

Original Article

Buberian Concept of Dialogical Existence: A Pathway to Reconciliation

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Abstract

This paper explores Martin Buber's concept of dialogical existence as a philosophical framework for understanding reconciliation as a pathway to peace. Conflicts, alienation, and relational fragmentation are widespread in contemporary societies and threaten genuine human encounter and mutual recognition. The study will address these challenges by exploring Buber's differences between I and Thou and I and It modes of relationship and what this means for reconciliation. The paper applies a philosophical analysis approach and draws on relevant literature on the concepts of dialogue, alienation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, discussed with reference to Buber's I-Thou. Through the analysis, it is suggested that reconciliation is not only about addressing conflict but also a process of relationship transformation through genuine dialogue. Buber's I-Thou relation is a recognition of the other person's dignity, openness, presence, and reciprocity in the encounter that leads to a person's genuine self. I-It, on the other hand, de-personalizes persons and, in doing so, alienates, divides, and dehumanizes. Reconciliation is possible when people shift from relationships that are objectified to those encountered in dialogue, thus restoring trust, ethical responsibility, and mutual recognition. The paper concludes that Buber's notion of dialogical existence offers a philosophical approach to reconciliation, focusing on the processes of reconstruction and renewal of authentic relations with oneself, others, and the transcendent. Dialogical existence, as a human encounter,

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is a very valuable basis for peace and a more humane society, because it is rooted in openness, respect, and love.

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1. Introduction

The fruit of reconciliation is peace. Peace is not just the absence of war, violence, or conflict, however. Instead, it is about the existence of real connections grounded in fairness, respect, recognition, and moral obligation. With today's society, conflict is not only seen in the political and social framework, but also within the person. Feeling anxious, guilty, unsure about yourself, uncertain about life and identity and emotionally splintered are all scenarios that individuals may experience. These internal clashes affect people's relationships with others and often lead to misunderstandings, hostility and alienation. This is why a reconciliation is required, since it is a process that restores broken relationships and heal interpersonal and intrapersonal divisions. This is a study on how the philosophy of Martin Buber can be used to explain the potential of authentic dialogue as a pathway to peace.

Conflict occurs when people become disconnected from themselves and others. Contemporary studies on alienation and identity formation demonstrate that modern social conditions, particularly those shaped by digital technologies and hyperreality, have intensified experiences of self-alienation and fragmented identity. Conflict is about disconnection from the self and others. The current research on alienation and identity construction shows that today's social climate, especially shaped by digital technologies and hyperreality, has exacerbated self-alienation and broken identity (Manannikova, 2023). People are increasingly looking to others' eyes and virtual identities for approval rather than for true self-understanding and real interactions with others. There is a crisis of the self that negatively affects real human relationships as a result of such conditions. These various struggles may manifest as prejudice, aggression, exclusion, and disturbed social relations, in which people cannot resolve their own differences. Reconciliation thus needs to happen at the intrapersonal level before it can be accomplished at the interpersonal level. Similarly, Pope Francis (2020) highlights that when societies do not accept their brothers and sisters as fellow citizens with equal human dignity, they become less peaceful.

This is more prominent in the Philippines. Historical injustices, social inequalities, political rivalries and longstanding conflicts in Mindanao undermine trust and social cohesion. In Muslim Mindanao, research on conflict and peacebuilding has identified the following as continued drivers of unsustainable peace: sovereignty issues, clan feuds (rido), political competition, displacement, trauma, and economic insecurity (Sendad & Manondog, 2025). In addition to the big wars, people face everyday divisions in their families, workplaces, schools, and online interactions, where hostility, misunderstanding, and polarization can be common. Digital communication can often diminish the opportunity to encounter others "face to face"

and can perpetuate judgmental attitudes and objectifying relationships. Studies on peacebuilding in the Philippines also underscore that, in addition to institutional reforms and political settlements, the relational dimensions of healing, trust-building, reconciliation, and personal transformation are essential for sustainable peace (Navarro & Jacinto, 2026). These facts show that there's a need for personal and structural reconciliation.

The dialogue philosophy of Martin Buber provides one means of comprehending this need. Buber considers there are two basic models of relationships: the "I-It" and the "I-Thou." The true self "I" can only become this in encounter with a true "You" – a "You" different from an objectified "It" (Górzna, 2014). Then, dialogue is the starting point for real-life experiences of real people. I-It mode is a mode in which persons are seen as objects, categories, instruments or social labels. This objectification can also occur internally, with individuals defining themselves by their status, achievements, failures, or comparisons. I-Thou is an open relationship, a present relationship, a recognized relationship, and an encountered relationship. In this way, people connect as subject, not object. According to Buber, it is only in this dialogical encounter that the real human life opens up (Górzna, 2014).

Buber's ideas have been expanded upon with subsequent development in dialogical philosophy. Other thinkers, like Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, extended the dialogical approach by including not just I-Thou and I-It relations but also the importance of third-person relations through "he", "she", "they", and "we". The developments, as such, show that dialogue is not only an interpersonal phenomenon but also a more complex process within a wider linguistic, social, and institutional framework. Reconciliation is thus not just an individual experience but the recognition of important social structures, collective identities and patterns of relationships, which all influence human interaction in some way or another.

Reconciliation is closely connected to Buber's philosophy of I-Thou, as it is an attempt to mend broken relationships stemming from conflict, exclusion, and dehumanization. The existence of I-It relationships that are indifferent, dominating, prejudiced, and objectifying tends to trap individuals and communities in a cycle of conflict. Restoring these relationships to the level of I-Thou encounters, therefore, involves transforming them into ones in which empathy, recognition, and respect are at work. A framework for the movement from I-It to I-Thou can help better understand how former adversaries can come to recognize one another's humanity and restore trust.

This dialogical approach is endorsed by contemporary scholarship on reconciliation and peacebuilding. Acknowledging offenses, showing empathy, discussing issues openly, and recognizing each other are among the essential components of the reconciliation process identified through their study. Contact theory, restorative justice, public apology, shared narrative, and peace education are effective when practiced locally and have the potential to enhance understanding and restore harmed relationships (Merhej & Rahme, 2024). Similarly, studies show that intergroup contact at the individual level can increase empathy, trust, and a positive

perception of others. Still, only meaningful intergroup contact can lead to long-term reconciliation that extends beyond the individual to the entire community and institutions (Haider, 2025).

Interfaith conflict-resolution programs are other examples of the applicability of dialogue. Dialogue-based methods highlight the need for active listening, neutrality, cultural sensitivity, restorative practices, and interest-based negotiation. Evidence from Rwanda, Northern Ireland, and Mindanao indicates that inclusive and culturally responsive communication can aid in reducing violence, building social trust, and supporting peacebuilding efforts in the long term (Kazanskaia, 2025). Within Mindanao, peacebuilding efforts have included interfaith dialogue, recognition of Bangsamoro identity, educational initiatives, land restitution, and community-based reconciliation programs aimed at healing historical divisions and promoting coexistence (Sendad & Manondog, 2025).

Faith-based reconciliation efforts are working in partnership with these structural & community-based efforts. The following studies on the use of sermons in peacebuilding in Mindanao illustrate the potential of biblical stories, personal testimony, and forgiveness-focused messages to bring healing, reconciliation, and greater unity among community members, even amid trust issues, fear, and reticence to forgive. The following research on the use of sermons for peacebuilding in Mindanao highlights the potential of biblical narratives, personal testimonies, and forgiveness-centered messages to foster repentance, healing, reconciliation, and stronger community relationships despite challenges of mistrust, fear, and resistance to forgiveness (Mano-Pelin, 2025). The results of this study indicate that the process of dialogical reconciliation is not only political and social, but also a moral and spiritual process that could contribute to sustainable peace.

However, modern reconciliation warns of the dangers of oversimplifying reconciliation as a panacea that can resolve all conflicts. Reconciliation processes need to be contextually aware and sensitive to power dynamics, structural inequalities, historical grievances, and local agency (Merhej & Rahme, 2024). Socio-economic reforms, transitional justice, and political settlements continue to be key factors in peacebuilding, especially in societies emerging from prolonged conflict (Navarro & Jacinto, 2026). Without accompanying actions for fairness, accountability and social change, dialogue has little impact on systemic injustices.

Thus, this study proposes that reconciliation represents one of the practical manifestations of the dialogical mode of existence as described by Buber. True peace is possible only when there is the shift in the consciousness of individuals and communities from objectification to encounter and from inner fragmentation to inner integration. In this way, the process of reconciliation starts from within the person, moves to others, and then to society. In Buber's philosophy of dialogue, peace is not merely a theoretical concept but a practical experience that involves genuine relationships, mutual recognition, and ethical accountability.

The research project explored Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue to deepen understanding of reconciliation in personal and social relationships. In the midst of

ongoing conflict, division, and alienation in the world, there is a need to examine how human relationships can be restored authentically through a dialogical way of life. This study has a special focus on the dynamics of conflict arising from distorted relationships and on reconciliation through encounter.

In particular, this study aimed to address the following questions:

- a. What is Martin Buber's Dialogical existence?
- b. How does conflict develop in I-It relationship interpersonal and intrapersonal (self)?
- c. How can reconciliation be understood as a process that begins within the self and extends toward others and society?
- d. How does Buber's dialogical philosophy help to understand reconciliation In Philippine context of conflict, division and alienation?

The idea of reconciliation is a core element of sustainable peace that has been repeatedly emphasized in contemporary literature on peacebuilding, philosophy, and social relations. Peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the restoration and healing of relationships grounded in justice, dignity, recognition, and mutual responsibility. In this sense, reconciliation emerges as both a philosophical and practical imperative for addressing interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social conflicts. Martin Buber's philosophy provides a significant foundation for understanding human relations through his concepts of the I-It and I-Thou, which continue to influence contemporary discussions on dialogue, ethics, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. The continuing relevance of Buber's thought is evident in contemporary scholarship, which argues that his philosophy of the interhuman was considered a viable response to the social crises of his own time and remains equally significant in addressing present-day social fragmentation, alienation, and conflict (Chai, 2023).

The development of twentieth-century philosophy and ethics increasingly emphasized the relational nature of human existence. Buber's dialogical philosophy maintains that human beings become fully themselves only in relation to others. His distinction between the I-It and I-Thou modes of relating provides a framework for understanding both authentic and distorted human relationships. The I-It relation treats persons as objects, instruments, categories, or means to an end, whereas the I-Thou relation involves genuine encounter characterized by openness, presence, reciprocity, and recognition. Kulyk (2023) explains that the I-Thou relationship enables individuals to recognize the uniqueness and dignity of the other person, while the dominance of I-It relationships contributes to alienation and crises in interpersonal dialogue. This distinction is further enriched by philosophical anthropological interpretations of Buber's thought. Aguas (2025) argues that human beings are fundamentally relational subjects whose identity and humanity are discovered within dialogue and in what Buber calls the "between," the dynamic space of encounter where authentic relationships emerge. In this sense, dialogue is not simply communication but the very condition through which persons become truly human. Kim (2023) likewise reinforces Buber's insight by emphasizing that true life can be achieved only

through genuine encounter, whereas a life dominated by I–It relationships ultimately diminishes human dignity and authentic existence.

The literature on conflict consistently demonstrates that social disintegration and violence originate from damaged relationships and the breakdown of meaningful human connections. Conflict is fundamentally relational because it involves the erosion of trust, communication, empathy, and shared meaning. Contemporary societies increasingly experience polarization, exclusion, and indifference as individuals fail to recognize the dignity and humanity of others. Such tendencies are intensified by the conditions of modernity and digitalization, which often encourage superficial forms of interaction rather than genuine encounters. In this context, Buber's philosophy remains relevant because it offers an ethical vision rooted in empathy, responsibility, solidarity, and mutual recognition. His dialogical approach challenges the objectification of persons and calls for a renewed commitment to authentic human encounter as a response to social fragmentation.

At the same time, conflict is not solely a social phenomenon but also an intrapersonal reality. Recent studies on alienation suggest that many individuals experience internal fragmentation manifested through anxiety, uncertainty, guilt, identity confusion, and emotional disconnection. Manannikova (2023) argues that contemporary forms of alienation are closely associated with a crisis of self-identity, particularly within digital environments that encourage the construction of virtual selves. Rather than developing a coherent sense of self through meaningful relationships and self-understanding, individuals increasingly depend on external validation and digital representations of identity. Butler (2024) further explains this condition through the concept of “fracturing of the affordance space,” in which the possibilities for meaningful action become disconnected from personal growth and purpose. As a result, individuals experience a fragmented sense of existence in which their actions, relationships, and aspirations no longer form a coherent whole. Similarly, Sam and Devi (2025) observe that the proliferation of multiple online identities often generates confusion, inauthenticity, and self-alienation, raising important questions about how individuals can recover a sense of connection, coherence, and wholeness.

These insights contribute significantly to understanding reconciliation because they reveal that conflict often begins within the person before it appears in relationships or communities. Internal fragmentation frequently manifests externally through aggression, prejudice, withdrawal, misunderstanding, and hostility toward others. From a Buberian perspective, digital fragmentation intensifies I–It relationships by reducing persons to profiles, labels, opinions, or social categories while diminishing opportunities for authentic encounter. Consequently, reconciliation requires not only the restoration of relationships between individuals and groups but also the reintegration of the self. Buber's dialogical philosophy offers a response to this crisis by emphasizing that wholeness is achieved through genuine encounter. The movement toward I–Thou relationships fosters both self-awareness and relational openness, enabling individuals to overcome alienation and recover a more integrated sense of self.

Contemporary reconciliation scholarship further supports the centrality of dialogue in the pursuit of peace. Reconciliation is increasingly understood not as the mere cessation of violence but as the healing of broken relationships and the transformation of how individuals and communities perceive one another. Merhej and Rahme (2024) identify acknowledgment of wrongdoing, empathy, and open dialogue as common foundations across various reconciliation approaches. These elements closely parallel Buber's emphasis on authentic encounter, mutual recognition, and ethical responsibility. Likewise, Mitchell (2023) conceptualizes reconciliation as a process of transforming social identities, whereby former adversaries move beyond antagonistic perceptions and develop new ways of understanding themselves and others. Such a perspective aligns strongly with Buber's vision of moving from objectifying I-It relations toward dialogical I-Thou encounters.

The diversity of reconciliation approaches also provides valuable insight into how dialogical principles can be translated into practice. Glucksam (2024) identifies instrumental, dialogical, restorative, transformative, and experiential forms of reconciliation. Among these, dialogical and transformative approaches are particularly compatible with Buber's philosophy because they focus on changing relationships, perceptions, identities, and patterns of interaction rather than simply resolving disputes. Reconciliation, therefore, becomes more than a political agreement or a conflict-management strategy; it becomes a process of human transformation grounded in encounter, recognition, and mutual responsibility.

Moreover, reconciliation is increasingly recognized as a multi-level process involving personal, interpersonal, communal, and structural dimensions. Fischer (2025) argues that reconciliation must operate alongside transitional justice, institutional reform, and broader peacebuilding initiatives to achieve sustainable peace. This perspective reinforces the argument that inner healing, relational restoration, and structural transformation are interconnected rather than separate processes. Genuine reconciliation requires attention not only to individual attitudes but also to the social, political, and historical conditions that contribute to conflict.

Practical examples of dialogical reconciliation further illustrate the relevance of Buber's philosophy. Miramonti et al. (2024), in their study of Forum Theatre for Reconciliation, demonstrate how participants engage in processes of rehumanizing both self and other, co-constructing more complex narratives of conflict, and developing collective responses to shared challenges. Such practices embody the essence of Buber's I-Thou encounter because they encourage participants to move beyond stereotypes and objectification toward genuine recognition and dialogue. They illustrate how reconciliation can be experienced not only as a theoretical ideal but also as a lived process of relational transformation.

These insights are particularly relevant in the Philippine context. Historical injustices, colonial legacies, political rivalries, and social inequalities continue to shape divisions within Philippine society, especially in conflict-affected areas such as Mindanao. Contemporary peacebuilding literature emphasizes that sustainable peace requires more than political settlements and institutional reforms. Reconciliation must

also involve relational healing, transformed identities, and renewed trust among communities. The work of Merhej and Rahme (2024), Mitchell (2023), and Fischer (2025) collectively demonstrates that structural change must be accompanied by processes that address the human dimensions of conflict. Within this context, Buber's philosophy provides a valuable lens for understanding reconciliation as a movement from I-It relationships characterized by prejudice, historical enmity, digital hostility, and social exclusion toward I-Thou encounters rooted in dignity, recognition, empathy, and mutual responsibility. Such transformation can be fostered through acknowledgment of past wrongs, narrative sharing, restorative practices, community dialogue, and other forms of relational engagement that affirm the humanity of all participants.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that reconciliation is a multidimensional process involving personal healing, dialogical encounter, social transformation, and structural change. Conflict emerges when relationships become objectified and persons cease to recognize one another as subjects worthy of dignity and respect. While contemporary peacebuilding literature provides valuable insights into dialogue, restorative practices, identity transformation, and social reconstruction, there remains a need to integrate these dimensions within a unified philosophical framework. The synthesis of literature presented here suggests that Buber's dialogical philosophy offers such a framework. Reconciliation becomes possible when individuals and communities move from objectification to encounter, from alienation to recognition, and from fragmentation to wholeness. Through this movement from I-It to I-Thou, dialogical existence becomes both the foundation and the pathway toward sustainable peace.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design in the form of a philosophical study that uses conceptual analysis to examine the phenomenon of dialogical life as a way of reconciliation, as studied by Martin Buber. In this study, rather than collecting empirical data, the analysis of philosophical and scholarly writing is undertaken to gain insight into how the I-It and I-Thou relationships help create a situation of conflict and the possibility of reconciliation. The main structure of the study is rooted in the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber, specifically his view that "all human being is relational. This philosophical inquiry was suitable because it has the capacity to delve deeply into meaning, human relations, and ethical transformation in both interpersonal and intrapersonal spheres of being. The study also attempts to examine how Buber's dialogical method can be used in the Philippines today which has been plagued by political polarization, historical injustice and cultural differences.

Primary and secondary sources, such as Buber's main works, especially I and Thou, and recent writings in the fields of dialogical philosophy, reconciliation, and peace studies. Other sources are interdisciplinary writings on social fragmentation,

alienation, and conflict transformation that provide context to Buber's thought about the real world.

In this methodical way, the study ensured a well-founded and coherent philosophical analysis of reconciliation in the light of dialogical existence.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Martin Buber's Dialogical Existence

The very core of Buber's dialogical existence is genuine dialogue. Buber's dialogue, whether spoken or silent, is when each participant really has in mind the other in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them (Buber, 2020). The belief in the dialogical character of human existence is the most important principle of Buber's doctrine: all manifestations of human nature are realized not in solitude or in abstract reflections and thoughts, but in true face-to-face encounter. This relational approach is best expressed in the classic work *I and Thou* by Buber, where he distinguishes between the I-It and I-Thou pairs as the basic ontological perspective for structuring human experience. These pairs are not just linguistic categories but ontological lenses that determine the very process of seeing reality. According to Buber (1970), the world is dual to man, as he has a dual attitude, meaning that the nature of one relationship directly molds the quality and intensity of existence.

3.1.1 I-Thou And I-It Relationship

I-Thou relationship is the model of genuine encounter. In I-Thou, the other is no longer an object but is taken to be a whole being in relation to one's own. The Thou is more than an object one can own or experience: it is a person that can be met in all of his/her reality. This is an event of openness, directness, reciprocity and presence. When Buber speaks of the I-Thou self-other relationship, the attempt to define, analyze, categorize and dominate the other is not made. Rather it is a mutual relation in which each one of them meets the other as a different and unique person, a person who can't be replaced. These experiences are not ongoing or easily created, but they do offer a glimpse into the core reality of humanity. It's at these times that the self is completely engaged and encounters the other without intervening; an encounter without mediation.

The interhuman further elucidates Buber's philosophy in that "authentic dialogue is possible only when the 'wholeness of being is employed' in the encounter." The I-Thou relationship is thus a full, rather than a fragmented or instrumental, engagement with the person. In contrast, relationships based upon utility, control, or function do not allow for meaning to be produced through dialogue, as they de-personalize persons and limit them to objects of experience or knowledge. Buber saw this dimension as a response to the social crises of his day, and it still offers the possibility of addressing

today's alienation, fragmentation, and dehumanization (Chai, 2023). In this regard, reconciliation is the renewal of damaged inter-human spaces, the “between” that gives birth to actual relationships, the space visited by human persons as persons and not as “things.”

By contrast, the “I–It” relationship is a subject to the object relation (Buber, 1970). I–It mode is a mode of being in the world in which people, things, ideas, and experiences are seen as items to be explored, classified, managed, or used. Buber doesn't dismiss this mode altogether. Instead, he admits the need for I–It relations across all aspects of daily living, scientific research, technological advancements, and social organization (Buber, 1970). To survive, plan, and work effectively in society, human beings have to objectify aspects of reality.

When the I–It orientation predominates or becomes the only one, however, it leads to alienation and dehumanization, Buber warns. People are de-individuated, labeled, socially defined and utilized, and relationships become superficial and one-sided. People are de-individuated, labeled, socially defined, and utilized; relationships are superficial and one-sided. As a result, interpersonal dialogue faces crises due to the predominance of I–It relations (Kulyk, 2024), as people tend to perceive others through categories and abstraction. Objectification is a demobilizing experience that leads to a lack of empathy and emotional connection, rather than an encounter marked by distance and indifference. Therefore, the relationships are more fragile and more fragmented.

This is especially pertinent in today's society. Consumer culture, the mass media, and technologically mediated interaction contribute to the dominance of the I–It relationship, as they emphasize an instrumental, competitive, and transactional perspective on individuals and their perceptions of others (Asakaviciute & Valatka 2020). Digital environments may turn people into profiles, images, opinions, or data points, and restrict opportunities for direct interpersonal encounter. In these contexts, the other is not experienced as another human being, but as an object of evaluation, consumption and ideological judgment. Consequently, there is a social and personal reality of alienation.

Thus, I–Thou provides a strong lens through which to view reconciliation as an I–It. When people and communities fall into the trap of objectification, prejudice and dehumanization, conflict can arise. Reconciliation is a shift from these I–It to I–Thou relationships based on I–Thou, seeing and holding one another in recognition, respect, and mutual presence. Such experiences enable human beings to recall their ability to relate through empathy, to engage in exchange and dialogue, and to embrace ethical responsibility, all of which foster possibilities for peace.

3.1.2 Genuine Dialogue

Dialogue is a directed conversation designed to gain greater understanding, solve issues, and reflect on thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors (Buber, 1970). Martin Buber, however, defines the Christian word for dialogue as more than an exchange of

information or opinions. Dialogue begins with affirming the other person as a unique and irreducible person. True conversation starts where agreement, conformity, and harmonization of views don't happen. Instead, it starts with the other as a subject different from myself, situated before me in his/her own reality. Real dialogue is thus possible to disagree and conflict without killing the relationship. The other is affirmed from non-believing motives because he or she exists as a point of response and recognition.

Dialogue is therefore an existential moment—two people are faced with each other openly and authentically. This encounter is neither an object of experience nor its analysis, nor any kind of utility. Rather, everyone is called a Thou, as a person. Thus, Buber maintains, encountering another as a Thou is the only way in which the self becomes self. Dialogue is not merely a means of communication, but a way of life, a way of living that allows people to actualize their humanity.

At the heart of this dialogical encounter is the act of making present. Making present involves imaginatively grasping the other person in his or her concrete reality by becoming attentive to what the other is thinking, feeling, perceiving, and experiencing (Buber, 2020). This is not the dissolution into another person's experience, nor is emotional fusion necessary in this process. It is, instead, a training of openness which enables one to come into contact with the actuality of the other without losing one's own identity. Dialogue is not possible without being open to the Other, not trying to defend, project, manipulate, or instrumentally use them.

Part of the difference between I–Thou and I–It relationships is why it is necessary to make present in order to have authentic dialogue. In I–It relationships, persons are known mainly in terms of their categories, stereotypes, functions, or social roles. Everything, even humans, is subject to analysis, administration, or utility. These are all examples of "objectification"—typical characteristics of contemporary technologically and bureaucratically ordered societies, where efficiency, control, and performance tend to supplant the real encounter. Dialogue is only authentic, however, in the I–Thou mode: when the other is approached as a whole person, whose life is not describable in concepts and terms (Buber, 2020).

The dialogical understanding is highly relevant to reconciliation. Empathy and emotional connection arise when people "see people", but not "objects" (Kulyk, 2024). Reconciliation, then, cannot be merely a negotiation or conflict-management process; it must be a change in the way people think about each other. In real-life conversation, enemies can begin to see the dignity and humanity in one another.

Relational reconciliation can also be linked to intrapersonal reconciliation in the process of making present. According to Fishbane (1998), based on dialogical viewpoints in couples therapy, what is needed for an authentic I–Thou relationship is the ability for individuals to reintegrate split-off or less-than-formed parts of themselves. As Fishbane (1988) reminds us "I can only see you in your entirety if I see myself in my entirety." This perspective helps understand the importance of reconciliation, starting first with the individual and then with others. Sometimes, because of internal fragmentation, unhealed wounds and fragmented identities,

individuals speak through a proxy of their own conflicts, and thus do not permit a real encounter. Therefore, intrapersonal reconciliation must be established to achieve interpersonal reconciliation.

Other dialogical traditions value and acknowledge the importance of genuine dialogue. Another important approach to understanding, central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, is the dialogical understanding. As Barthold (2020) states, a text should be considered a "Thou" rather than an "It"; it must be open and responsive, without ever being domineering or controlling. Similarly, Yılmaz (2022) claims that Gadamer's idea of the 'fusion of horizons' is a link between two people, in which both are transformed by the openness of the other and by learning. Understanding, then, is a collaborative endeavor that involves moving beyond the individual's limited understanding and being open to new possibilities.

These views accord with Buber's philosophy in that the focus is on dialoguing – no conquest, no convictions, but only the space of relationships where persons can be met in their authenticity. Real dialogue involves openness, recognition, reciprocity and transformation; in philosophy, therapy, education, and peacebuilding. Such encounters promote unity, moral obligation and mutual respect – key pillars for reconciliation.

The importance of true dialogue for the sake of the other is always present in this affirmation of the other as a person. To make the other present is already to take over responsibility for the other, not in a paternalistic or juridical way, but as an answerability and responsiveness. Ethics is, therefore, not just what one ought to do but how one actually does; it is not solely a matter of moral laws, but of actual relationships. The relevance of Buber's ideas in today's educational, leadership, and counseling contexts, and in the teaching and learning of social reconciliation, continues to illustrate how one can respond to dehumanization, polarization, and social fragmentation in a meaningful way through dialogue. Dialogue is an example of living together in a pluralistic society, grounded not only in tolerance but also in the positive affirmation of human dignity.

3.2 Objectification as the Source of Conflict

Conflict is rooted in the objectification of relation. The I–Thou relationship is substituted by the I–It mode of existence, and beings are no longer met in their irreducible presence, but only as functions, categories or threats. But this diminution is not just external or social; it is internal, it is a part of consciousness. Humans can objectify not only others but also themselves, and this fracturing of one's relationality goes hand in hand with the fracturing of dialogue, which is the condition of all relational existence.

Shame is a deeper level of self-objectification within the subject's inner life. Where the self-leaps back upon itself by considering itself in the gaze of evaluation, the punishment or looking down, or the comparative looking down, it is no longer encountered as a living Thou, but rather as an It, an object of deficiency, failure, inadequacy. In this condition, consciousness splits against itself: At one point, a

section of the self-judges, while at another the self is judged—there is an internal rupture, a self-doubt, self-condemnation, and self-alienation (Shaw, 2023). It is not merely a division of the whole but a process of breakdown of a relationship in the self. Empirical descriptions of shame also suggest that people do the best to handle this rupture, either by suppressing the affect, rationalizing it, distancing themselves from it, or negotiating with it within themselves, which involves coping with a self no longer experienced as a whole (Acar et al., 2025).

Suhan's internal division, from the Buberian point of view, indicates an I-It relationship between the self and itself. The self is no longer encountered; it is now an object to be corrected. However, the internal objectification makes the I-Thou encounter impossible for others because of the need for wholeness of being in relation to the other in dialogical existence. A divided self is already divided and can therefore not go into relation. Reconciliation, therefore, has to start with the re-establishment of dialogical unity, an "inward" reconciliation, that is, a self-reconciliation through the process of compassion, integration, and being thrown back into a "between" in which the self is not split into subject and object, but is restored through the reconstitution of a "between" unity.

This objectification logic reveals itself not only in the individual's encounters but in the sphere of collective life, too, where it takes the form of dehumanization, the prevailing mode of collective breakage. Dehumanizing another is to deny him/her full humanity (less than real), and to set aside the ethic of encounter (Kteily & Landry, 2022). Dehumanization, then, is not merely an ethical failure; it's a failure of the ontological bond necessary to the relation of dialogue. In the group's perception through the reductionist category, hostility becomes structurally justified because the other has already been cut off from the sphere of Thou.

Groups dehumanize groups and think that groups dehumanize them: this process is enhanced with what might be called meta-dehumanization. This is a vicious cycle of mutual perception, in which each side feels the other side is not human, and the other side feels the same, justifying and reinforcing hostility rather than resolving it (Landry et al., 2021). The point of the dynamic is that it shows that disagreement alone doesn't make a conflict last; the objectification of one must lead to the objectification of the other. When each side is an It for the other, the possibility of shared presence withers, and what remains is a structure of relation based on suspicion, fear, and retaliatory dehumanization. In the sense of encountering the other as Thou (Moore-Berg et al., 2020), polarization is not just a matter of ideology – but one of ontological breakdown.

This ontological disintegration can be intensified in a contemporary digital environment, which makes the life of relationality visible through a mediation. In online environments, people are becoming increasingly visible as avatars, as profiles, as images, as affirmations, as positions, as statements, etc. Under those circumstances, encounter is substituted by exposure, presence by circulation. Empirical studies of online communities have demonstrated that echo chambers lead to affective polarization and encourage 'normalization of hostility' by isolating people in

communities with similar worldviews from contacts that are perceived as 'opponents' (Harel et al., 2020). The other is no longer the lived reality but the abstract 'enemy' whose presence is more discursive than relational in these spaces.

Furthermore, digital infrastructure tends to magnify hateful expression, its visibility, and its reach. The architecture of digital interaction might favor rupture over relation, as network dynamics indicate that negative and dehumanizing content might reach a wider audience and gain ground more quickly than non-hostile communication (Mathew et al., 2018). In the context of those conditions, hatred is not only a sign of pre-existing divisions, but also a force that creates and reinforces them. The digital sphere is accordingly a place that enables I–It relations not only to be expressed but also to be further structured. What comes out is a relational atmosphere in which "recognition" is usurped by "reaction" and "dialogue" by "symbolic aggression. What we get is a relational environment where recognition is replaced with reaction and dialogue by symbolic aggression.

However, even these different types of objectification are not autonomous of the subject's interior state. What goes on the inside is dictated by what we see on the outside. In today's relational world, especially in cultures driven by performance and visible to others, people are given the freedom to value themselves against external criteria of value, recognition, and comparison. This creates an image of self that is manipulative rather than lived, a sense of "self-as-image" rather than "self-as-image-becoming. This results in an image of the self that is manipulated, rather than lived, a "self-as-image" rather than a "self-as-image-becoming." Thus, the two types of objectifications, interpersonal objectification and self-objectification, reinforce each other, creating attachment insecurity and internal fragmentation (Jiao et al., 2022). The gaze of others experienced as an object of self often becomes internal, adding to this sense of self-alienation and emotional disintegration.

At the same time, however, relationality has the potential to exercise a restorative power in this self-objectifying cycle. Empirical studies confirm that emotional and trusting relationships that foster a sense of emotional security and a feeling of being valued can protect individuals from the negative impacts of objectifying environments (Jiao et al., 2022). In a philosophical sense, this means that not every relationship has an I–It mode; some relationships retain or rediscover the nature of an I–Thou encounter, in which persons are affirmed rather than reduced. Such relationships don't just alleviate psychological suffering; they help to restore the conditions of personhood. Recognition is a return to wholeness; the encountering of another as Thou is a participation in the reactivation of the primal structure of existence: dialogue.

3.3 The I-Thou Relationship as the Foundation of Reconciliation

This study argues that the I-Thou relationship is the philosophical basis of reconciliation because it brings back the true encounter between persons and restores the person to real relationality. Buber (1970) explains what true dialogue depends on: openness, being present, reciprocity, and mutual recognition. In the I-Thou encounter,

people do not come into the other person's presence as something to be manipulated, categorized, or controlled. Rather, they see themselves and one another as persons in their own right, with dignity and humanity in and of themselves. Reconciliation is possible when people move beyond objectification and come into contact with one another free of labels, prejudices, ideologies, and divisions. According to Buber (1970) encounter is the source of authentic life; it is only in relation to others that there is any meaning for the human person. Reconciliation is therefore primarily a dialogical process, as it restores the relational aspect of human life that has been lost.

This study concludes that reconciliation is not only about resolving a disagreement, but also about forgiveness. Instead, reconciliation is a radical change of relationships and awareness. In the I-Thou relationship, people start to hear, understand and validate the humanity of the other person. This dialogical shift brings back trust and empathy, and ethical responsibility. Authentic dialogue, according to Kim (2021), establishes the possibility for reconciliation by offering the opportunity for persons to engage each other sincerely, not defensively. In the same manner, Buber's philosophy is considered a philosophy of social healing, as it does not focus on domination but on solidarity, reciprocity, and mutuality (Margulies, 2023). In this way, reconciliation is not a "solution" that obliterates difference or conflict, but it is the way persons experience difference and conflict.

Buber's view of reconciliation is philosophically in line with the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas who suggests that ethics starts with the encounter with the face of the Other. Levinas (1969) states that the face-to-face encounter breaks the self-interest and forces the self to become responsible and open towards ethical meaning. Levinas, much like Buber, is opposed to objectification, as it would mean that ethical relation with the other would cease to exist. Reconciliation, then, is possible only if the people recognize the irreducible humanity of the other person. The results indicate that Buber's I-Thou relation has a great deal in common with Levinasian ethics, as both philosophies focus on encounter as the source of moral duty and human dignity.

The synthesis also shows that to reconcile, one must be vulnerable and open. Dialogue, however, cannot be authentic if people are limited in their freedom of response by fear, prejudice, self-interest or dogma, Buber (1970) asserts. For a real encounter, one must be ready to "be with" the other without controlling or manipulating them. In this sense, reconciliation is an ethical risk that requires the attitudes of humility, self-transcendence and receptivity. Ricoeur (2004) agrees, seeing reconciliation as a process of recognition, memory and the difficult process of forgiveness. However, Ricoeur does not negate past hurts or the suffering of others; he says, rather, he aims to "reconcile fractured relationships" by recognizing the humanity of the other. Reconciliation is a process of ethical remembrance and relational restoration. It is also discovered that the I-Thou relationship thwarts modern forms of alienation and dehumanization. The societies of today that are technol-bureaucratic tend to promote I-It relationships, in which efficiency, utility and power are more important than real presence. This results in disconnection from others and from oneself. In Habermas's (2023) view, communicative action based on mutual

understanding is still very much needed in democratic and social life. Dialogue that is aimed at understanding, not domination, is a space in which social solidarity and consensus are possible, Habermas says. The stance is complementary to Buber's philosophy, as both thinkers are concerned with the ethical and social bases of communication, which they see as an authentic phenomenon. The results accordingly indicate that reconciliation is a stance of resistance against contemporary dehumanization, as it fosters genuine dialogue and recognition.

Furthermore, the study finds that Buber's dialogical philosophy has existential meaning. Reconciliation is not only at the external social level, but also at the internal level of the person. In authentic dialogue, one comes across not only the other, but also oneself. According to Buber (1970), the self can gain its full expression only in relation to a Thou. Reconciliation heals not only broken relationships with others but also the broken, alienated self. Marcel (2017) concurs that human existence is not about being present, faithful and engaged but rather about being objectified. Marcel's philosophy serves as a reminder of the restoration of human wholeness through reconciliation: by enabling a human being to participate in genuine relationships.

The results thus show that the I-Thou relationship is the deepest philosophical underpinning for reconciliation, as it brings the relational and ethical dimension back into human life. Reconciliation is not achieved through force, oppression, or toleration, but through a real encounter grounded in dialogue, openness, and recognition. The I-Thou relation transcends alienation, prejudice and hostility toward the other and leads to real communion. In this dialogical change, reconciliation is not only a political or social matter but also an existential and ethical healing for humanity.

In the deepest sense, reconciliation is a healing from the fragmented self, taking place when an inner dialogical relationship is restored, in which the self is no longer divided by shame and self-objectification. At the interpersonal level, it means the end of dehumanization and the re-establishment of mutual recognition as persons rather than categories. Collectively and digitally, it calls for opposition to systems that reinforce objectification and for the development of relational environments capable of maintaining the presence of things rather than dissolving them into representation.

All of these levels are governed by the same philosophy of a shift from It to Thou, from object to presence, from the fragmented to the whole. Conflict abides wherever beings are presented as objects; reconciliation exists wherever beings are presented as living presences. Peace, then, is not simply a lack of hostility, but the restoration of dialogical existence itself—the reawakening of the "between" in which human beings may be able to come into the presence of one another, and to themselves, as Thou again.

3.4 Reconciliation as a Process Beginning Within the Self

The philosophical meaning of reconciliation becomes more intelligible when situated within the dialogical structure of human existence. Reconciliation is not only about the restoration of the social order or the end of the violence, but it is also about

setting up the conditions for reappearance for persons as persons. Conflict, in its purest form, is a breaking apart of encounter: The other as a living presence is reduced to a thing to be categorized, suspected or controlled. What is lost is not only agreement, it's dialogical space itself, where human beings recognize each other as irreducible subjects.

In the I–Thou relation, the original encounter is expressed. It is not the mode of addressing a person through concepts or utility, but in the presence and mutual addressing of the whole being of the person, the whole person. The I–Thou is not a psychological process but an ontological “primal word of the in-between” that leads to real dialogue. In contrast, the I–It relation is ontological rather than relating to the immediate presence of the other; it is a relation of objectification: persons become things to be looked at, classified, or used (Chai, 2023; Zhu, 2024). In the dominant I–It mode, relational life loses its reciprocity, and human beings are seen as functions. Reconciliation, therefore, is the restoration of the I–Thou horizon which allows persons to meet again as persons.

This restoration serves ethical and social considerations. In so doing, the recognition of the other as Thou acknowledges the inherent value of individuality for each person, and stands in opposition to any attempt to make any man or woman into a numeral, a place in politics, or a social function. In this way, the I – Thou relationship establishes an ethic of dignity that goes beyond the personal sphere into the social and justice sphere. The affirmation of the other as Thou is a response to domination and exclusion because each moment of objectification is a moment of depriving, depleting and denying the ground of relational life that is shared between us (Steinmann, 2022; Wu et al., 2026). Reconciliation is not merely about a settlement; it involves a shift in social hows of persons and groups towards each other.

The other's presence suggests the idea of responsibility as an ethical framework in the process of meeting. The other is not just a thing of knowledge but one that eludes conceptualization and calls the self to account. Ethical relation begins not via abstract norms, but by first being exposed to the Other. The face of the other interrupts self-enclosure and declares, before choice or deliberation, that moral life is fundamentally relational, not just rational or institutional (Imran, 2025; Jain, 2025). In this regard, it is not just an epistemological, but a moral, wrong to objectify, to reject responsibility that encounters demands. Reconciliation is, then, restoring the responsiveness to the other, to the other as a being whose reduction would result in a loss of ethical quality.

Modern times make such encounters more challenging. Human relations are increasingly mediated in digital settings through representation, metrics and algorithmic visibility. Communication is dislocated into circulation, in which persons become profiles, data points, and broken-out expressions rather than concrete people in the here and now. This gives rise to digital alienation in the forms of a decrease in relational depth, as well as a mediation of interaction in systems of evaluation and visibility (Kulyk, 2024; Asaro et al., 2022; Tkach et al., 2026). In these settings, the self is objectified and defined in terms of external success/attention/performance,

leading to self-estrangement and fragmentation. The other one is omnipresent and yet is seldom encountered as presence.

The style of online communication intensifies these dynamics. Networks encourage particularly emotional and hostile expressions, while echo chambers foster separation and can reduce one's exposure to genuine differences. Under these circumstances, dehumanization becomes common practice and groups come to see each other as a threat and not an interlocutor. The digital sphere then reinforces I-It relations, making them more fragile in some ways and more necessary in others as genuine encounter becomes more necessary but less possible (Harel et al., 2020; Mathew et al., 2018; Barroso, 2024). The more life is mediated in relation to systems of abstraction, the more critical it is to regain presence as the starting point of dialogue.

Interpersonally and collectively, objectification is often seen as dehumanization, viewing persons or groups as less than human. Perceptions like this lend legitimacy to hostility and perpetuate cycles of dehumanization, where one side sees the other as less than human, and the other sees the former as less than human. Dehumanization is, as a result, a double process, resulting in what can be conceptualized as "meta-dehumanization", where people believe they are "dehumanized" by others, which deepens their tendency to dehumanize others (Landry et al., 2021). This dynamic shows that the cause of ongoing conflict is not just a disagreement but a failure to recognize one another. Hostility becomes self-perpetuating and firmly established when people do not cross paths again as Thou.

Reconciliation, on the other hand, demands the restoration of recognition as a basis of social life. Where there is much division, even in that context, relational practices, such as dialogue, empathy, or shared presence, can restore a sense of common humanity obscured by dehumanizing practices. These practices do not dehumanize people and return the possibility of encounter through difference. Reconciliation, then, does not mean the disappearance of the conflict but the change in the relationship in which the conflict occurs.

Reconciliation also requires a "transformation of memory" and a reshaping of the past in the "configuration of the present. Forgiveness does not forget or reject or deny memory, but transforms its affective and relational structure so that the individual can be conscious of harm without being bound by it. Thus, the significance of the previous injury is reframed within a broader framework of re-established relations. Empirical studies of forgiveness show that forgiveness processes have psychological and ethical implications, as they help reduce hostility, lessen emotional suffering, and foster more positive attitudes toward past wrongdoers (Worthington, 2013; Andrade, 2021; Krouglov, 2024). When memory is used in the context of reconciliation, it is no longer conceived as an outside barrier between two worlds, but as an integral component of a new relational continuity.

Finally, reconciliation has to be seen as a process that works in several areas of human life: at the intrapersonal level, overcoming self-objectification and alienation; at the interpersonal level, overcoming dehumanization and achieving recognition; and at the collective level, overcoming an abstract mode of communication to bring them

into a mode of presence. At all these stages, I–It is transformed into I–Thou. The I–Thou is not only an ethical goal but an attitude that means human beings are fully present to each other and to themselves.

Reconciliation, therefore, is the reestablishment of dialogical life. It is the return of the relational “between” in which persons no longer become objects of manipulation, but emerge once again as living presences capable of being addressed by each other. Peace in this restoration is more than the lack of war – it is the presence of real encounter. When the reduction is removed, when the presence is not present and when the objectification is not objectification, human life comes into the world again.

3.5 Application of Buber’s Dialogical Philosophy in the Philippine Context

Objectification becomes most apparent in the objects of everyday life: the structures of digital culture, where more and more relations are transmitted as images, with more and more visibility and more and more circulation. In such places, there is a lack of capacity for the other as Thou, since perception is trained toward representation rather than relation. Research of the visual social media platforms confirms that repeated exposure to and interaction within the body of sexually charged peer images is associated with objectification of others, with an effect of self-objectification, that is, rating oneself based on externalized images. The appearance-centered nature of such tagging and curated identities further diminishes people into images, amplifying a visual perspective that prioritizes what can be seen over the presence of the person and reflects an I–It rationale, even at the level of self-relation (Vendemia & Fox, 2024). In this state, what is read is the self and other as objects for presentation, assessment, or enjoyment, not as life.

This reshaping of relational perception is further echoed in digital practices of exposure and public shaming. This reshaping of relational perception flows on into digital practices of exposure and public shaming. Whether in public or in shared spaces like cyber, online spaces have become more normalized, with shared judgments of individuals through condemnatory, mocking, and symbolic rejection. Here are some lessons from practices connected to cancel culture and digital exposure: how quickly communication can shift from understanding to punishment and from dialogue to moral reduction. What comes out of it is a communicative landscape in which visibility is less about the acknowledgment of the other's presence and more about a situation in which being seen also means being vulnerable and open to the other. In these situations, relational life is arranged around a degree of surveillance and status degradation that do not allow for recognizing each other and also strengthens the cycle of hostility and estrangement (Trottier et al., 2024). The other has ceased to be a "Thou" and has been transformed into something about to be rectified, condemned, or thrown away for the general good.

Here too, relationships are not only symbolic and virtual: They are manifested as tangible conditions of work and mobility. In many countries, Filipino domestic

workers have been subjected to significant control in their work, and their experience shows how personal elements can be reduced to economic machines that also need to be rhetorically presented as symbols of national virtue. In these scenarios, dignity paradoxically is validated in conversation but limited in lived experience. Workers may spend their days in private homes surrounded by people they do not know, unable to take part in society, and unable to be recognized by others as a person, but dependent upon systems that emphasize productivity over relational recognition. Even in the guise of “hero”, the way they live aligns with an instrumental logic, where the person is valued more as part of transnational labor systems than as a person (Wei, 2025). Objectification is both interpersonal and structural, supported with economic and legal structures that govern its visibility, mobility and recognition here.

However, within these constraints, there are ways of expressing counter-movements of recognition digitally. Migrant stories shared through apps and platforms like TikTok illustrate the way people are expressing their experiences of precarity, exploitation, and emotional labor, as well as their struggle to be less than victims or commodities. By way of narrative, testimony, and public declaration of their experience of struggle, migrants re-iterate their subjectivity in precarious places where dominant subject-object lines intersect. These expressions are not completely liberated from the structures but break up the ‘all of I–It’ as an allness of meaningfully lived presence over silence functioning. By doing so, they create, in the system, what they term 'provisional spaces of dialogical visibility' in systems that tend toward abstraction and commodification (Cabalquinto, 2024).

In collective life, such polarities can be seen in political or cultural struggles where a rupture in relations leads to feelings of division and polarization. When it comes to public discussion, especially in politically polarized times, there are often quick and sharp turns toward affective opposition, in which arguments are no longer used; instead, people are confronted with one another in emotional generalizations of hope, contempt, fear, ridicule, etc. In this context, the "other" is not engaged in dialogue but is the object of an affective projection, which deepens the division rather than the understanding. The distinction among political differences is that if it is not a relationship, then it is a rupture; if it is not disagreement, then it is a reason to be symbolically excluded.

In areas where historical conflict has occurred, such as Mindanao, these factors take on greater historical significance. There have been centuries of land, identity, displacement, and recognition issues, resulting in relational wounds that are passed down from generation to generation. Communication isn't always happening and communities frequently meet each other through the stories that they have been told about fear and injustice. However, in the context of peacebuilding, some significant efforts can be seen to recreate the space of relations through interfaith dialogue, common peace language, and cultural and religious identity. These will not remove the sense or the pain of the past, but will attempt to open up the possibility of encountering, of doing this, when there is only a memory of conflict. Reconciliation

there is not the elimination of difference, but an ongoing re-establishment of trust as a result of relational engagement.

In these contexts, in the Philippines: digital interaction, labor migration, and political/regional conflict, it is clear that the same type of process of de-humanization occurs, the process of making persons visible for certain, useful for others, or definable based on ideology. The logic of objectification manifests in many forms, such as digital imagery, economic systems, and political labeling, which frame how persons are sited and engaged. But in the same circumstances, resistance can still happen as soon as it is reconstituted whenever it is found or recomposed, even if on the most fleeting, provisional basis.

These tensions highlight, from a dialogical point of view, the core philosophical tenet: reconciliation is not simply an institutional mending but a reassertion of relational life. Every time persons are reduced, the I-It relation prevails; every time persons are met in their irreducible mode, the I-Thou relation comes to the fore. These changes of mode are not estranging, but are actualities of seeing, of speech, of memory and of response in the normal practices of life. Peace isn't just a political result, but a change in perception and relation: people regain the ability to relate to people without being reduced, and to live in a common world that does not search for the object in the other person, but makes the other person an object in the understanding of the places in which they do.

4. Conclusion

Martin Buber's concept of dialogical existence has been explored here as a philosophical starting point for understanding reconciliation as a means of achieving peace. The conceptual and hermeneutic approach to the philosophy of Buber, especially the distinction between I-Thou and I-It relations, has indicated that reconciliation is essentially a return to the real human encounter. Human conflict does not stem solely from political, social, or structural situations; it is the result of a deeper relational crisis in which the subjectivity of persons is lost and they are seen as objects of utility, ideology, fear, or control.

The analysis has shown that the I-It relation has interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects. The interpersonal level of objectification creates prejudice, dehumanization, hostility and social fragmentation. At the intrapersonal level, self-objectification, shame, and the fragmentation and alienation of identity obstruct an individual's capacity to be fully present in the dialogue. In addition to these forms of objectification, new realities such as digital culture, internet polarization, public shaming, and technologically mediated communication further amplify them, due to the superficial nature of communication and the loss of human presence and recognition.

In light of these challenges, the dialogical philosophy of Buber offers a transformative vision of reconciliation grounded in the I-Thou encounter. Reconciliation is not just about resolving conflicts, avoiding violence, or creating

social peace through institutions. Instead, it is an existential and ethical change in which individuals come together in openness, reciprocity, responsibility, and recognition. The I-Thou relationship brings back the relational space, where humans are affirmed in their dignity and real communities are possible.

The topics of alienation and dehumanization, forgiveness, peacebuilding, and interfaith dialogue are also very relevant to today's literature and further demonstrate the timeless relevance of Buber's insights. Reconciliation must go beyond structural changes and political negotiations and involve changes in attitudes, perceptions, and relationships. Peacebuilding processes in the Philippines, especially amid polarization, digital animosity, labor migration, and Mindanao's historical conflicts, underscore the importance of restoring dialogue and recognition, and promoting institutional change. The recovery of authentic encounters between persons and communities is essential for sustainable peace to come about – not just legal settlements or social programs.

Finally, this study concludes that reconciliation starts in the self, moves toward the other and ends in the transformation of a society. I–It to I–Thou, then, is not only a philosophical ideal but a practical and ethical imperative. We live in an alienated, polarized, and dehumanized world, and Buber's dialogical life is a powerful reminder that peace is attainable if we meet people as persons worthy of dignity, recognition, and love, rather than as objects to be exploited, feared, and dominated. In this sense, reconciliation is the return to our common humanity in dialogue and peace is the fruit of that relationship.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers state that there are no conflicts of interest in conducting and completing this study.

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