of power, which leads to empowerment.
- What are the terms of negotiating power sharing? It does not mean you have to give up everything. It is about negotiating spaces in which different forms of power can be expressed.
- Aesthetic experiences can help with the negotiating of power and transformation of power relationships. Aesthetic experience can provide spaces for dialogue and therefore the sharing of power. But then when the sharing does happen, can it be reproduced? The reproduction of it can lead back to the power cycle again.

One Fellow added the dimension of timing, “The stage at which the reconciliation is occurring [before, during, or after conflict] is important in understanding the power dynamic. War is a way to not share power.”

Change: What theories undergird our work?

The two Fellows who considered this question agreed that it is most effective to focus on change theory as a theory of human development that is operational before a conflict. “An individual is reorganizing over a period of time, recognizing abilities and strengthening emerging abilities. This links to capacity building. This concept of development has to do with progressive aspects of the person. It also links with appreciative inquiry.” Another element in this developmental change theory is that people have experiences that are reparative. Through building and establishing relationships reparative experiences are offered to build on. “It doesn’t happen fast as people learn to trust in relationships and then in social structures that they previously did not.”

The presenters also talked about the links between personal, institutional, and social change, and acknowledged that change is seen as a positive development. It is important to ask what kinds of things are we trying to change on the path to reconciliation.

Arts: What are the unique contributions of the arts? Are particular art forms more effective than others?

The report from this pair was on one art form—drumming—that has the characteristic of being accessible to all people at multiple levels.

“The beating on the drum has a lot of power because it connects both to heartbeat and breath. Even though drumming does not have narrative within it, it can create a space for the sharing of stories. It is possible to do drumming without it being about reconciliation; for drumming to facilitate reconciliation, there has to be an intentionality to it. There is something happening around the drumming, and for drumming to contribute to reconciliation, someone must notice those dynamics and act on them. In other words, there must be an intention to mobilize the energy of drumming toward social change.

In corporate and institutional settings, the intention may or may not be there. In community settings, things might be noticed as a matter of tradition. For instance, in Ghana, if one person has an issue with another person in the community, they are not able to enter the drumming circle. Then someone else notices their absence, and brings the two people who are alienated from each other back into conversation.

The base rhythm is what holds all of the various rhythms in a supportive relationship with each other. This base rhythm can serve as a metaphor: in corporate or institutional settings, the base rhythm stands for the purpose, mission or goals; in community, the base beat is the shared life space, the values that drive the patterns of relating and forms of social organization.

Drumming also gains its power because it connects us to something beyond human comprehension...the realm of sacred that connects to the mysteries of the universe.”

We continued the conversation on Wednesday morning by exploring power dynamics in processes of reconciliation. The questions were framed as:

How is the reconciliation process different for those on different sides of the power equation? What are the challenges for those on each side? What is the emotional work?

Working again in small groups and reporting out to the full group, key statements were made and more questions emerged.

- Personal characteristics are a factor in reconciliation. Specifically, “humility in the powerful and confidence and courage of all parties.” However, the powerful may also become enmeshed in feelings of shame and guilt and become a victim. “They can become so careful about not creating more harm that they become immobilized and cannot act, and they also get caught in questioning if they are really willing to give up something.”
- The form that oppression has taken has different consequences. “The divisions created by long-term economic exploitation may need to be addressed differently from the divisions created by war.”
- If part of reconciliation is to empower the oppressed, then effort must be expended in giving the oppressed the tools they need to assume the power.
- Being less powerful does not mean being powerless, but it is more difficult to imagine sharing power if you feel that you have none.
- Art may assume a role in building empathy, or it may serve “as a polemic in the direction of justice.”
- The objective of the reconciliation is central.
- Consciousness raising and opening spaces that happen through art may lead to political action and destabilization.

The group weighed the positive potential in using the arts to open the spaces for dialogue and for creating opportunities for empathy against the possible misuse of the arts. The same attributes that make the arts a useful tool in reconciliation are available for the purposes of manipulation. It is always about intention, and in our work of using art for reconciliation, “We are talking about art as contributing to restoring relationship. It is about those communities being able to deal with each other.” It is evident to all that art can be used for manipulative, political purposes. It is critical to be aware of that possibility in this work.

Viewing the video of the celebration of heroes in Burundi provided an opportunity to consider the role of arts in reconciliation and political manipulation. The celebration recognized people who had helped others during the conflict in Burundi, in spite of great risk to themselves. The stories of the heroes were moving, but still the questions of possible negative consequences to the celebration arose in the discussion.

One comment was “It is always a problem when you stage something.” In this case the objective was “to complexify the stereotypes... it is not simple.” However, the conversation also led to the conclusion that in complexifying the stereotypes, there is the possibility that others will be hurt. “When you create a hero, you also create a non-hero.” The closing comment for the day was representative of much of the conversation all morning, “It is a great responsibility—to do something or not to do something.”

Wednesday and Thursday, October 13 and 14

On Wednesday evening and all day Thursday, the Fellows joined the Brandeis community and local guests for the symposium *Re-Imagining Self and Other: Creativity and Ethical Action in the Aftermath of Violence*. The symposium provided an opportunity for the group to learn from

and engage with key individuals who are doing the work of reconciliation in different places in the world, both as artists and as peacebuilding practitioners.

Featured presenters

- Barbara Sonneborn, director of the award-winning film, *Regret to Inform*. Her film depicts widows' stories of loss incurred by the Vietnam war.
- Professor Hizkias Assefa, founder and co-coordinator of the African Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Network in Nairobi, Kenya. He has been engaged in second-track diplomacy and grassroots peacebuilding processes in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, southern Sudan, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Colombia, and in many other regions. He has consulted to the United Nations, European Union, and many international and national NGOs, and conducted conflict resolution and peacebuilding training seminars and workshops in over 50 countries around the world.
- Jane Sapp, a cultural worker who engages with disenfranchised urban and rural communities in the United States. She is a powerful, highly regarded performer, songwriter, recording artist, and educator. Sapp's music reflects the blues and gospel sounds of her Georgia youth and is deeply rooted in the spiritual, religious, and historical experiences of the African-American world. She is also a senior Fellow at MIT's Center for Reflective Community Practice.
- Olivier Urbain, associate professor of art and peace studies, English, and French at Soka University, in Hachioji, Japan. A blues pianist and a Nichiren Buddhist, he founded the Transcend: Art and Peace Network (TAP) in 2000, a virtual network designed to strengthen the contributions of artists to peace.
- Goenawan Mohamad, an Indonesian writer, editor, activist, and poet. In 1971, he founded *Tempo* magazine, an Indonesian weekly similar to America's *Time* magazine. *Tempo*, which quickly turned out to be the mouthpiece of the opposition, was banned in 1994 after years of harassment, but reestablished itself following the ousting of Suharto. Mohamad then founded The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia's first independent journalist association, and the Institute for Studies in the Free Flow of Information (ISAI), which documents harassment in the Indonesian press.

For a schedule of the symposium and biographies of the presenters, please visit http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/fellowships/bif/bif_2003/symposium.html and http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/fellowships/bif/bif_2003/symposium_presenters.html

Friday, October 15

Friday morning proved to be a fulfilling time for the Fellows to continue the conversations started at the symposium and in the first days of the institute with the visiting scholars. Brandeis International Fellow Bev Hosking welcomed the symposium presenters as guests into the community and Iffat Fatima opened the day with a poem. A Playback Theater presentation, conducted by Jonathan Fox and acted by several of the Fellows, allowed the group to share reflections on the symposium and expectations for the day ahead. This set the stage, so to speak, for recognition of the importance of colleagues, camaraderie, and dialogue. One Fellow said of the opportunity of having this group assembled, "I am excited and full expectations and confusion as to where to focus. Which question to focus on?"

The group chose to break into two sessions for the first half of the morning. One group worked with Jane Sapp to compose a song. The second, larger group addressed the question: what is art? During the second half of the morning, Fellows followed up on questions that had been raised prior to and during the symposium, about the challenges of facilitating reconciliation in contexts of unequal power and disagreements about the meaning of justice. During this session, Hizkias Assefa responded to the Fellows' questions.

What is art?

Immediately, ancillary questions shaped the conversation. The questions hold in them the dimensions of the dilemma faced by the participants. "What it is about the question that interests us or concerns us? We know that art is an expression of creativity. Are we questioning whether the arts [in the work of reconciliation] is creativity or manipulation?"

The intent of the artist and/or the individual or group that commissions the art is key to the integrity and perhaps even outcome of the effort. "The concern is that is the art might be used for propaganda... [and yet] there is something in the goals of art that is compatible with reconciliation."

Goenawan Mohamad stated that "art is a way of using language to talk about the abstract. Artists are like politicians...you have to look at what they do instead of what they say. The purpose is to swim against the stream."

Since the Fellows and the symposium presenters all use their art in their reconciliation efforts, the conversation quickly moved to issues current in their own work. For example, a filmmaker ponders that since art is open to interpretation, the issue for the artist becomes to what extent is the meaning left open and how does the artist facilitate the meaning. "In film, especially documentary, how much do you tell, how much is open?" Another filmmaker expressed the role of art in "helping people reflect on feelings that can be overwhelming through expression that is not intellectual... Some arts express the agony of a situation. The problem in a documentary film is how explicit to make the meaning."

Another Fellow said, "If you are making a movie to elicit something, then you have to have integrity with yourself about what you are trying to say. Or perhaps the purpose is for raising the questions and allowing people to find their own answers. It is not manipulation to raise the question or to have an intention."

But it is not only about raising questions in a film, it is about "something in the magic of creativity held in collective." Another offered that in Hindu, a word for the creativity in art is *rasa*, meaning the creation of the juices. This idea took the conversation back to the meaning of art in the context of reconciliation. Specifically, one underlying assumption about art is that it "has a connotation of something original." Traditional forms of expression that may not be original do seem to have *rasa*. For example, traditional drumming and dancing can certainly have *rasa*, but they may not be (probably are not) "aiming for something original."

Perhaps the commonality between traditional form and original form is the connection that is opened within the individual and between people. “I don’t understand where the connection comes from. I connect deeply with people and I don’t know where it comes from. There is no agenda for it, but there are things that happen. But it is a transformative time. There is a lot of *a-ha*, so this is possible; we can see each other in a different way. I think it is connection. I find it very difficult to say what it is. I have tremendous fear when get into conflict situations when I don’t know anything, but then it may become the deepest, the most wonderful. The fact that it happens, it gives me the hope that it can happen again. And when that happens, it is deeply creative.

The dilemma is how to talk about a moment without verbal expression, especially when trying to train other people in this work. “I always relate to the terror, when there is such an unknown space, and then to have the commitment and courage to step into it without knowing.”

“A lot of our own work is about helping others to unleash the creativity in themselves. Helping them to remember their own creativity allows them to also to find other spaces to solve other issues. What interests me is this: it is not about teaching them to sing but to find their voice.”

This notion of teaching others, or using art to educate, brought the discussion back again to the issues of intention. “As artists, we have power, but can shift the power to empower the audience. It is an attempt to equalize the relationship.” As another said, “Maybe the intention is an honorable one. I am concerned about the ‘other’. What is the ethical value of art?”

In an attempt to summarize this discussion that had led to no clear answers, one Fellow said, “I trust art as a way to get from A to B and I don’t hide that I want to get from A to B. Others may not trust it because of the terror of the open space. How can we trust more in art, in the artistic expression? In the way we facilitate and communicate, and enable others to trust it more. There are many who have never participated in an opportunity for a creative space, they don’t know what it will unleash. The process of drawing a memory is not something that you won’t be able to manage.”

One of the symposium presenters ended by saying, “Art as a concept is frightening. It excludes me. In my language, art is translated as drawing. What can we do through this medium to achieve a certain purpose? I can connect to that. Every aspect of life is trying to make meaning of this reality we call life. If we can’t label it, then it does not exist. But we also can’t label it.”

Song-writing group

A small group of the Fellows worked with Jane Sapp to create a song and to learn from and enjoy her process of collective songwriting. The lyrics reflect issues of self-acceptance and self-judgment that had been raised for some participants in the symposium the previous day.

If you treasure my susumah
I will honor your susumah
Ubambano ubambano

Spirit, soul, shadow, destiny, togetherness
Ubambano, ubambano.

Shine that little light of yours (x2)
If I want to be you
Who would be me?
Shine that little light of yours,
Set yourself free!

Don't throw yourself away (x2)
If I want to be you
Who would be me?
Shine that little light of yours
Let yourself free!

RAP

Sing that little song of yours (x2)
If I want to be you
Who would be me
Sing that little song of yours
Let yourself free.

In working toward reconciliation, how do we deal with questions of power and justice?

During the second half of the morning, the group reconvened to ask Hizkias Assefa about questions of power and injustice that had surfaced throughout the week. Cohen opened this part of the day with a request that Assefa reflect on the different challenges of reconciliation faced by the more or less powerful group. Assefa began by saying that reconciliation “presupposes certain criteria especially that both parties are able to dialogue. Reconciliation is an extension of mediation. When there is inequality, usually the stronger wants to maintain status quo, and the weaker to change it. Ethics come in. If your [ostensible] reconciliation role is maintaining status quo but giving it a good gloss so that the weaker can live with it, that is not reconciliation but pacification. Reconciliation is a revolutionary and transformative process.

“Pacification undermines the concept of reconciliation. I am concerned about it being courted in the international political realm. When the state department talks about reconciliation, it is about the supremacy of the United States being acceptable for everyone.

“There must be some sort of struggle to relieve the inequality... nonviolent struggle is needed. Depending on the way it is approached, even those on the oppressor end can be convinced to see the need for change. From the outside, it is easy to see who the oppressor is, however, the encounter we had [in one situation] with the military, who seemed to dismiss the notion that they give up anything, we found that there was so much isolation in being the oppressor, that you can touch their humanity and help them to see that they are also trapped... [These are some awful situations that are actually] a human-created trap that [everyone is] caught in.

“There is a way you can have power while you also let others have power. If you think power is only domination over others, then you are not able to share power. Reconciliation is not about anyone losing; it is in everyone's best interest to think about how to share the power. Depending on how it is approached, it is possible to talk to the [more powerful] group that it is in their best interest to talk to the other. It is a reasonable alternative to violence.”

Assefa responded to specific questions about where to start the process and how to sustain it. His answers imply that reconciliation is a work of art, and that the resources are so varied in each situation that there is no single way. Generally, he recommends starting the reconciliation talks

with the more powerful group, and to recognize that it is very difficult to sustain any agreements without a secure infrastructure to support decisions made during the reconciliation process.

One of the Fellows held out the hope that through the arts and media, the dialogue that got started in a reconciliation process could be continued, “The discussion can continue through media, through journalists and artists. This is a way to continue to ask the question continually about how they can image a different way.” Another suggestion is to explore the connection between reconciliation and conflict transformation. “There is the importance of practicing preventive reconciliation, the larger process of transforming conflict in daily life. There are skills for how to do this, but the number of people who have the skills is very low, so most people deal with conflict with violence. This is where the real work needs to happen: a need for collaboration between the conflict resolution workers and those who are working for reconciliation.”

Goenawan Mohamad suggests that reconcilers coming in from the outside have the positional power that enables them to say that no one will lose power as the result of the reconciliation. However, “some things are irreconcilable, such as stealing land or ideology. When you eliminate the ideology of something, then you are imposing another ideology. If you don’t fight, then you don’t change the world.” Which led to a Fellow saying, “There is a use for understanding the need of violence. How do you understand violence?” Assefa’s answer is worth including in full, as it serves as a summary for the question about power and justice.

“There sometimes is a personal risk in mentioning the word reconciliation. People will believe that you are an apologist for the bad behavior. Even the mention of the word justice can be dangerous in some situations. There are times that I use words that are not inflammable but express the essence. Reconciliation means too many different things to different groups. It is a serious difficulty that we have.

“Is reconciliation an outsider scheme? An outsider may facilitate the process, but it is only accomplished by the people who are involved. The problem with large-scale political reconciliation is that this does not happen. It cannot be done by proxy. It must occur by those who experienced the hurt and those who imposed it.

“Sometimes the people are locked in tremendous hostility that prevents dialogue, so it is necessary bring in outsider. But it is very difficult. I cannot reconcile anyone, but I may be able to be a catalyst to their reconciliation. If you not very sensitive, you can become part of the problem.

“Reconciliation is a process where people who have become alienated try to become a community again. Deep down we are profoundly human. *Regret to Inform* is about humanity, it is not about Vietnam. History has been all about mystifying humanness, creating artificial labels to separate us. We are all craving the same things. Reconciliation is an exploration of the deeper human connections. It enables us to get out of this category we have created for ourselves. Reconciliation is to move away from condemnation to understanding. Law is about condemnation. Condemnation sometimes freezes us in the position we are in. Whether a group or individual is the victim or offender frequently depends on when you start in history to make the decision. Who is the one to say that history starts here? The definition of victim or offender is a

function of power or ideology. We have to try to remove this dichotomy. Those that are so convinced of their victimhood can be helped to see their role in creating that.

“If you tell victims that they are not a victim, you reinforce their victimhood. The problem with Israel and Palestine is that we cannot convince Israel that they are not victims.

“It is also how we define power. Generally power is to stay on top, to dominate. This is very taxing. As you exercise this kind of power, it costs more and more to do it because there are more and more enemies. A notion of power as domination is self-destructive. The task is to help folks see power in a different way.

“Victims want to be on the top, but then they will also be trapped. We need to help them to see that they will become the image of the very thing they hate.

“I am conflicted about violence. My intellect tells me no; my gut sometimes tells me yes. I believe there should be nonviolent approaches, but I don’t always know what they are. When a community is in a position of total despair, I can understand the use of violence.”

Reflections on the shared time between the Fellows and the symposium presenters

- “There are other ways to talk about this without talking. There is silence.”
- “The silence or pause is an important part of the rhythm. We can feel the pauses and the rhythm.”
- “I like the thought that transformative change can happen at the moment you imagine possibilities...in that space.”
- “The big gem was Goenawan [Mohamad] mentioning that hope is like tramping a path in the countryside.”
- “Wealth is the ability to give things away in the community. If I am becoming richer, I need to share it there.”
- “With appreciation, creativity increases. It gives me more energy to think about more ideas. Otherwise I will hide what I think. Development grows.”
- “Trying to describe art with words... it is like magic.”
- “Jane [Sapp] asked what is her work. I got to thinking, what is the work, really? What’s my real work and what is my art? I work with theater, but the real work is being with a group of people and being willing to enter into a relationship that unfolds moment by moment without fixing an end point.”
- “Silence gives the person time to say what he wants to say rather than what you want him to say. It is difficult to maintain the silence.”

Saturday, October 17

Saturday came with the institute drawing to a close and still so many questions on the table. The questions that the Fellows considered this day were specific to their own work. How are you coming to understand the meaning of reconciliation in your work? What do you appreciate about your own work and how it contributes to reconciliation? What next steps do you see for your work?

How are you coming to understand the meaning of reconciliation in your work?

In response to this question, the Fellows noted that the essential part of their work is in the building of relationships, both the relationships that they themselves build with others and the opportunities they create for others to grow relationships. The arts, even with all the potential abuses that might occur, are still seen as valuable media with which to build relationships. It is this building of relationships that is central to the work of reconciliation that the Fellows are doing. “What I have come to understand and seen, is that there are a lot of people that are working on reconciliation but they don’t call it that, they do not use the word reconciliation. We can empower those people to do what they do rather than impose this word on them. Building relationships and maintaining relationships... it is very broad and lots of people are doing it. They need to be encouraged.”

Building the capacity in people that enables them to imagine a different future through meaningful work and through the development of skills is another key element to the way the Fellows have come to view their work in reconciliation. They have also recognized the importance of connections among people doing this work and the importance of hearing about the “small stories of hope” that form the ripples of change. “I struggle with the feeling of urgency and [continuing to] trust that shifts in consciousness happen and it’s not a small thing [when a small thing happens].

“In one way there are the networks and links that we are building up, but on the other there are the islands of change that may bring about peace in the larger scale.”

**What do you appreciate about your own work and how it contributes to reconciliation?
What next steps do you see for your work?**

Cindy Cohen referred to a point in Hizkias Assefa’s writing in which he says that there were many small steps that led toward a peace treaty and it is important to never negate the small moments, but it is also important to know how to leverage that into something bigger. One Fellow said that different people need to be ready to play the roles they can best play: some can leverage, others can create the small spaces for change that may create the environment that allows the leverage. Which led again to the need for networks of people who are engaged in reconciliation in all its guises, and a beginning notion of what part Brandeis and the Fellows might play in creating this.

What the Fellows appreciate most in their own work is that the steps each is taking are being taken with integrity and sincere intent to break down barriers to real relationship. There is also agreement that there is much to do and that there are multiple ways to do it. “Seeing reconciliation not as a category...there is an element of wanting to communicate something that might lead to some sort of change. I want to experiment with different kinds of dialogue.”

Barbara Sonneborn joined the Fellows in reviewing one of the films from Sri Lanka and offered feedback on this difficult and important project. They then considered the work that each has to do to fulfill the expectation of the Fellowship.

This last topic provided a bridge to the closure that would be a part of Sunday. On the final day of the institute, the group began by dividing into three smaller groups, each working on one of the following topics:

- Elements of the report to emerge from the Fellowship Program
- Possibilities for future directions for the group
- Policy recommendations regarding arts and reconciliation

Elements of the report to emerge from the Fellowship Program

This group shared the following list of possible elements:

- Report: there should a visual element
- Literary elements: stories, poems, citations, proverbs, interviews
- Chapters
- Space to each of us. We each have a page to do what we wanted to do, to be creative. What would you do: put in a photograph? a drawing?
- Portfolio elements
- Each of the five presenters should be represented somehow with some version of their presentations.
- Ask Stephanie Marlin-Curiel and Ingrid Muan to be included in a page
- Introduction including the questions
- Jonathan Fox to do a piece
- Something from Daniel Terris, director of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life
- Internet links
- Photos of the Fellows and presenters

In conversation, one of the Fellows recommended that the web could become a resource center, where Fellows could add contributions and could communicate with each other. Works could be published on the web and possibly later revised for print publication.

Future visions

This group proposed that it build on the relationships that have formed in a variety of ways. It could be involved in some work in some other place so that we collaborate in doing something, not just talking. The group can connect via the e-mail list. At a minimum, this group proposed that each person would write a letter to the group indicating how the Fellowship has affected our work. The Fellows could share stories of hope. Fellows could construct different collaborations involving one or more people in the program. Fellows could share possible learning opportunities for each other. Fellows might present at a conference.

As to future commitments, Fellows agreed to hold this lightly. As one Fellow put it, “This community had a life, and now we can each carry this life with us.” We agreed that this phase of our relationships is ending, and that we will not know how we want to move forward until we go away from each other and return to our different contexts.

Policy recommendations

This group proposed the following as policy recommendations:

Arts and cultural work can be used to spark or to deepen reconciliation processes. Art has something to offer where the language of reconciliation can't be used; art brings people together.

- The process of creativity and artistic expression fosters elements of flexibility, spontaneity, empathy, and being alive to difference. These are quality that can facilitate people's readiness or participation in the process of reconciliation.
- Group creative activity facilitates a sense of common identity and shared humanity.
- For artistic approaches to reconciliation to be effective, the artists need to be conscious of the context, be inclusive, be ready to listen and respond to the needs of concerned parties

Members of the group made the following additional suggestions:

- Reconciliation workers and peacebuilders should be encouraged to include artists and cultural workers as part of teams.
- Education for peacebuilders should include education about the arts.
- Education for peacebuilding should include artists and cultural workers.
- Partnerships among peacebuilding practitioners, artists, and cultural workers could be important.
- Donors who support the arts should be educated about the role that the arts can play in reconciliation, and be encouraged to support projects that demonstrate the contribution that the arts and cultural work can make in peacebuilding efforts.
- Arts can reach people who cannot be reached through other media.

Wrap-up

Members of the group reflected on the institute in two different forms. First, Jonathan Fox invited people to write haikus, and he offered the following:

We do not name
What is most important
Hit the lamppost.

Then Cindy asked for participants' preliminary evaluation of the institute. Comments included both disappointments and appreciations.

Disappointments included:

- Wish for more rigorous probing
- Wish to leave with more tools to improve practice
- Time consumed by tensions that could have been cleared out before the group met
- Facilitation too sensitive, initially too consultative
- Insufficient dialogue with presenters: they seemed not to have a real interest in the Fellows' work.

Appreciations included:

- Moments of sharing of ideas, particularly during the symposium
- Deepening of relationships with extraordinary people
- The "marathon day" with a quality of real engagement with each other
- Models presented by Goenawan Mohamad and Hizkias Assefa—clarity and intense seriousness in their speaking

- Presenters—what they shared and the qualities they embodied
- Smooth transition between small group and public space during symposium
- Everyone's engagement

The group also appreciated members for specific contributions: Lisa for driving, Daravuth for his dissenting voice, Jenny for clearing up clutter, Lyn for organizing tickets and food, Lena for researching cultural activities and for the clarity of her thought and expression, Nicholas for the songs that he shared, Nicholas, Stompie and Lena for leading the group in musical sharing that unified the group, Bev for her understanding, Jonathan and Cindy for their facilitation and for holding the space, everyone for their sharing of themselves and their humanity.

Lyn Haas, who documented the institute, was given a gift. Kim brought handmade beaded angels from South Africa, which people chose and then gave away. The Institute ended with two songs. Lena shared a song from Burundi on a CD and Jenny taught a Maori song:

A - I - O
Ki te aorangi

Aronah (love)
Ki te aorangi (throughout the world)

Pono (Truth)
Ki te aorangi

Koa, koa, koa (joy)
Ki te aorangi