A look back

The Accord series on addressing the legacies of violence

Previous issues of the Accord series have documented reconciliation practice in peace processes. Summaries from a selection of articles from the Accord back catalogue highlight some of the synergies and tensions between official and unofficial efforts to address the legacies of violence.

Full articles are available on the Conciliation Resources website: www.c-r.org/accord

Accord 2: Guatemala (1997)
Violent truths: The politics of memory in Guatemala by Richard Wilson
The Commission for Historical Clarification was established in 1994 as part of a framework agreement for negotiations, before a final peace agreement was signed in 1996. Its shortcomings included limits to its investigatory powers and the fact that its findings could have no legal implications, raising concerns that the Commission’s work would reinforce impunity. A 1996 amnesty law reinforced the vulnerability of the ‘reconciliation’ agenda. A ‘Recovery of Historical Memory’ project run by the Catholic Church succeeded in collecting testimonies on human rights abuses, particularly in rural areas.

Accord 3: Mozambique (1998)
Sealing the past, facing the future: Trauma healing in rural Mozambique by Alcinda Honwana
Five years on from the 1992 Rome Accord, which officially ended the Mozambique Civil War, intermittent violence and social unrest in rural areas continued to pose a persistent threat to the fragile peace. In the absence of national initiatives to address legacies of violence, local traditional practices proved popular in bringing stability to post-conflict communities. While there were concerns that customary traditions ‘drawing a line’ under past violence might foster impunity, the author argues that future justice mechanisms should be based on local demands.

Accord 9: Sierra Leone (2000)
Dialogue on justice and reconciliation, facilitated by Florella Hazely; notes taken by Alpha Abu
In March 2000, key figures in Sierra Leone’s search for peace discussed the prospects for justice and reconciliation and the potential impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) envisaged in the Lomé Agreement. Discussions stressed the importance of acknowledgement and forgiveness, and the absence of vengeance, in order to achieve true reconciliation, arguing that the TRC should not be perceived as a legal undertaking based on Western notions of justice, but as a vehicle to rebuild societal relations.

Reconciliation and justice: ‘Mato oput’ and the Amnesty Act by Barney Afako
Because many Lord’s Resistance Army combatants were forcibly abducted, many Acholi people prefer reconciliation to retributive justice as a way to create conditions to end the war. Weak institutional and political structures in Uganda made robust legal responses to serious offenses difficult, while traditional approaches such as mato oput have broad support within communities. The Amnesty Act of 2000 encouraged many combatants to return home and engage in these traditional reconciliation practices.

Reconciliation: My side of the island by James Tanis
Traditional community-oriented processes have been complemented by newer Christian practices in Bougainville. A Ministry of Political Education and Reconciliation and Internal Affairs was created to enable reconciliation between the political leadership of Bougainville’s various factions, which broadened reconciliation to communities and helped facilitate the establishment of a joint negotiating team for the final peace agreement. The publication recommends that post-war institutions should continue to focus on reconciliation at the community level to consolidate the fragile peace.

*Inter-community meetings and national reconciliation: forging a pragmatic peace* [Mali] by Kåre Lode

In late 1994, local leaders in northern Mali began to organise inter-community meetings to agree local ceasefires. Civil society leaders subsequently formed a facilitation group to extend meetings across the north and to address broader issues. They helped promote reconciliation, serving as unofficial ‘truth commissions’ through which grievances were safely aired and solutions found. Efforts to scale-up these meetings with international support have led to an increasingly bureaucratised structure, threatening the delicate peacebuilding processes.

**Accord 15: Angola (2004)**

*Peace and reconciliation* by Carlinda Monteiro

Following military victory in 1994, the government advised that ‘in the spirit of National Reconciliation, all Angolans should forgive and forget the offenses resulting from the Angola conflict’ [Annex 6 of the Lusaka Protocol]. This approach privileged the reconciliation of the warring parties without enabling local communities to address legacies of the conflict. Understanding past violence through approaches rooted in local social and cultural contexts became a crucial factor in reconciling victims, perpetrators and communities. It was hoped traditional rituals could create space for dialogue and provide the basis for a broader ‘national reconciliation’.

**Accord 20: Aceh-Indonesia (2008)**

*Human rights and justice in Aceh: The long and winding road* by Faisal Hadi

Efforts to redress human rights violations during the war in Aceh were hampered by political resistance at the national level, international indifference to the human rights agenda, and weak civil society leverage. Growing recognition of human rights in Indonesia from the late 1990s did not extend to Aceh. A Human Rights Court for Aceh backtracked on considering wartime cases, while objections by Indonesia’s Constitutional Court to impunity and amnesty provisions in a proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission obstructed a truth-telling mechanism for survivors.

**Accord 23: West Africa – Sierra Leone and Liberia (2012)**

*Fambul Tok: Reconciling communities in Sierra Leone* by John Caulker

*Fambul Tok* was launched in 2008 out of frustration with the Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which had struggled to engage beyond urban centres and enable locally led, community reconciliation. While TRC recommendations were poorly implemented and deprioritised, *Fambul Tok* attempted to create self-sustaining local reconciliation initiatives, identifying committees from a cross-section of existing community leaders, that also encourage economic ventures and other development benefits.

**Accord 24: Lebanon (2012)**

Section 2: ‘Reconciling society’ [10 articles]

This section of the publication, *Reconciliation, reform and resilience: Positive peace for Lebanon*, looked at social challenges to building peace in Lebanon, discussing issues of memory, identity, marginalisation, reconciliation and citizenship. It explored among other topics: the role of culture and of civil society in documenting and discussing the past; challenging ‘state-sponsored amnesia’ over the war years; the importance of a non-sectarian teaching of history; youth activism; the dangers of neglecting rehabilitation of demobilised militia; interfaith dialogue as a means of reconciliation; the challenges of confessionalism; and the participation of women and disability groups in confronting entrenched power structures.