Reconciliation

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Definition of reconciliation

Reconciliation is one of the processes a post-conflict society must go through to rebuild the interpersonal relationships between conflict parties. During this process, the conflict parties are confronted with the challenge of developing respect for and acceptance of one another's identity and existence (Kelman, 2010). Depending on the context of the conflict, this procedure may happen to various degrees and create diverse outcomes. In general, reconciliation measures can include the creation of truth commissions, reparations, retributive justice trials and apologies. All these actions are deliberately done in pursuit of restoring the relationships between perpetrators and victims, preserving the dignity of the victims and allowing for a critical and effective confrontation with the violence of the previous conflict and its consequences for victims (Nguyen, 2008). In order to be successful, reconciliation procedures must happen at several levels in society. First, it can happen on an individual and interpersonal level, which often involves the building of relationships among ordinary citizens through self-reflection, acknowledgement and building respect for the other (Seils, 2017). Socio-political and institutional reconciliation practices involve a general acceptance of religious and political groups, which may also be supported through institutions protecting the rights and freedoms of members of victim groups (Seils, 2017).

It is important to study reconciliation processes with caution, as they tend to be highly context-dependent and can lead to various different outcomes, based on the unique interests of individual actors and the societal structure in a post-conflict state. Therefore, one must acknowledge that this process, too, can lead to new forms of inequalities or tensions within a society (Hamber and Kelly, 2018).

[Image above: Middle East Eye: Dozens of female activists protested in Taiz city demanding women be given positions in the cabinet (MEE)]

Reconciliation in Yemen: External and Internal factors

As the process of reconciliation includes addressing relationships after political conflict, it includes the building or relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions (Hamber &Kelly, 2018). The vertical reconciliation of institutions is necessary in the case of weak

institutions. The objective is to restore the rule of law and the basic principle of equality before the law. Constitutional reforms aim to re-establish the culture of democratic institutional accountability. Building confidence in democratic institutions and values through justice and security reforms as well as prosecution of former military leadership is part of the institutional reconciliation process . The prior goal is to create a society where social groups and institutions live in peaceful coexistence (Seils, 2017).

This goal can only be reached when the social, political, ethnic and religious groups participating in a conflict reconcile. This vertical reconciliation aims to restore the social contract within a society by resolving the societal cleavages . When there is widespread horizontal violence between social, religious or political groups including non-state armed actors, it is important to reintegrate victims as well as perpetrators. This can be done by acknowledging harms done and restoring respect for each other in the future including local and peaceful dispute resolution processes (Seils, 2017).

In general, one could say that social cohesion goes hand in hand within an inclusive governance at an institutional level (Seils, 2017). In the Yemeni case, where there is widespread horizontal violence between social, religious or political groups including non-state armed actors, reintegration of all societal parties into their communities should be carried out through traditional practices based on tribal law and traditions as some of the most influential agents of reconciliation are political parties, NGO's, women, and tribes(Seils, 2017; Sharqieh, 2013).

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[Picture above: "Demonstrators march with a sign reading in Arabic "the UAE is the leader of destruction and fragmenting the Arab region" during a protest in the southwestern Yemeni city of Taez on August 30, 2019, against air strikes carried out by the UAE on Yemen's second city of Aden." Photo credit: Ahmad Al-Basha via Getty Images]

Reconciliation through Internal factors: Tribal Governance

Tribes in Yemen have had a very important role in keeping Yemen stable in the face of the atrocities, especially during the 2011 period of instability. Yemeni dependence on indigenous tribal governance results from the incompetence of the Yemeni government and its limited ability to create a state of stability in the country. It has been argued that tribal governance has been able to establish justice and regulate conflict during times of uncertainty (Al-Dawasri, 2021).

Tribal Customary Law is based on ideals such as consensus building, maintaining relationships, transparency, accountability, solidarity, collective responsibility and the protection of public interests through prioritizing the interests of the community. Furthermore, it is based on mechanisms of conflict resolution such as arbitration, negotiation, and mediation. However, the lack of recognition of tribal sovereignty and neglect of the inherently anti-ideological status of Yemeni tribes by western media has limited Western efforts to resist terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda (Al-Dawsri, 2021).

As part of reconciliation for the state of Yemen, it is essential that Yemeni Tribal Governance be integrated into the formal governmental system in order to complement formal institutions, eventually leading to trust between such institutions and the citizens.

External factors

The most significant external factor in the Yemen conflict is Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian political narrative has consistently been directed at their desire to contain Yemen and prevent it from further chaos. However, this is untrue; Saudi Arabia is known to have subsidized the Yemeni state in efforts to impose political influence on the Yemeni state and to stop an overflow of immigration into the Saudi Arabian State, consequently dominating the region. In this case, the Saudi Arabian attack against Houthi control is an approach to control Iranian influence over the Yemeni state and the region in general. It is obvious that the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran is but a theatrical contest for regional dominance(Clausen, 2015). Reconciliation concerning external factors, in specific Saudi Arabia, is impossible if the Saudi Arabian state's intervention is merely due to selfish state interests of the government rather than sincere devotion to the development of the Yemeni state and well-being of its citizens.

Bibliography:

Al-Dawsari, N. (2012). *Tribal governance and stability in Yemen* (Vol. 24). Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribal_governance.pdf

Clausen, M.-L. (2015). Understanding the Crisis in Yemen: Evaluating Competing Narratives. *The International Spectator*, *50*(3), 16–29. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03932729.2015.1053707

Hamber, B., & Kelly, G. (2018). The reconciliation paradox. https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/files/12487129/pap_Reconciliation_Paradox_ICIP.pdf

Kelman, H. C. (2004). Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective. *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, *1*(1), 111–124. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.003.0006

Nguyen Vo, D. S. (2016, September 26). *Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation*. Beyond Intractability. https://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/vo-reconciliation.

Sharqieh, I. (2013). A Lasting Peace? Yemen's Long Journey to National Reconciliation. *Brookings Doha Center, 7.* https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BDC_Yemen-National-Reconciliation_Sharqieh.pdf

Seils , P. (2017, June 30). *The Place of Reconciliation in Transitional Justice*. International Center for Transitional Justice. https://www.ictj.org/publication/reconciliation-transitional-justice.

Further Reading Suggestions:

Readings about Conflict Reconciliation - General:

Bar-Tal, D. (2000). From intractable conflict through conflict resolution to reconciliation: Psychological analysis. *Political Psychology*, *21*(2), 351-365. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791795?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

This paper approaches the topic of conflict reconciliation with a psychological analysis perspective and gives valuable insight into which internal and external conditions must be met to make this a successful process that encompasses all institutional, cultural and political spheres of the reconciliation process.

Bloomfield, D., Barnes, T., & Huyse, L. (2003). Reconciliation after violent conflict. *A Handbook. Handbook series. Stockholm.* https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/reconciliation-after-violent-conflict-handbook

This handbook gives a very detailed account of reconciliation, addressing its actors, institutions, methods, outcomes and role in the international community throughout several chapters. This handbook will be helpful for anyone trying to understand all aspects to the reconciliation process.

Readings about Conflict Reconciliation - Yemen:

Strategiecs Think Tank

STRATEGIECS. (2021, February 24). *Yemen: The Road to Reconciliation*. Strategiecs Think Tank - Yemen: The Road to Reconciliation.
https://strategiecs.com/en/analyses/yemen-the-road-to-reconciliation

"The following position paper foresees the future of the reconciliation in Yemen in light of some of the changes that have taken place during the past 6 years. It also reviews the most prominent local obstacles to real stability in the country." (Strategiecs Team)

United Nations Development Programme

Strengthening Institutional and Economic Resilience in Yemen (SIERY): UNDP in Yemen. UNDP. (n.d.). https://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/projects/SIERY.html

The United Nation's programme to Yemen aims to cover nationwide stabilization within communities and institutions. It focuses on local governance, institutional as well as economic resilience, capacity development and service delivery.

Gulf International Forum:

Munassar, O. (2021, January 21). *Yemen to Reap the Fruits of GCC's Reconciliation* . Gulf International Forum. https://gulfif.org/yemen-to-reap-the-fruits-of-gccs-reconciliation/

A commentary on the Gulf Cooperation Council's reconciliation project after three years. The article explains the diplomatic conflicts between the different Gulf States such as Qatar and Sauid-Arabia connected to Yemen. The author see a shift in Saudi Arabian position towards reconciliation.

United States Institute of Peace:

Dialoguing for Reconciliation in Yemen. United States Institute of Peace. (2016, December 29). https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/06/dialoguing-reconciliation-yemen

The National Dialogue is the subject of this article. It is explained how the participants of the National Dialogue bring together different parts of Yemeni society who had been excluded from political dialogue before. Even though the initiative of the National Dialogue is not as successful as hoped, it is a good beginning.

BBC World News

Schmitz, C. (2015, February 28). The rise of Yemen's Houthi rebels. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31645145

BBC article explaining the rise of Yemen's Houthi Rebel group and its situation and influence in Yemen now.

Middle East Eye:

Yemen: Anger as newly sworn-in cabinet excludes women for first time in 20 years . Middle East Eye. (2020, December 27).
https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemen-cabinet-excludes-women-anger

The newly sworn government in Yemen, divided between the separatist Southern Transitional Council and Yemen's internationally recognised government, has become controversial and caused protests due to the fact that women were excluded, provoking dispute for the first time in 20 years regarding this subject.

Peace Incite:

Adra, N. (2015, May 12). *Can tribal institutions help rebuild Yemen?* Peace Insight. https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/can-tribal-institutions-help-rebuild-yemen/?location=yemen&theme=

This blog article discusses how tribal governance and political structures could help promote stability and long-term peace.

Search for Common Ground:

Maktary, S., & Smith, K. (2017). Pathways for peace and stability in Yemen. *Search for Common Ground*. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Yemen-Peace-Analysis_FINAL.pdf

The executive summary of this research discusses suggestions which could promote peace and stability in Yemen. Further, it summarizes the situation in Yemen in a thorough manner allowing readers to understand the conflict further.