Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts: A Virtual Collection

Synthesis

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III. Questions and Dilemmas for Reflection

Throughout the papers, portfolios, and creative projects in this collection, the 2003-2004 Brandeis International Fellows grapple with the dilemmas and questions that are at the heart of their arts-and-culture based reconciliation work. While much has been learned over the course of this fellowship program, many of the questions that are raised in the Fellows' work, and in reconciliation work in general, do not lend themselves to easy answers. Practitioners are often faced with strong and conflicting imperatives. The "right" action can be very difficult to discern. And sometimes the same action is both right and not right; it both benefits and harms the reconciliation process. Although in their writings, some of the Fellows have illustrated how they worked through the dilemmas they faced in their particular circumstances, these dilemmas of peacebuilding, which arise amidst the complexity of communities and nations entrenched in conflict and its aftermath, are never neatly and finally resolved. They must be considered again and again, by each individual peacebuilder, in each new and changing context.

What we present here, then, is a set of questions and dilemmas that we believe are at the core of reconciliation work. Some of these questions and dilemmas are grappled with explicitly in the Fellows' papers, portfolios, and creative projects. Others are implicit in their work and their words. We pose them here to peacebuilders who want to deepen and strengthen their practices through reflection, and we hope that they will be thought-provoking and generative.
Questions for Reflection

**Dilemmas about bringing artistic and cultural forms from one context into another:**

1. What are the benefits and risks for the reconciliation process of drawing on an artistic or cultural form developed in a country, culture, or community other than the one in which you are working? How, and under what circumstances, might this foster the reconciliation process? How, and under what circumstances, might these practices be experienced as impositions or appropriations?

2. What are the benefits and risks for the reconciliation process of bringing an artistic or cultural form from a sacred context into a secular one or from a traditional context into a modern one? In drawing on sacred or traditional forms, how might we balance the desire to promote innovation and critical thinking with the desire to honor and respect traditions?

**Dilemmas about the peacebuilders' relationship to the community and to each other:**

3. What are the specific challenges of working as a peacebuilder in a cultural context other than our own? What are the benefits of working in this "outsider" role? What are the power dynamics that inscribe your relationship with the community? Are they constructive and conducive to reconciliation work, or divisive? How might those dynamics be meaningfully acknowledged and, if necessary, transformed?

4. What are the specific challenges of working as a peacebuilder inside our own cultural contexts? What are the dilemmas that arise when we are both facilitator of and participant in a reconciliation process? How do our positions in the race, gender, class, and cultural dynamics of the society affect our roles as facilitators of the process?

5. For peacebuilders working in collaboration: what are the power dynamics within our teams? Are the dynamics of the conflict area (or of any other cultural, national, or global conflict) in some way insinuating themselves into the team relationships? How are the relationships within our teams affecting the community in which you are working? Do we have a platform for communication with each other and for reflecting on our working relationship?

6. As peacebuilders, how do we balance the imperative to be flexible about what reconciliation practices might look like with a strong belief in certain defining features of reconciliation—for example, that past injustices must be addressed? How do we ensure that the practices in a reconciliation process have been chosen by and are meaningful for the people whose lives are at the center of the process, while also ensuring that the process goes deep and accomplishes reconciliation's difficult tasks?

**Questions about crafting, administrating, and assessing the work of reconciliation:**

7. Can we craft reconciliation initiatives that both affect people deeply and affect a great number of people? How can the reach of reconciliation work be extended, the impact
Questions for Reflection

broadened, without sacrificing the intimacy and the patient relationship-building that is the essence of the work?

8. How can we best assess the effectiveness and the impact of peacebuilding work? What are the criteria for success in a reconciliation process? How we you know if our initiatives are working and not causing harm?

9. Are the non-profit organizations, community centers, fellowship programs, and other institutions that facilitate and sponsor reconciliation initiatives being run in ways that reflect the values and requirements of reconciliation? What might reconciliation-based organizational structures look like? What are the difficulties of running institutions and programs this way? What are the benefits?

10. How do we choose who to invite to the table to participate in reconciliation processes? In post-colonial regions, where colonial powers established patterns that gave rise to ethnic conflicts, what role should those powers play in contemplating reconciliation processes? How can they be supported to acknowledge the harms to which they have contributed?

Questions about integrating reconciliation work into the rest of life:

11. In our work as peacebuilders, do we see people incorporating the powerful learning essential for reconciliation-learning that might take place through engagement with culture and the arts, for example-into their daily lives? What kind of work might help a drummer, for example, feel the peace, equanimity, and unity that he feels while drumming in more areas of his life?

12. How does the broader national and global climate in which we work affect grassroots efforts at and individual attitudes toward reconciliation? How does this larger picture affect our choices about the reconciliation process? How might we create a safe space where reconciliation work can take hold without creating a "bubble," an unrealistic escape from the rest of society and its problems?