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Review of Selected Essays on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

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This paper is a review of selected essays on reconciliation and peacebuilding in conflict-affected and post-conflict societies delineating the fundamental key factors that promote peacebuilding, and the approaches to reconciliation which have proved to be effective over the past 20 years. Acknowledgement of wrongdoing, empathy and the promotion of open dialogue stand out as the factors common to all reconciliation initiatives. The paper examines five approaches to peacebuilding, namely contact theory, restorative justice, making apologies, sharing narratives and reconciliation through education, conceptualizing each in light of its benefits, as well as its challenges, with examples from the real world illustrating its application. The paper concludes with recommendations for contextualizing peacebuilding approaches as there is no one single approach that fits all contexts, and for intersectionality and the full engagement and commitment of local actors.

Keywords: reconciliation, peacebuilding, forgiveness, apologies, restorative justice, contact theory.

Introduction
Reconciliation, forgiveness, and peacebuilding are critical components of any conflict resolution plan for healing the wounds caused by conflict, preventing new hostilities, and moving towards a better future. The promotion of reconciliation, forgiveness and peacebuilding requires the identification of key factors within each so they can be applied to effectively address identity conflicts, trauma, and violence in post-conflict societies. Rouhana (2017) distinguishes between conflict settlement and conflict resolution whereby the former is a process of negotiation and mediation between two conflicting parties seeking an agreement to formally terminate a dispute based on mutual interests; it does not effect a deep transformation of the relation between the conflicting parties. The latter is a process that addresses the underlying causes of conflict regardless of the power relations between the conflicting parties; its aim is to achieve peaceful relations.

In recent years, several theoretical frameworks have emerged to identify the key factors and approaches that promote successful reconciliation and peacebuilding in conflict settings. For example, Van der Borght (2018) identified the role of religion and sociocultural identities in promoting reconciliation, while Arai (2019) explored how conflict intervention training can be used as a strategic tool for convening in conflict settings, and Waters (2016) examined how trials and conflict shape the process of reconciliation in conflict settings. Of the various theoretical frameworks, intergroup contact theory emerges as a most promising one, suggesting that intergroup contact can lead to improved attitudes and reduced prejudice between conflicting groups (Hässler et al., 2021; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Another theoretical approach is the narrative-based framework, which emphasizes the importance of storytelling and collective memory in promoting reconciliation (Auerbach, 2009). Further, theoretical perspectives such as social identity theory focused on the role of group identity in intergroup conflict (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011), and the theory of transitional justice addressed past human rights abuses and
promoted reconciliation through legal and institutional mechanisms (Teitel, 2000). Other studies have focused on the challenges and obstacles to achieving reconciliation and forgiveness among victim groups of unacknowledged past trauma and genocide (Uluğ et al., 2021).

**Aim and significance of the review**

This paper reviews a number of essays written on these concepts, either separately or together. The aim of such an endeavor is to look for common threads across all selected papers on best practices to promote peacebuilding, in spite of the encountered challenges. The following questions are addressed: What are the factors that contribute to reconciliation and peacebuilding in conflict-affected and/or post-conflict societies, and what reconciliation approaches have proved to be most effective in the conflict resolution process?

This paper’s significance lies in providing a deeper understanding of the complex nature of identity conflicts, trauma, and violence, and how these factors impact reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts. The paper starts by conceptualizing reconciliation, forgiveness and peacebuilding through the lens of different authors in different contexts. This is followed by a section delineating the main findings gathered from the selected essays into two parts: (a) the factors contributing to the promotion of reconciliation and forgiveness, and (b) the approaches for promoting reconciliation and forgiveness.

**Conceptualization of Reconciliation**

While opinions differ as to the theoretical and empirical dimensions of reconciliation, it is generally agreed that reconciliation might be conceived as the long-term processes of establishing peaceful relations between rival sides following the resolution of conflict (Aiken, 2010). Reconciliation is a conflict resolution process of rebuilding trust between individuals or groups that have been in conflict with each other, often involving acknowledgment of past harm, apology, and reparations (Auerbach, 2009). There are three different types of reconciliation: (a) instrumental reconciliation which includes interventions designed to engage former antagonists in sustained cooperative interaction, through which enmity is gradually replaced with trust, (b) socioemotional reconciliation which includes interventions designed to confront directly the emotional and perceptual legacies of past conflict (feelings of victimization, guilt, distrust and fear), and (c) distributive reconciliation which includes plans to reduce structural and material inequalities between former antagonists. For a sound intergroup reconciliation plan, all three types of reconciliation must be kept in mind (Aiken, 2010). For example, in the late 1960s, then in the late 1990s and early 2000s, structural and material inequalities among nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland, main push factors of the conflict, were reduced by extensive legislative reforms in housing, employment allocation, education, electoral practices and in the criminal justice system. The socioeconomic disparities, while certainly still present to a reduced degree, no longer represent the major source of conflict they once did in Northern Ireland. However, those equality-oriented initiatives and reforms did not necessarily translate into the transformation of antagonistic mindsets essentially needed for reconciliation: ‘no consensus was ever reached among the parties about the past, particularly with regard to the morality (or otherwise) of the use of violence during the Troubles or to who the ‘real’ victims and perpetrators of past violence are’ (Aiken, 2010, p. 175). Another set of strategies had to be implemented, of a socio-emotional nature, where the parties involved recognized the need to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence. In the late 1970s, the Victims’ Commission was established recommending increased access to compensation for victims, trauma counselling and support services for victims, survivors
and their families. This was followed by a government-wide policy for addressing the needs of victims through an agenda for funding a wide body of community-based victims’ support organizations. The Belfast Agreement also included provisions to address the perpetrators of past violence, through the release of some 450 prisoners, and provision of support (education, skills training, financial and welfare advice, housing, counselling) to facilitate their re-integration in the community, a move that was highly controversial yet necessary for the peace process (Aiken, 2010).

Many models of reconciliation in post-conflict societies have been criticized as being loaded with normative expectations of what reconciliation ought to be and of viewing reconciliation as an end product artificially concocted and imposed by external actors (Sokolić, 2020). The challenge here is to integrate all levels of analysis together so that interethnic relationships are examined at (a) the micro and macro levels, and (b) the formal and informal levels. In the process, the dangers of artificiality ought to be highlighted (Sokolić, 2020). And because the term reconciliation can be interpreted in a variety of ways embedding distinctive personal perspectives, conflict histories, as well as local political, social and economic contexts, critics say that reconciliation thus remains ‘a relatively amorphous, malleable concept’ (Cole & Firchow, 2019, p. 18), nuanced by contextual specificities.

**Conceptualization of Forgiveness**

The term “conflict trap” applies to the state of the world today where a large portion of today’s conflict outbreaks are recurrences of old unresolved conflicts, and ‘about 60% of all countries with civil wars fall back into violence within ten years’ (Dyrstad et al., 2011, p. 364). Many scholars question the viability of forgiveness in numerous post-conflict contexts such as South Africa, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and Bosnia (Finnegan, 2010); forgiveness may be one of the most potent, yet most controversial, means to break the conflict trap. Forgiveness ‘is not merely accepting what happened or ceasing to be angry. Rather, it involves a voluntary transformation of your feelings, attitudes, and behavior, so that you are no longer dominated by resentment and can express compassion, generosity, or the like toward the person who wronged you’ (APA, n.d.). Finnegan (2010) defines the notion of forgiveness ‘as a social process in which victim(s) release resentment toward perpetrator(s) yet acknowledge the wrong done to him/her’ (p. 427). Ultimately, the resulting outcome should be a shift in the victim’s orientation from the traumatic past by making a meaning out of the traumatic experience(s) toward a more forward-focused approach. In her analysis of the sociological phenomenon of forgiveness, Finnegan (2010) focused on two important social mechanisms that promote the discourse of forgiveness among the Acholi people of Northern Uganda who had been persecuted for two decades by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels; these are (a) a communal sense of war fatigue, and (b) a sense of Acholi collective identity emphasized by the Acholi religious and cultural leaders. In this sense, fostering Acholi collective identity has legitimized forgiveness as a viable means for shifting communities from war to peace. On the other hand, promoting mechanisms such as criminal prosecution and retributive justice may increase the risk for further marginalization and stigmatization, considering that the Acholi people have been long marginalized and stigmatized by the dominant Ugandan political discourse.
Conceptualization of Peacebuilding
In the reviewed literature, the terms reconciliation and peacebuilding seem inseparable and often overlapping. Peacebuilding is the process of creating sustainable peace in a society or community that has been affected by conflict, often involving efforts to address the root causes of the conflict and to promote social, political, and economic development (Duman, 2017).

The history of conflict and violence is as old as human civilization, and the need for reconciliation and peacebuilding has always been present. However, the modern discourse on reconciliation and peacebuilding emerged after World War II and the Nuremberg Trials, which established the principle of international criminal justice and accountability for war crimes (Roht-Arriaza, 2006). Since then, various conflict settings around the world have witnessed the implementation of reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives, such as South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which aimed to address the legacy of Apartheid and promote national healing and unity (Gibson, 2004). The field of peace and conflict studies has also emerged, which focuses on understanding the causes of violent conflict and developing strategies for promoting peace and reconciliation. Lederach (1997) further explains that building toward peace, for any setting produced by protracted conflict, proceeds at two levels: (a) the level of transformation which is the movement from the latent stage to confrontation to negotiation to dynamic, peaceful relationships, and (b) the level of sustainability which means allowing this transformation to become a proactive process that is capable of regenerating itself over time—a spiral of peace instead of a spiral of violence (pp. 74-76).

Factors Contributing to the Promotion of Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Peacebuilding

Acknowledgement of wrongdoing
Acknowledging responsibility for wrongdoing is key to overcoming historical injustices and promoting reconciliation, and it is associated with higher collective guilt and support for actions to redress the harm done (Bilali et al., 2019). Reconciliation between two conflicting parties is a very difficult endeavor due to their divergent construals of collective violence, and such divergence poses one of the most challenging obstacles to conflict resolution and reconciliation: The victim and perpetrator groups’ discrepant perceptions of collective violence may serve to trigger further conflict and get in the way of reconciliation (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019). However, because perceptions of victim roles and perpetrator roles are subjective, relative and not static, the historical, social, and political context of victimhood and violence perpetration should always be taken into account to better understand the complex intersection and the varying power degrees of experienced violence and oppression at different times in history and in different contexts (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

Acknowledging wrongdoing includes acknowledging the pain and suffering of victims as well as taking responsibility for any harm caused (Waters, 2016). In his Reconciliation Pyramid, Auerbach (2009) views acknowledgement of wrongdoing and assumption of responsibility as core elements of the reconciliation process. These involve (collective) identity issues which are at the center of the feud between conflicting parties. Collective identity is founded upon and nourished by national narratives ‘about past and present glories and traumas, where the other was either the defeated (in case of glories) or the victorious (in traumas)’ (Auerbach, 2009, p. 294). These national narratives can be barriers to a reconciliation, but they can also trigger it. When the perpetrator acknowledges wrongdoing, they are giving a signal of a change of character to the harmed group and of their
intention to redress these wrongs; this helps the victimized group to regain a sense of agency and readjust their perception of the perpetrator as bearing a sense of morality (Klar & Schori-Eyal, 2015), creating spaces for open dialogue and apology, and promoting healing and accountability. In this context, readers are encouraged to consult the work being done at the Institute for Healing of Memories founded by South African Anglican priest and social justice activist, Michael Lapsley. Despite the debilitating disability inflicted by a letter bomb attack orchestrated by the Apartheid regime, and the ensuing deep emotional pain of the trauma, Lapsley describes his life as a transformation from a freedom fighter into a healer and advocate for reconciliation in the post-apartheid era, profoundly committed to healing and reconciliation. Through his work, Lapsley emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing past wounds as a crucial step toward building a more just and reconciled society.

**Empathy and sympathy**

Developing empathy and understanding towards the other party was also found to be an important factor in promoting reconciliation and forgiveness: Expressing empathy is the third stage in Auerbach’s Reconciliation Pyramid where ‘empathizing with the enemy can lead to the assumption of at least partial responsibility for the plight of the other’ (Auerbach, 2009, p. 303). Thus, the themes of tolerance, empathy and human rights should all be incorporated in peace education programs: Tolerance is the readiness ‘to bear, to allow, and even to hear opinions (thoughts or attitudes) that contradict his or her own’ (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009, p. 565).

To be tolerant means to challenge and reject negative stereotypes and prejudice about others, and to actively engage in meaningful dialogue about controversial matters with them. For such a dialogue to be possible, there are prerequisites such as having an open mind, being acceptant of alternative ideas, being sensitive to human rights and having empathy toward other groups. Training on tolerance means offering opportunities for the conflicting parties to consider views that ‘contradict the dominant societal beliefs of ethos of conflict’ (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009, p. 565); such opportunities should foster attitudes of empathy toward one another, and the ability to see members of the other group as people who can be trusted, who have legitimate needs and goals, and with whom one would want to maintain peaceful relations. In Halpern and Weinstein’s (2004) words, empathy is the ability to see former enemies as real people, to rehumanize them by reversing the dehumanization process and returning ‘humanity to those from whom categorization has removed all individual attributes’ (p. 567).

However, because empathy is very difficult to imagine between two opponents in the context of an identity conflict as it can be equated with treason in some cases, some scholars suggested substituting empathy with sympathy. For example, Eisikovits (2004) believes that empathy is not as useful and realistic as sympathy. In his view, sympathy involves a critical element which is not found in empathy: ‘if I begin to sympathize with another, and make an effort to place myself in her circumstances, this can serve as an independent motivation and encouragement for endowing her with the same rights I have’ (p. 44).

Eisikovits (2004) highlights the difference between sympathy and empathy, the former being the process of entering into another person's situation while the latter is entering into their feelings. Sympathy is thus endowed with a degree of objectivity, for attempting to take over the feelings of others would not enable an objective evaluation of their responses. The call here is for an impartial
spectator who is as well informed as possible about the circumstances at hand, and who remains as fair as possible in spite of their natural biases. Thus, exposure to details, knowledge of circumstances and familiarity with specifics are crucial for allowing one to project themselves realistically into the circumstances of the other.

**Dialogue and communication**

The underlying idea of Auerbach’s Reconciliation Pyramid is that ‘identity conflicts, centered on victimhood metanarratives that carry so much pain and humiliation, need reconciliation in order to heal the wounds of the injured peoples’ (p. 304). This highlights the importance and necessity for dialogue and communication. Such dialogue should be based on trust and empathy and focused on the achievement of desired common objectives (Cehajic et al., 2008). In spite of the lack of consensus on a universal definition of peace education, due to the fact that each particular conflict context requires a specific historical, socio-political, economic and cultural approach, Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks (2015) believe that there is, however, some common ground in the academic debates about peace education in various regions: the importance of critical and reflexive dialogue.

Dialogue is a crucial part of the peacebuilding process, and when promoted via bottom-up and top-down methods, it contributes to building the infrastructure for peace between conflict-affected societies (Dudouet, 2017). However, for dialogue to be an effective conflict settlement technique, it must be preceded by power shifts between the conflicting parties towards greater equality; otherwise, it could only result in a pseudo-resolution that serves to prolong the conflict. Dialogue should be held over a solution that guarantees the rights of the marginalized party so it may achieve sufficient leverage for an effective negotiation process with the other party. Curle and Dugan (1982) write that for conciliation and bargaining to be achieved, a high level of awareness of the conflict and a relative power balance between the conflicting parties must exist. When conciliation and bargaining processes are entered into without a minimal level of power parity between the conflicting parties, and without a minimal level of preparation and organization on behalf of the less powerful party, then a semblant of participation and equality may have been served, while no real change in power relationships has been effectuated, and hence, decision-making capability remains where it was.

Open and inclusive dialogue was found to be crucial for promoting reconciliation and forgiveness in Syria (Duman, 2017), in Sri Lanka (Duncan & Lopes Cardozo, 2017; Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2015), in South Africa (Gibson, 2006), in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hart & Colo, 2014), and in Israeli and Palestinian schools (Maoz, 2000).

But why is the promotion of dialogue and open communication important for the peacebuilding process? Hart and Colo (2014) write that dialogue between conflicting parties helps reduce tension, stereotyping, out-group discrimination and negative attribution among adversaries. Dialogue and communication are thus a major channel for discovering, connecting and modifying negative feelings and perceptions. In their description of the peacebuilding workshops that were held in the Bosnian context, they emphasize the importance of dialogue to address the traumas, and provide safe spaces where war and social narratives are shared for healing and attitudinal shifts to take place. Dialogue also allows giving voice to the voiceless and empowering the marginalized with the right energy for change and transformation toward sustainable peace.
Maoz (2000) who examined reconciliation and peacebuilding processes between Israelis and Palestinians, believes that that signing agreements between policymakers is not enough. Such agreements must be ‘accompanied by dynamics of social and psychological change at the grassroots level of populations at both sides’ (p. 721). He talks of transformative dialogue between two conflicting parties as a process of self-expression, listening to each other, and empathizing with the emotions, experiences, views and values of the other. It is transformative because ‘perceptions and relations to the other are transformed, and greater understanding, acceptance and connectedness to the experiences and positions of the other are formed’ (p. 722).

Approaches for Promoting Reconciliation and Forgiveness
How can the acknowledgement of wrongdoing, empathy and the promotion of dialogue be incorporated in the reconciliation and peacebuilding process? The following section deals with the approaches that have been proposed and implemented in various conflict-affected and/or in post-conflict societies. There are many approaches that cannot possibly be all included in our discussion; we therefore dedicate this section to the examination of five of the most documented approaches: (a) the use of national narratives, (b) apologizing, (c) restorative justice, (d) contact theory, and (e) reconciliation through education.

National narratives
The first approach is based on Auerbach’s model of reconciliation, and it addresses national narratives. Because reconciliation is a deep process that aims at radical changes in the hearts and minds of the people involved in a given conflict, Auerbach (2009) proposed a theoretical framework of the reconciliation process as including both the emotional (apology, forgiveness, empathy, remorse) as well as the cognitive (the societal beliefs translated in the national narratives of the people). Auerbach called his model the Reconciliation Pyramid which he describes as a heuristic exploratory tool for generating further research into the reconciliation process. Auerbach distinguishes between two types of conflicts, the material conflicts (disputes over territory, defense borders, natural resources, and the like) and identity conflicts which he defines as situations where one party feels that the other ‘has negated its identity and denied its right as a legitimate player in the international arena’ (Auerbach, 2009, p. 294). In psycho-political terms, collective identity conflicts, which are reinforced by respective national narratives, explain the depth and intensity of the mutual hostility between the conflicting parties.

National narratives are stories about past and present glories, victories and triumphs on the one hand, but also of wounds, scars and traumas on the other hand. Among the many projects that sought to promote tolerance and reconciliation between the British and the Irish in dispute over Northern Ireland, and improve relations between Catholics and Protestants, one project was concerned with re-visiting the past, or in Harris’ (2008) words, ‘excavating atrocities’, giving voice to victims of the conflict: the “Healing Through Remembering” group, an initiative launched by the Northern Ireland Office’s Central Community Relations Unit. The aim of such an initiative was to highlight the significance of personal testimonies from individuals and communities - both positive and negative - and it was believed to have a therapeutic, cathartic value. This process of public storytelling recommends an inclusive, victim-centered approach, where previously unheard groups are identified. However, if such an initiative was to be successful, the need to place personal accounts in a wider context was emphasized over the isolated ‘single identity’ projects which may fail to bridge the gap between victims and perpetrators (Harris, 2008).
In a national narrative, the *other* is either the defeated (for the victorious party) or the victorious (for the defeated party). Such a process is known in social psychology as *self-categorization and categorization of the other* (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Turner & Oakes, 1986). In general, perpetrator groups are very effective in avoiding the perpetrator status, by either forgetting or silencing ingroup wrongdoing in order to reduce identity threat. Narratives reflecting acknowledgment of harm-doing are quite rare, and so are the feelings of collective shame and guilt, which unfortunately bring very low support for reparation policies between conflicting parties (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

The picture gets more complicated when we try to understand such narratives from an attributional perspective: The intergroup attributional bias is the tendency to attribute negative actions committed by an ingroup member to external factors while attributing negative acts committed by an out-group member to internal, dispositional factors. Such attributional biases have been demonstrated in the context of intergroup hostilities and violence whereby groups use more external attributions for the harm they perpetrated, but make more internal attributions for the harm that other groups have committed against them (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

The underlying premise of the Narrative and Story-Sharing techniques is as follows: For perpetrator groups, narratives and stories of collective violence and their outcomes necessitate the need to reflect on and cope with moral accusations that threaten the ingroup’s identity, the underlying need being to avoid ingroup responsibility; for victim groups, these narratives necessitate the need to reflect on ways to protect the ingroup from future harm, but also the dire need for acknowledgment of their victimization and suffering.

As for the application of the technique on the perpetrating party, it consists of presenting it with credible, unequivocal and convincing information which will make it difficult to distort or deny. In parallel, the party is presented with constructive coping strategies to deal with the information (support for policies to restore the harm done, strategies for reparation and apology, opportunities for rehumanizing the *other*, inducing a group malleability belief as in the group can change, and induction of self-affirmation, particularly in domains other than the threatened domain, prior to the discussion of harm-doing).

With respect to the victimized party, one strong motive needs to be addressed: that of acknowledgment of the ingroup’s victimization. Such acknowledgement does not only mean recognizing the facts but also, for the perpetrating party, accepting the narrative of the victimized group about these facts. This will entail calling events by their name (as in, the massacre of the Armenians is a genocide), and perceiving and acknowledging the uniqueness of the victim’s experience (as opposed to comparing it to other similar events of victimization) which by de facto means acknowledging the perpetrator’s act. Acknowledgement of the harm done is a crucial step toward reconciliation; Bilali and Vollhardt (2019) report the findings of a study examining the context of mass violence committed by the Pakistani army against Bangladeshi civilians in the 1971 war, where Bangladeshi participants who had read about the perpetrator group’s acknowledgment of responsibility for the violence reported less anger, less animosity, and more willingness for contact with the perpetrator group than participants in the denial of responsibility condition or the control condition.
However, when designing strategies to cope with the plight of victimhood, one should be cautious about the effects of competitive victimhood, that is minimizing the out-group’s suffering and claiming exclusive victimhood to one’s ingroup, both qualitatively and qualitatively (we are the real victims!). Such competitive victimhood has negative effects on the reconciliation process. It can actually yield the opposite outcomes in terms of less willingness to forgive, more social distance, more mistrust and more intolerance of each other (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

A more realistic and tangible strategy for reconciliation may be related to inclusive victim consciousness; here, the concerned victimized group’s sufferings, but also other victimized groups’ sufferings are acknowledged and other perpetrator groups’ acts are addressed. Such a technique has yielded increased willingness for forgiveness and reconciliation, but also increased peace activism, and support for political inclusion of former opponents. The underlying rationale for such prosocial effects would be that acknowledging the ingroup’s and other groups’ suffering serves as a moral lesson or obligation to never victimize others or to stand by when other groups are being harmed (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

**Apologizing**

Over the past decades, multi-disciplinary scholars have proposed ways to redress historical harms in order to tone down the effects of historical injustices on the present, and ‘more and more commonly, governments and political groups are redressing historical harms by offering official public apologies’ (Blatz & Philpot, 2010, p. 995). Blatz et al. (2009), in their discussion of the psychology of government apologies to historical injustices, say that apologies are an especially powerful means of resolving conflicts, in spite of the scarce research on the impact of such apologies.

Why do victims as well as perpetrators of violence need apology? From a psychiatric perspective in clinical practice, Yager (2007), in his critical review of Aaron Lazare’s seminal book *On Apology*, says that ‘the art of apology, always important in human conduct, is likely to become even more important to assure future social harmony among individuals, groups, nations, and transnational aggregations’ (p.685). Apologies are described as having the power to heal humiliations, to fulfill the victim’s need for restoration of dignity, and for truthful explanations as to why the violence was perpetrated, to help the victim acknowledge that the offender actually shares important core moral values (such as respect for people’s dignity), to provide the victim with assurances of future safety, exculpation from self-blame (*it was my fault*) and eventually the removal of the desire for vengeance.

Excuses, justifications, and apologies have a healing effect on the victim because they implicitly communicate respect and care for the victim as well as remorse for the harm done; but the healing effect of an apology depends on how it was composed (Schmitt et al., 2004). According to Schlenker and Darby (1981), ‘apologies split the self into two parts, a "bad" self that is vilified for the incident and a "good" self that proclaims a recognition of the misconduct and extends a promise (often implicit) of more acceptable behavior in the future’ (p. 272). The research on apologies (Blatz et al., 2009; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Schmitt et al., 2004) shows that effective apologies should consist of the following six elements: Expression of remorse, acceptance of responsibility, admission of wrong doing, acknowledgement of victim suffering, promise not to repeat wrongdoing in the future, and offer to repair, fix the damage done.
Schmitt et al. (2004) explain that the first constituent which bears an implicit confession of guilt is a necessary element of an apology but not enough. Asking for pardon must be accompanied with offering compensation; the configuration of a harm-doer wanting to be forgiven without offering compensation is interpreted by victims as hypocrisy, as if the harm-doer wants to get away cheaply with a simple apology. Scher and Darley (1997) believe that this last constituent is very important not just because of its remedial function, but because it is a symbolic form of self-punishment of the guilty self.

Blatz et al. (2009), in addressing the issue of government apologies for historical injustices, say that an expression of remorse reflects the government’s care for the victim; an admission of responsibility asserts the innocence of the victims (as opposed to blaming the victim); an admission of harm doing assures the victimized group that the current government upholds the moral principles that were violated; by acknowledging the victim suffering, a government validates the victims’ pain, and by promising not to repeat the harm, trust is restored between groups; finally, by offering to repair the harm done, governments demonstrate that their apology is sincere. Blatz et al. (2009) view this as a win-win situation: it should theoretically make the victims, the majority group, their government, and their country feel better about themselves.

To this classical apology model, Blatz et al. (2009) add four elements that may give more impetus to the reconciliation process: They mention first that governments should address the identity concerns of the minority/victimized groups (history tells us that minority groups are aware that their group is devalued) by praising and emphasizing the important and unique contributions of the victimized group to society as a whole. Second, and because majority groups generally oppose governmental apologies for minority groups, governments should phrase apologies in ways that minimize resistance from majority groups, as in praising the minority as well as the majority groups. Third, because people are highly motivated to believe that they live in a just and fair country, knowledge of a historical wrong by the previous system can threaten this psychologically important belief. In such a case, government’s apology account should strive to decrease perceived threat to the system by emphasizing the fairness of the present system. The fourth element suggests an explicit dissociation between the present system and the system that permitted the injustice to occur, noting that the injustice occurred long ago, under different laws, values and beliefs. ‘By distancing and condemning the actions of past governments, the current government demonstrates its commitment to justice’ (p. 223).

Blatz and Philpot (2010) remind us that perpetrator group’s responses to intergroup apologies are not self-evident, and that perpetrator group’s reaction to the apology is likely to affect the victim group’s opinion of the apology. Based on this, they recommend understanding how the perpetrator group views the intergroup relationship after an apology has been made; ‘this may illuminate when and why these groups decide to apologize, inform political debates on whether to apologize, and delineate how an apology changes the perpetrator group’s view of the intergroup relationship’ (p. 1003).

Hornsey et al. (2015) offered an alternative model for reconciliation through apologies, the Staircase Model of Intergroup Apologies: On the ground floor, perpetrators must take responsibility for the harm done; once this is achieved, then formal discussions between representatives of perpetrators and victims are initiated on the second floor, the aim of which is to
reconstruct an accurate consensus of history; on the third floor, discussions of the means to repair the damage take place, underlying the perpetrator’s sincere remorse for the harm done; on the fourth floor, the apology is officially pronounced, and on the last floor, called the post-apology engagement, the perpetrator engages in a forward motion to promise that the actions of the past are not to be repeated and commits to uphold human dignity.

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The Restorative Justice approach

Restorative justice can be conceived as an effort to transform the way we think of punishment for wrongful acts (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). The restorative justice approach is an integrative approach which groups a variety of different practices already covered in this paper, namely apologies, direct communication, forgiveness, acknowledging wrong doing, reintegrating offenders into their communities and restitution, away from any talk of punishment. This is known as the four R model (repair, restore, reconcile, and reintegrate); it is mainly a social practice that historically began in the 1970s as a reaction against an overly harsh criminal justice system, but gradually got to be championed by social workers, progressive lawyers, judges, psychologists, and community and peace activists. In the late 1990s, it became a process of international interest when Desmond Tutu initiated the reconciliation process to transition South African society from apartheid to a just, multiracial society. Soon after, Rwanda and Uganda followed suit.

‘Restorative justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future’ (Braithwaite, as cited in Latimer et al., 2005). The fundamental premise of the restorative justice paradigm is that the most appropriate response to criminal behavior is to repair the harm caused by the wrongful act, and that those most closely affected by the crime (victims and perpetrators) must be given an opportunity to come together to discuss the wrong doing and reach an understanding about what can be done to provide appropriate repair. Latimer et al. (2005) go on to explain that the core elements of the restorative process involve voluntariness (it should be voluntary for all participants), truth telling (the offender should be willing to openly discuss their wrong doing), and a face-to-face encounter (participants should meet in a safe and organized setting to collectively agree on an appropriate method of repairing the harm). Such a process provides an opportunity to heal, to repair and to restore relationships through the reintegration of victims and offenders. It is a platform for open communication, empathy and understanding.

Latimer et al. (2005) performed a meta-analysis on 35 individual restorative justice programs to account for effects on (a) victim satisfaction, (b) offender satisfaction, (c) compliance with restitution and (d) reduction in recidivism. Their findings showed that, compared to traditional non-restorative approaches, restorative justice was found to be more successful at achieving each of the four major goals.

The research on restorative justice programs highlights its benefits, namely enhancing understanding of the root causes of the conflict, reducing recidivism rates, offering the possibility of transforming individual wrongdoers and reintegrating them into productive activity, developing mutual feelings of empathy, and a sense of moral responsibility and reciprocity, and enhancing community norm development and democratic participation, among many other benefits. But perhaps the most fundamental of these is that restorative justice promotes a positive redemptionist
view of human behavior ‘that even the worst among us can be transformed to consider the common good and the best for other human beings’ (Menkel-Meadow, 2007, p. 170).

**Intergroup Contact Theory**

Intergroup contact theory is based on the premise that if lack of contact between members of identity groups reinforces prejudice, conflict and hostilities, then contact between members of identity groups can be used to overcome these. As they interact, their preconceived notions of the *other* are challenged, commonalities across groups are revealed, accentuated differences are minimized, and members of each group get to humanize each other (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011). Contact between individuals and groups of people has been shown to reduce existing prejudices and promote a more tolerant and integrated society. Gordon Allport (1954) explains that peaceful progression from sheer contact between individuals or groups of people toward full assimilation occurs frequently but it is far from being a universal law; what matters is the nature of the contact to be established. In the context of the reduction of intergroup prejudice, Allport delineates several variables, including the quantitative aspects of the contact (frequency, duration, and number of persons involved), the status component (minority with inferior status, with equal status and with superior status), the social context surrounding the contact experience (prevalent segregation or prevalent egalitarianism), individual differences between the persons experiencing the contact (their initial level of prejudice and suspicion against the *other*, history of contact with the *other*, differences in age and educational level), and type of contact (casual, religious, political, occupational, etc.). All these variables illustrate the complexity of contact, and after reviewing the findings of numerous studies tackling the above mentioned variables in the context of intergroup prejudice, Allport (1954, p. 281) concludes that intergroup prejudice may be reduced by four key conditions: (a) equal status, (b) intergroup cooperation, (c) common goals, and (d) support by social and institutional authorities. Allport (1954) further emphasizes that ‘contact in a hierarchical system, or between people who equally lack status, or between individuals who perceive one another as threats, are harmful rather than helpful’ (p. 488).

Allport’s formulation of intergroup contact theory has inspired a plethora of research since its conception. Pettigrew (1998) reports that positive contact effects have been confirmed even in situations lacking Allport’s key conditions, as documented in the literature on Chinese students in the United States, interracial workers in South Africa, German and Turkish school children, and Australians and Americans getting to know Southeast Asian immigrants (p. 68). The reported findings used diverse research methods (field research, archival records, surveys and laboratory experiments). Pettigrew (1998) argues that Allport’s hypothesis risks being an open-ended ‘laundry list of conditions’ (p. 69), thus eluding falsification. For example, researchers have advanced new conditions for optimal contact such as a common language, voluntary contact, and a prosperous economy. This leads to the problem of confounding *facilitating* with *essential* conditions. Moreover, Pettigrew (1998) notes that Allport’s original theory says nothing about the processes (how and why) by which contact changes attitudes and behavior; it predicts only *when* contact will lead to positive change (p. 70), and he proposes the four following interrelated processes: (a) learning about the outgroup (new learning corrects negative views about the outgroup), (b) changing behavior (the new learning will require behavioral accommodations to new expectations – this is understood as a form of dissonance reduction), (c) generating affective ties (positive emotions – mainly empathy) and cultivating friendships with outgroups, and (d) ingroup reappraisal (optimal intergroup contact provides new insights about one’s ingroup’s
norms, customs, values, and biases). Of all the above mentioned four conditions, Pettigrew emphasized intergroup friendship (c) as the most potent because it insinuates the potential for long-term close relationships rather than initial acquaintanceship and short-term intergroup contact. Hence the need for adopting a long-term perspective to allow cross-group friendships to develop, and in some cases, to generalize to other outgroups. Based on the above, Pettigrew (1998) proposes a fifth condition for the contact hypothesis: ‘The contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends. Such opportunity implies close interaction that would make self-disclosure and other friendship-developing mechanisms possible’ (p.76).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), in their seminal meta-analytic test of Allport’s contact theory, confirm that while contact under Allport’s conditions is especially effective at reducing prejudice, even unstructured contact reduces prejudice, and that Allport’s proposed conditions may not be as essential for prejudice reduction as once posited. Contact between groups, even in sub-optimal conditions, is strongly associated with reduced prejudice. Allport’s key conditions act as facilitating conditions that enhance the tendency for positive contact outcomes to emerge (p. 766). In this respect, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) proposed a reformulated intergroup contact theory which stresses the positive features of contact situations as potential maximizers of prejudice reduction. Here, additional mediators of contact effects are considered, such as perspective taking, broadened views of the ingroup, the perceived importance of the contact, and a willingness to trust and forgive the outgroup.

In the reconciliation and peacebuilding context, Cuhadar and Dayton (2011) give recommendations for a successful implementation of intergroup contact theory, and they propose a set of recommendations to complement Pettigrew and Tropp’s conditions of contact in order to achieve positive outcomes. Their recommendations are stated as follows:

- For contact to be optimal and sustainable, it must be repeated in numerous situations, in natural environments and local settings with the same people rather than a one-shot event.
- Promoting change via the cognitive route so that inducing new cognitions about the situation can bring about cognitive dissonance with the expressed behavior of participants, therefore necessitating strategies (behavioral adjustments) to restore cognitive balance in harmony with the new cognitions.
- Promoting attitude change via the affective route by generating friendships among participants through designing social time together which allows for self-disclosure and the discovery of commonalities across categories.
- Providing transfer strategies (opportunities for generalizing what is happening now to future situations and other groups) by influencing and involving community organizations, the media, public opinion, decision-makers, political advisors and negotiators (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011, pp. 284-286).

Hässler et al.’s model (2021), the Integrated Contact-Collective Action Model (ICCAM), is based on the assumption that intergroup contact is compatible with efforts to promote social change when needs of both groups are met and existing inequalities are openly addressed. It is important to understand the circumstances under which intergroup contact can promote support for social change (reconciliation and peace). In their view, ‘intergroup contact interventions aiming to promote social change should not only focus on commonalities between groups but also make existing group differences an active topic of the interaction between advantaged and disadvantaged
group members’ (Hässler et al., 2021, p. 13). Empowerment during intergroup contact is key: the disadvantaged group members (the victims of injustice) should be able to express their perspective, while open discussion of the existing problem is simultaneously reinforced.

Self-categorization and categorization of the other are important processes to take into consideration in such an intervention model: A sharp distinction between us and them poses obstacles to victim-group members’ engagement in collective action with the perpetrators’ group toward reconciliation. Intergroup contact can alter the inclusiveness of individuals’ processes of social categorization, thus the ICCAM proposes that a category’s level of inclusiveness may be a relevant moderator between contact and support for social change. The solution proposed by the ICCAM is to preserve differences between the two groups in the context of a shared superordinate category, a national identity, which may foster positive intergroup attitudes while preserving awareness of intergroup disparities. For this process to be effective and successful, more frequent and more intimate positive intergroup contact is needed to strengthen the positive effect of intergroup contact on the advantaged group (perpetrators) members’ support for social change.

In their review of the literature on intergroup contact theory, Cuhadar and Dayton (2011) talk of the de-categorization effect, so that group memberships need to be made less salient during contact, and social categories less rigid. Through de-categorization, group members gain an inter-personal focus instead of a salient category identity, and positive effects of contact can be generalized to new situations and to the out-group in general. What the ICCAM is proposing is actually a recategorization: This proposal of a superordinate category is derived from the Common Ingroup Identity model which posits that engineering intergroup encounters in such a way as to foster a more inclusive categorization of the situation where the ingroup and outgroup become merged into a single enlarged ingroup, then intergroup relationships would benefit and intergroup biases should lessen (Cehajic et al., 2008). In his Reformulated Contact Theory, Pettigrew (1998) regards recategorization as the optimal strategy that ensures maximum reduction of prejudice and conflict. Recategorization becomes possible if the participants adopt an all-encompassing group identification.

In an application of the intergroup contact theory, Cehajic et al. (2008) examined the effects of contact and common-ingroup identification on intergroup forgiveness and outgroup behavioral tendencies on a sample of Bosnian Muslims who were asked to report their readiness to forgive the violence perpetrated by Bosnian Serbs during the 1992-95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The common-ingroup identification consisted of changing the category of Bosniak to Bosnian. Their results revealed that frequent and good quality contact with members from the perpetrator group predicted forgiveness and reduced the desire for social distance, and stronger common-ingroup identification proved to have a direct positive effect on forgiveness and a direct negative effect on social distance.

The real-life application of Intergroup Contact theory has been criticized; for example, Cuhadar and Dayton (2011) evaluated reconciliation programs initiated by different agents from different parts of the world (peace practitioners from Palestine, Israel, Greece, Turkey, the Balkans) in terms of the theoretical models of change they were based on. They report that, in all cases, no robust theory of change was formulated, the expected outcomes were not clearly articulated, the rationale of why and how the activities were carried out was not explained; some initiatives mentioned an inflated and generic list of overarching macro goals to be implemented in three week-ends.
(strengthening civic dialogue, building a pluralist society and strong citizenry, and deepening the
Greek-Turkish peace efforts).

Reconciliation through Education

Although Paulo Freire did not write on the topic of reconciliation, yet his ideas on education as
expressed in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can greatly contribute to reconciliation efforts.
Freire proposed a dialogical approach to education, the "problem-posing education", where
students are active participants, engaging critically with the material and co-creating knowledge.
This model teaches students to take control of their destinies as it unveils reality and society
problems to them rather than masking the problems with preconceived ideologies. Students are
also involved in solving those problems in innovative ways and assuming responsibility for their
future. Basically, Freire (2005) recognized the shared humanity of all individuals, including those
who have been involved in the oppression of others. This recognition doesn't justify their actions
but helps understand the broader context of oppression and work towards collective liberation.
According to his perspective, acknowledging the shared humanity is crucial for breaking the cycle
of oppression and dehumanization (Freire, 2005). We believe such an approach to education can
greatly support the broader process of reconciliation.

The formal education system and non-formal forms of schooling can play a significant role in the
processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation. Unfortunately, in many conflict-affected societies,
children miss out on such schooling opportunities. However, we also know that the school, in
conflict affected as well as post-conflict societies, can be both victim and perpetrator of war and
conflict. The field of Education in Emergencies (EiE) emphasizes education’s potential to play a
constructive, transformative role in peacebuilding processes, yet at the same time it addresses the
problem of the education systems and actors who may (re)produce inequalities and various forms
of violence, thereby becoming key drivers or potential triggers of conflict (Lopes Cardozo, 2022).

A clear example is the secondary school system of post-war Sri Lanka, thoroughly discussed in a
paper by Duncan and Lopes Cardozo (2017), with a specific focus on the Muslim and Tamil
communities in the Northern city of Jaffna. Here, the segregation between Tamils and Muslims is
replicated in secondary school education whereby schools are segregated on the basis of religion,
potentially exacerbating conflict between groups. Further, secondary schools have also been the
venue for struggles for political power. In such a case, education alone cannot build peace, it has
to be addressed through a holistic approach which broadens the role of education for building
peace towards political, cultural and social contexts. To do so necessitates the concerted effort of
individuals (teachers and students) and external actors (community members and organizations)
for implementing the positive values of education and mitigating its negative role through the
desegregation of ethno-religious groups, and the teaching and enactment of democratic principles.
Lopes Cardozo (2022) asks: How can education become a nurturing space for today’s youth to
develop the appropriate and constructive tools and ways to accomplish radical change? She calls
for a holistic, even a transgressive approach to education that ‘would move beyond the cultivation
of so-called sustainability competencies, such as dealing with ambiguity and complexity, imagining alternative future directions, and taking action in mindful and empathetic ways’ (p. 192).

Based on the 4Rs framework (which combines socio-cultural Recognition, economic
Redistribution, political Representation, and Reconciliation), education can significantly
contribute to peacebuilding through its effect on security, and on political, economic, social, and
cultural transformation within conflict-affected societies. Such a vision of education serves to (a)
address cultural, political, and economic injustices and grievances, (b) increase levels of vertical trust (trust in the government and its services) and horizontal trust (trust between groups), and (c) foster public debate on multiple interpretations of the past in order to reimagine alternative futures. The fourth R of the model, Reconciliation, is the overarching dimension of the model that promotes transformation and higher levels of thinking, consciousness, and interconnectedness toward the goal of creating sustainable peace and a socially just society.

Conclusion

Around the world, numerous efforts are being dedicated to promote peace. Some of these initiatives are top-down approaches driven by governments, such as performing revisions of history education curricula in schools, or establishing historical and truth commissions. Others are driven by civil society actors and non-governmental organizations and focus on addressing and transforming violent conflict narratives and promoting reconciliation (Bilali & Mahmoud, 2017). The selected essays of the present review have discussed different approaches that may be incorporated in both top-down and a bottom-up directions. We believe that initiatives that tap into multiple tools and strategies simultaneously may be the most effective initiatives, maximizing their chances for social change.

Peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives create opportunities for people to share their experiences and stories, and actively listen to and engage with these narratives. Sharing stories helps people who lived through conflicts and traumas to reconcile with their past, thus creating a healing effect. These initiatives also help the other empathize with them and hear the story from their perspective. Thus, they both can find a common ground and a story to agree on. The findings of the essays presented in this review indicate that the same key factors (acknowledgement of wrongdoing, empathy and sympathy, open dialogue and communication) can be incorporated in the different approaches to promote reconciliation, forgiveness, and peacebuilding in conflict settings. The approaches that were examined, whether apologizing (Blatz et al., 2009; Blatz & Philpot, 2010; Hornsey et al., 2015; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Schmitt et al., 2004), fostering intergroup contact (Cehajic et al., 2008; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Hässler et al., 2021; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), building reconciliation bridges through a transgressive holistic educational approach (Lopes Cardozo, 2022), community-based initiatives such as the ones discussed by Dudouet (2017), restorative justice practices (Lamiter et al., 2005; Menkel-Meadow, 2007), or using narratives (Auerbach, 2009; Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019), they all have benefits more than disadvantages.

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of these approaches may vary depending on the specific context of the conflict-affected or post-conflict society in which they are to take shape. Thus, while reconciliation through education initiatives are very helpful to challenge the prevailing stereotypes and intergroup biases, they must be tailored to the local context and incorporate indigenous knowledge and perspectives (Lopes Cardozo, 2022).

Two conclusions can be drawn: (a) all approaches must be contextualized and socio-culturally and politically tailored to take into account the history, culture, and social dynamics of the affected community, and (b) all approaches must engage local actors and stakeholders, including civil society organizations, religious leaders, and community leaders; it is such engagement that enhances their effectiveness and sustainability.
Contextualized approaches that involve local stakeholders, particularly representatives of the victim-groups, are more effective in promoting reconciliation and peace compared to approaches that are led by external actors. Their active participation and engagement ensures more commitment to the goal to be accomplished, more relevance to the context at stake, and more accessibility to all members of the concerned community. Bilali and Mahmoud (2017) give several examples of the need to contextualize; in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, creating and disseminating shared narratives of a past that highlight similarities across societies proved to be an effective strategy, while in the Armenian–Turkish dialogue, it proved to be difficult: Using a Turkish narrative highlighting both groups’ suffering and victimization served to equalize the victimization experiences of the two groups and undermine the Armenian group’s experience while absolving the Turkish group of its responsibility for the violence. Thus, it was more effective to create a shared narrative that highlights historical periods when the two antagonistic groups lived peacefully side by side. In spite of using different approaches in the production of shared narratives, the underlying goal was one: creating space for a common shared vision for the future.

It is important to recognize and address intersectionality and diversity when working towards reconciliation and forgiveness. Intersectionality should be an integral part of good peace-building practice because it helps understand the unique and interwoven sets of challenges that impact vulnerable persons (victims of war, of genocide, displaced people, etc.). For an intersectional approach to be adopted, one must first recognize that there is no one universal agreed-upon peacebuilding practice; second, no peacebuilding initiative can succeed if it is not preceded by a thorough conflict and context analysis highlighting the main challenges facing each concerned community, as well as the channels that are available to address these challenges; and thirdly, an intersectional approach is an empowering approach which actively engages the people who are involved in the reconciliation process so their thoughts and voices and experiences can be heard (Farooqi & Slenter, 2018).

Limitations
There are several limitations to this review that should be taken into account. First, the scope of the review was limited to essays published in the English language only, which may have resulted in missing out relevant articles in other languages. Another possible shortcoming is that our literature search was limited to four databases; there may be other relevant sources of information that were not included in this review.

It is important to note that the essays included in this review stem from a variety of post-conflict settings, each with its own unique cultural, social, and political context. While efforts were made to identify common themes and approaches across essays, we should admit that each setting may require unique and tailored approaches to promoting reconciliation, forgiveness, and peacebuilding.

Last, but not least, the essays that were selected in the present review focused primarily on the factors and approaches that promote reconciliation, forgiveness, and peacebuilding, but did not fully examine the challenges or barriers to implementing these approaches or the long-term sustainability of their effects. For example, Bilali et al. (2019) write that, despite the importance of acknowledgment of wrongdoing and apologizing, groups rarely acknowledge their responsibility for any harm done, and resort instead to a variety of defensive disengagement
strategies (displacement of responsibility, justification of the harm-doing, dehumanizing the victim or minimizing their suffering) to undermine their responsibility in the harm and to protect and preserve their ingroup’s positive identity and social image. These are important themes to discuss for they shed light on the complex and powerful mechanisms that undermine peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives.

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