which they should trump autonomy, and how this negotiation would unfold in the hospital ward or in the courtroom.

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Reconciliation(s): Transitional Justice in Postconflict Societies. By Joanna R. Quinn, ed. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. 313 pp. $95.00 cloth.

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What *is* reconciliation in postconflict settings? This contested question perplexes scholars in the field of transitional justice (TJ), which generally concerns itself with how nations address a past of widespread human rights violations during episodes of violence and the breakdown of the rule of law and democracy. Since its debut some 20 years ago, the discipline of TJ has generated a growing body of literature that continues to outpace the estimated 40 countries that have opted to pursue judicial and nonjudicial mechanisms like truth commissions, reparations, criminal trials, and institutional reform, among other measures, to prevent new cycles of violence (Hayner 2010). Often these articles, books, and chapters examine the theory and case studies of TJ, all the while making passing reference to "reconciliation" as an overarching aim of these national political processes. Conveying grand promises to return societies to "normalcy," reconciliation has become the focal point of the TJ movement (Sarkin & Daly 2004). Yet despite the great deference displayed in the canon of TJ literature, readers are often left puzzling over the exact definition of *reconciliation*. Moreover, despite this lacuna in clarity, few academics venture into this uncharted land of confronting the topic of reconciliation head-on.

For that reason, I was intrigued that Joanna R. Quinn bravely took on the challenge of tackling this daunting ground by making reconciliation the central theme of her edited volume *Reconcilia-*

tion(s): Transitional Justice in Postconflict Societies. As Quinn explains in her introduction, the invited authors all attempt to "come to terms with the many-headed beast that is reconciliation" (p. 12). Quinn and her cohorts respond to the fact that in the last 20 years reconciliation has come to assume "multiple meanings and understandings" (p. 290) but that "those within the transitional justice community have not settled on any one particular definition of reconciliation" (p. 5). Quinn herself candidly reveals her own grappling with defining the term: "What, then, of this thing called reconciliation? In past writing and teaching, I have been reluctant to address the issue of reconciliation for a couple of reasons: first, even with the innumerable articles and books available on the subject, the definition of reconciliation has proven illusive, and I have never understood completely just what 'reconciliation' was supposed to be" (p. 182). Thus, Quinn enlists the contributing authors of *Reconciliation(s)* to figure out what reconciliation looks like and how transitioning nations get there, all beginning with the premise that "reconciliation can mean very different things to different people ... the contributing authors agree, however, that, at its heart, reconciliation is about building relationships of trust and cohesion" (p. 5).

Practitioners and academics alike, the authors represent a variety of disciplines (education, political science, philosophy, theology, law, psychology), which inevitably means a rich combination of styles, methodologies, and analytical frameworks. This composition could potentially frustrate a reader eager for a set paradigm for framing reconciliation, but then again the diversity of perspectives merely symbolizes the dynamism of reconciliation, incapable of being captured by just one interpretive "notional lens" (p. 12). Alternatively, there is a style to suit each reader's preference: theoretical and philosophical ruminations, case-based inquiries, anthropological thick description and nuanced observation, and political-legal frameworks for testing political models and hypotheses, among others.

Indeed, Quinn notes that many of the chapters test "how realities of TJ correspond to conceptual arguments" (p. 12), but I was surprised to note that a handful of the authors fell into the old habit of referring to the aim of reconciliation without clearly defining what it means, merely repeating the very problem that Quinn hopes to address. Other authors provide an array of conclusions, viewing reconciliation as "a process, a series of actions that lead to a conclusion"; others, "an endpoint, that stage where a relationship is repaired" (p. 5). While some adopt minimalist definitions of reconciliation (absence of conflict), others paint a more robust picture of societal transformation of power structures (economic, social, political). They also discuss the different levels on which reconciliation operates, noting the personal, collective, and societal, all of which seem inextricably intertwined. The authors

who localize their study to capture the voices and meta-narratives of people living in TJ settings discover "competing notions" of what a reconciled society would look like (pp. 141, 296). By the end, the authors offer too many concepts of reconciliation to be neatly summarized in this brief review. Ultimately, the reader is left realizing that the definition of reconciliation "depends on where you are looking at this from and who you are" (p. 298).

Reading Quinn's book left me where I began: unclear. Yet I do not believe it is the fault of the book as much as the inherent quality of an indomitable beast. While Quinn set out to provide a more clear definition of reconciliation, she only proved the impossibility of doing so. Yet this result does not counsel abandoning the term altogether but rather suggests that readers may need to live with the discomfort of uncertainty. I suspect the quest to nail down one definition responds to a logical need for accountability: TJ projects raise expectations and promise deeply yearned–for outcomes, and the only way to evaluate these processes is to clearly understand what successful outcomes look like. Legal scholars observe, study, and record each TJ experiment to inform future practice, even at the risk of over-institutionalization. Yet Quinn demonstrates the fine balance between setting strict parameters for evaluating TJ processes and not undermining a wholly local and organic process that depends on many factors unique to each country setting and lacking in neat uniformity.

Indeed, Quinn ponders whether the term *reconciliation* merely serves as a "catch-all" phrase for modern convenience (p. 182), a vessel to be filled with "localized dynamics" and meanings (p. 301). While readers may agree on a minimalist baseline definition (no more conflict as reflected in the popular expression "*nunca mas*"/ never again), we can embrace the process of reconciliation as "an ever-evolving concept" (p. 12). In the end, reconciliation may just mean whatever a local community decides it should be and not one model or program. There is no one authoritative tome, but rather, each example deserves study and documentation to allow readers to get closer to its essence, while accepting that we will never arrive at one neat and concise definition. Indeed, perhaps Quinn finally puts to rest the need to worry about one definition: All future authors are now on notice on the impossibility of taming this "behemoth" whose very essence might be lost if ever caged (p. 183).

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