

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN THE CASE OF CUBA: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

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There is no widely accepted technical or popular definition of the term “reconciliation” as applied to states and nations.¹ Despite a recent boom in reconciliation processes at the national, state and international levels, discussions and debates on cases of reconciliation frequently generate more heat than light. Discussants “talk past” each other because they hold distinct but unstated assumptions about what reconciliation is or should be.

Furthermore, the association of the divided Cuban nation with processes of reconciliation would be considered by many to be premature or *quijotesco*. The predominant tone of bilateral and multilateral foreign policy regarding divisions in the Cuban nation continues to be more antagonistic than conciliatory.

This paper sets out six definitions of reconciliation and applies them to the case of Cuba. Questions are then raised regarding the role of international diplomacy in this process.

We can outline six different definitions/conceptualizations of reconciliation (see Table 1), and associate

each with a primary role incumbent on the individual and institutional proponents of that approach (Ackerman forthcoming; Hamber 1998). It should be stressed that this list is not exhaustive nor are the six types of reconciliation mutually exclusive. As more cases accumulate in the post-Cold War period, additional definitions and roles will be generated.²

SIX TYPES OF RECONCILIATION

1. Reconciliation as an event. Like most journeys, the process of national reconciliation begins with a single step. Divided factions literally meet and sit together for the first time in an effort to begin an exchange of views and initiate a process of accommodation on past differences. This historic moment acts as a frame for the style, content and outcome of further actions. Additionally, the social/political position, reputation and behavior of protagonists provides a model of conciliatory conduct and structure. The symbolic elements of the initial event carry disproportionate weight in the continuing trajectory. Who sits at the table, the method of broadcasting the

1. For analytic purposes, definitional distinctions are made between state and national reconciliation and between transition of the state and reconciliation of the nation. This paper discusses national reconciliation—a process of accommodation and reintegration by a previously divided, unique *people*—in this case the Cuban people. State reconciliation is a process of accommodation and reintegration by a *government*. State transition is the process of changing the form and/or terms of political domination in a recognized, sovereign country. These processes do not necessarily occur at the same time although they may. In general, reconciliation is a more protracted process than transition. It is frequently associated with individual transformation and local action as well as institutional, collective processes.

2. Recent cases involving processes of reconciliation include South Africa, Northern Ireland, the states of the Southern Cone, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda. The typology given here is an expansion and adaptation of Hamber and van der Merwe’s five ideologies. See Hamber and Van der Merwe (1998).

Table 1. Definitions and Roles in Reconciliation

Definition of Reconciliation	Primary Role of Proponents
1. Literal meeting of opponents/divided groups	Frame process & tx model behavior
2. Dissolution of conflicting identities (e.g., class, race, religion, ideology)	Inspire conversion, confession & reintegration
3. Mutual coexistence of distinct groups.	Act as broker/facilitator promoting tolerance of diversity
4. Moral/religious—confess/forgive/repent	Confessor & moral mentor
5. Regulate social behavior via legislation of human rights	Legal drafter/watchdog/whistle-blower
6. Community building	Promote trust-building, truth-telling, renewed interdependence & holistic view of society

planned event to the nation and of constructing an agenda are important variables.

2. Reconciliation as the dissolution of conflicting identities. Some observers define reconciliation as a process of dissolving identities that have caused the divisions with the nation. These may include identification with theories of racial superiority, ethnic superiority, religious prejudice, or the inevitability of class differences. The society will be “healed” when these damaging identities are eliminated. In order to achieve this social conversion, individuals and institutions must recognize their past mistakes, and set out on a new path. Protagonists of this definition tend to focus attention on eliminating “isms”—racism, classism, etc. and substituting concepts of human potential and programs of reparation for classes of victims.

3. Reconciliation as mutual coexistence among distinct groups. Others view reconciliation as peaceful coexistence among inherently different groups. The accommodation to be made through reconciliation is not one of compensation to fellow human beings who have been misjudged as less than equal but of building tolerance among peoples who inevitably have distinct traditions, cultures and histories. The process of reconciliation involves building respect for difference, communicating across differences and celebrating unique ways of being. Proponents of this model see themselves as brokers or facilitators who promote tolerance and appreciation of diversity.

4. Reconciliation as individual, moral evolution. Like those who believe that wars will only end when each individual embraces pacifism, proponents of this model advocate individual moral conversion involving confession, repentance, atonement and for-

giveness. Both victims and perpetrators must examine their actions and attitudes and make necessary moral corrections. Only then can the possibility of collective reconciliation be achieved. Advocates of this approach see themselves as confessors and moral mentors. It is a model of reconciliation based on individual transformation.

5. Reconciliation as rule of law via effective guarantees of human rights. This definition is more legalistic, focusing on establishing the truth of past human rights violations and then installing a more effective rule of law to protect the restored balance. Activists in this model act as legislative drafters, watchdogs and whistle-blowers. They monitor the level of compliance with standards of human rights and alert the nation to violations.

6. Reconciliation as community building. Here the centerpiece to the resolution of national disputes is thought to be recognition of interdependence. The nation has been divided because significant numbers of citizens have ceased to see that collective well-being depends upon mutual respect. This approach tends to focus the role of proponents on local level truth-telling and renewed sense of community. A successful outcome requires all parties to agree that there is greater advantage in uniting the nation than in continuing to be divided.

THE CUBAN CASE

I have argued elsewhere that the process of Cuban reconciliation began in 1978 with the Dialogue between President Castro and a group of exiles wherein political prisoners were released and return exile visits and remittances were authorized (Ackerman forthcoming). Since then, it has gone haltingly forward through two additional “national encounters” and

the post-1994 expansion of family visits and remittances. But, do these instances and processes constitute a cumulative movement toward reconciliation?

Scholars focusing their attention on the process and substance of reconciliation point to the primary necessity of an expanding, literal, social space where conciliatory action—whether at the state or national level—can unfold (Ackerman 1996; Kriesberg 1998; Lederach 1995). Secondly, a balance must be struck between the desire to reconcile/reunite/accommodate (i.e., to settle differences) and insistence on truth-telling concerning injustices committed on all sides (i.e., to establish the historic facts of prior injustice). What is the status of these basic items in the Cuban situation?

A difficulty in the Cuban situation is the interweaving of state and national issues and of foreign policy and popular issues. The following logic has persisted stubbornly in discussion of Cuba. The Cuban revolution is presented as a triumph of national independence that has been assaulted relentlessly by a U.S. embargo/blockade. The embargo is planned, promoted and maintained by exile lobby groups in Miami. Therefore, foreign policy issues and national divisions are one and the same. A process of mutual blame ensues wherein the exiled portion of the national family is held accountable for U.S. policy.

At the same time, a contradictory personal logic exists wherein individual friends and family must be given aid (via visits and remittances) as a matter of personal morality and affection and relatives welcomed during exile visits. Alas, the logic of indivisible state/national blame occupies formal, social spaces (government offices, media venues, mass organizations) while the logic of mutual aid exists as a subtext without a literal, public space. In order for reconciliation to progress, foreign policy issues must be disentangled from national identity and the forces of mutual aid must begin to claim social spaces. Although the balance remains on the side of government control of social space, we can point to expanding spaces such as those opened by increased religious tolerance and greater freedom to travel to and from the island by persons loyal to the regime (the so-called velvet exile).

If other cases of reconciliation are a barometer, then debates over how to define and proceed with reconciliation will intensify as social spaces expand. For some, the case of Cuba is less difficult because the “injustices” are of a smaller magnitude—the extent and degree of human rights violations, killings, incarceration are usually cited as less severe whether discussing exile or island groups. This depends, however, on the meaning attached to reconciliation. For example, if divisions within the nation are viewed as non-racial, non-ethnic then there is less rancor. However, those who subscribe to definition No. 2, seeing the divisions grounded in racism, or classism, and insisting on repentance will encounter difficult terrain. Each definition can be discussed as applied to Cuba and an evaluation made of the obstacles to successful reconciliation can be made for each.

Finally, what are the implications for Cuban national reconciliation inherent in the potential involvement of multilateral institutions such as the U.N.? We cite a group of key factors to begin an evaluation of this issue. Who are the actors and institutions most likely to promote multi-lateral involvement? What are the potential terms and mechanisms for entry into the situation? What have been the effects of using hard versus soft power in past cases and what are the implications of each for the Cuban case?

Traditionally constituencies in the U.N. are also swept into the linking of foreign policy and national differences—constituents divide between human rights monitors (generally censuring the Cuban government) and those allied on foreign policy issues in condemnation of the U.S. embargo. Key questions: Is the issue of Cuban sovereignty a sacred cow? That is, are the independence and non-intervention achieved by the revolution so bound up with national pride that multilateral involvement is unacceptable in this sensitive area. This is open to debate but U.N. involvement has been most successful in cases where civil society was weak and world concern over the situation was high and persistent, e.g., human rights violations in Guatemala. The UN entered as a more powerful force that could weigh in on the side of a clearly disadvantaged nation against a clearly abusive state. Ultimately the Cuban case does not fit these

criteria and involvement of soft power resources are likely to be manipulated by all sides to maintain divisions rather than to heal them.

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