Chapter 3
Peace-less Reconciliation

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Abstract Reconciliation is commonly viewed either as a step toward peace, taken in the aftermath of violent conflict, or as a closing note of the move from war to peace, constituting a definitive feature of a just peace. This article posits an alternative role for reconciliation *during* times of conflict and suggests that, in certain cases, it may be a necessary first step out of hostilities. We suggest three elements – recognition of asymmetry, determination of victimhood, and, most crucially, a narratively based acknowledgment – to distinguish such peace-less reconciliation from its more conventional counterpart in the context of transitional justice. Using the Israeli-Palestinian ongoing, violent conflict as an illustrative case in point, we investigate these factors at work in current attempts at reconciliation before the cessation of violence and claim that the dearth of such efforts may explain the persistence of that unattenuated enmity. Whether the specific idiosyncrasies of the Israeli-Palestinian story can be generalized to a more comprehensive theory of peace-less reconciliation remains an elusive question.

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Justice brings peace, not the other way around.
(group e-mail from Muhammed Jabali, one of the young leaders
of the "Tent Revolution," Tel Aviv, August 2011)

3.1 Introduction

One's ruminations, even if they be submissions of theoretical and conceptual deliberation, are born of a time and place; my thoughts arise in and from a place – Israel-Palestine – in current, dire times. This does not, however, condemn such reflections to the status of a "case-study," purporting to be an instance of a generalized theory of reconciliation. Rather, the aim of this exercise is to broach the issue of reconciliation and, using the experience, the insights, and the convolutions that go with a place and a time, submit a nuanced reading of what reconciliation is, what it can be, and what it should be. This last, however, does not pretend to be a prescriptive agenda advising other times and places; it is, rather, a particular description – in Wittgensteinian mode – of an undeniably contextual reconciliation. Wittgenstein, one of the twentieth century's most enigmatic philosophers, in what is known as his later period, believed that philosophy should be done in a different way than it had been traditionally pursued. Instead of looking for some version of a theoretical truth, we should instead look at how language is used ordinarily, describe these uses, and thereby acquire insights into the meanings of our words and our human behavior. He says: "We can only describe and say, human life is like that" (1967), enjoining philosophers to refrain from explanations and general theories (to be kept for scientists). With Wittgenstein, who also says that understanding can be had by "seeing connexions" (1953, 122), this professes to throw light on other cases; *pace* Wittgenstein, it may even lead to a theory of reconciliation being developed in conjectural provinces.

This is the conventional wisdom: First, war or violent conflict, then cessation of hostilities (termed cease-fire, truce or armistice), then a somewhat-peace, then a transitional period during which warring parties aspire to arrive at justice – i.e., to make the peace a just peace (usually posited as the attainment of "democracy"). Accordingly, successful transitional justice procedures may lead to varying degrees of a just peace. The conventional assumption that accompanies such wisdom holds that *during* a time of war, *during* violent conflict, there are no normal, explicit manifestations of peaceable relational co-existence between the parties. It is after war, in post-conflict time, during a period that aspires, perhaps, to peace though not yet a just peace, that reconciliation makes its entrance. And, indeed, the way the tale of transitional justice is recounted, it is up to reconciliation to ensure that final stage of just peace. Reconciliation is, in a sense, a necessary condition of just peace and, in that same sense, it must precede the ultimate end-point, by a temporal, procedural or even formal hair-split. In some renditions, apposite, authentic reconciliation is precisely definitive and constitutive of that final end-point. In others it is only one means – others being an interim truce, negotiations, peace-treaties, democratic institutions, longer-term education, a period of calm – on the way to that end of just peace. In all versions, however, before the beginning-point of this progress, i.e., still in the time

of conflict, reconciliation is absent. That, in fact, is the defining trait of violent conflict – it is devoid of the compassionate understanding, the elements of forgiving, the thoughtful give-and-take of human intercourse that are demanded by reconciliation. In other words, no matter where in the time line between violent warfare and a true, just peace one places reconciliation, whether simultaneous with that peace, immediately pre-peace, or on the way-to-peace, reconciliation does not take place in wartime. There is a presupposition at work here – that reconciliation can only manifest itself after violent conflict has been put to rest: in the *wake* of conflict.[1]

I put on offer a different time line; more significantly, I attempt to sidestep questions of time or temporal necessity in the investigation of genuine reconciliation. Initially counter-intuitive, the proposal here entertained is that reconciliation, although relevant to a fully realized, just peace, is not dependent on the cessation of violence; reconciliation does not need to wait for even a semblance of peace, a quiet on the front, a truce, a cease-fire, peace negotiations or treaties. In some cases – paradigmatically in the Israeli-Palestinian case – reconciliation might be, instead, a necessary step in the ending of war itself. This choice of formulation, then, posits an integrated process between reconciliation and (even preliminary) peacemaking. Though the two, reconciliation and peacemaking, should be distinguished – and a differentiation between several types of peacemaking with attendant value judgment as to their very different contributions to authentic peace will ensue – it is here submitted that the latter, the so-called "peacemaking" that heralds cease-fires, truces, or even veritable peace treaties, does not necessarily come before the former, that is, reconciliation. Whether reconciliation can stand alone – that is to say, whether we can broach ante-peace or peace-less reconciliation – is the further question to be raised here; a final query will try to assess this variety of reconciliation.

3.2 Preliminary Clarifications

Admittedly, the reconciliation being addressed here is political reconciliation, in the very categorical sense that its purported absence is due to political conflict.[2] Nevertheless, a number of additional clarifications are called for; certain conceptual truisms must be exposed and either accepted (as true) or rejected (as inappropriate or, sometimes, fallacious).

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[1] *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, puts its agenda "to effect social reconstruction in the wake of widespread violence." The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, under the entry "Transitional Justice," makes it even more explicit. It begins with a temporal description, "Once violent conflict between two groups has subsided," and goes on to *define* transitional justice as a field which is involved with an "investigation of the aftermath of war." Most writers on reconciliation and forgiveness or reconciliation as being a mainstay of transitional justice invariably use that coinage – "aftermath of war/conflict" – in any analysis of reconciliation.

[2] I do not refer here to the minimalist sense of political reconciliation that Griswold (2007, 193) mentions.

First, although the idea of *re*conciliation appears semantically distinct from conciliation – reconciliation assumes an earlier togetherness, before the onset of violence, which is to be *re*constituted after cessation of conflict[3] – our use of the term, in keeping with ordinary usage, will be indifferent to this supposition. Indeed, political reconciliation as we understand it and as we charge it to function is forward looking and future-oriented. This is not to say that the work of reconciliation does not require a very demanding look at the past, soon to be elaborated on; rather, its *re*institution as an earlier state of peaceful co-existence between warring partners is not necessary or obligatory. Sometimes, oft-times, the history of a conflict does not include any such earlier state, and reconciliation must bring about a novel, hitherto unknown and perhaps unimagined state of affairs.

Secondly, in contrast to several models of political reconciliation that focus on and emphasize ritual and apology, indeed, the ritual itself of apology, this investigation will be invigorated primarily by a cognitive view of reconciliation rather than any procedural one.[4] Differently put, we are pursuing the idea of *ideal* reconciliation, an essential conciliation between persons, rather than any performative version of such. Again, this is not to say that such reconciliation does not permit or sometimes even require certain formal elements, which will soon be suggested; it is only to say that these are not necessarily a matter of apology or other performatives.

An additional element to be elucidated concerning the phenomenon of reconciliation is the relative status of the parties to be reconciled. There is no *a priori* demand concerning the parity of social, political or economic status and behavior – or, for that matter, their absence – between the factions. To be sure, one can imagine reconciliation between parents and children, between bosses and their underlings, between masters and slaves, between rich and poor. Still, we are often witness to a common, very conventional *mantra* demanding equality and mutuality of recognition that are needed for true reconciliation to occur. We will (again with Wittgenstein), contrary to these normative attitudes, descriptively note and emphasize differences of status and, furthermore, ask about their significance for the achievement of reconciliation. At the very least, these disparities hold great import for the *process* of reconciliation.

Finally, genuine personal reconciliation has often been conceptually analyzed as essentially involving forgiveness.[5] It is important to note that we are here speaking

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[3] See e.g., Griswold (2007, xxv). Long and Brecke (2003) talk of "*reconciliation* – mutually conciliatory accommodation between former antagonists," but interestingly, in an earlier working-paper version of their book (Brecke and Long 1998), they had written "*reconciliation* - returning to peace, harmony, or amicable relations after a conflict." See also Walker (2006, 384) on restorative justice – rather than reconciliation, but still dealing with "re" – as not "assuming a morally adequate status quo ante."

[4] This personalized nature of reconciliation does not preclude its political character. It may be somewhat similar to Alice MacLachlan's (2013b) elaboration of "political forgiveness," applying the structure of her type (2), and perhaps then type (3), political forgiveness to political reconciliation.

[5] But see "Reconciliation without apology?" in Griswold (2007, 206–210). See also Derrida (2001).

of personal, political reconciliation; i.e., the reconciliation effected between political, warring groups that happens between individual members of the group (though not necessarily all the members). So, although intuitive understanding maintains that, on a personal level, one can only sincerely reconcile with one's enemies after having forgiven or after being forgiven, the order of things here will be interrogated: political reconciliation is a process which may include individual acts and states of mind of forgiveness, but which does not, of necessity, come to pass after the forgiveness. Reconciling, in our sense, means undergoing processes of change of heart and mind with and *vis à vis* an-other, which may consist of forgiveness but need not inevitably do so. Certainly one – and definitely a group – can find oneself at a certain stage of reconciliation without yet having forgiven or been forgiven. An essential replacement for forgiveness will be considered here and will serve the express purposes of political reconciliation, sometimes beyond the personal.

3.3   Vagaries of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Wittgenstein admonishes us to look at the particular instance rather than the general type. What is the engine of the particular story of reconciliation in Israel-Palestine? Our story is clearly, in this case, about political reconciliation. Traditionally, standard categorizations of political reconciliation recognize two main types: international as opposed to civil reconciliation.[6] Within the grouping of civil reconciliation there is an additional sub-categorization distinguishing between civil conflicts where warring parties are various ethnic, religious, or racial groups, with the conflict defined by their variety, and civil conflicts between colonizing and indigenous groups. Quintessential international conflicts are the long-term rift between Germany and France or the shorter-term wars of history (the Spanish-American War, the Sino-Japanese War, the World Wars; the list is endlessly populated). Prototypical civil conflicts of recent times are the Rwandan atrocities, the Baltic wars of the 1990s, and the horrors of Sudan. Conflicts arising from processes of (de-)colonization are the paradigmatic struggle of Native Americans or the more current contests in India and Indochina. And there are, certainly, conflicts which are not facilely categorized or that may inhabit multiple categories; such were, for example, both the South African and the Irish imbroglios.

   How are we to categorize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Usual parlance places it as an international conflict between two national groups, originally perceived as

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[6] More precisely, scholarship on political reconciliation takes one of two directions: (a) the categorization of civil and international reconciliation based on traditional political thought, international relations, and history. See e.g., Long and Brecke (2003), who provide separate treatments of "international war and reconciliation" and "civil war and reconciliation"; (b) the very contemporary and up-to-date discussion which appears to be focusing on reconciliation within societies (e.g., Schaap 2005).

Israelis and Arabs, later recognized as Israelis and Palestinians. The former perception is problematic in ascribing to Arabism, per se, a national identity; the latter was tardy in recognizing the national aspirations of the Palestinians. In some discussions these two national groups are already viewed as two state-groups, one a real, existing, functioning state – Israel, the other a state-in-the-making – Palestine. There is a whiff of disingenuousness in this depiction if one considers that an important ingredient of the Palestinian agenda in this conflict is specifically the creation of a Palestinian state. In contrast to the international categorization, the Israel-Palestine conflict has also been depicted as a civil war between either two ethnic groups or two religious groups, both vying for power over and ownership of the same real estate. When presented in such civil terminology, the Israel-Palestine problem has, appropriately but very imprecisely, been termed the Jewish-Palestinian or even the Jewish-Muslim conflict.[7] Other internal-civil portrayals of the conflict in which these two groups are embroiled hinge on the ideology, advent and success of Zionism as a colonialist project which has usurped the land, rights, lives and even identity of the indigenous group – the Palestinians. In this case one will hear it called the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

This variation in categorizing the conflict – international, civil, colonial – results in a name-change, of course (the Arab-Israeli problem, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Jewish-Muslim clash; the Jewish-Palestinian war; the Zionist-Palestinian conflict), but in much more than that. Distinct categorizations lead to different narratives, indeed to different dates marking the beginning of the conflict, from the end of the nineteenth century, i.e., the beginning of Zionism, through 1948, the establishment of the State of Israel, to 1967, the beginning of the – or that particular – occupation of Palestinian lands. Lest you think that the title of the conflict, its narrative, or the date of its inception brings its identification to closure, note the further complication deriving from Palestinians who *are* citizens of Israel – in other words, self-perceived members of the Palestinian nation who are citizens of the State of Israel, marking a well-known, but no less tricky, divorce between nation and state in the Jewish nation-state. So, although emphatically recognized as a matter for political reconciliation, the Israel-Palestine conflict is not easily put in any of the slots of international, civil, or colonial contexts of conflict.[8]

There is call here for a methodological confession alluded to above: I will be adopting, throughout, a stance of uniqueness in describing this particular conflict and its attendant, still non-existent, reconciliation; but this distinctiveness will optimally carry further implications for the idea of reconciliation. The claim of distinctiveness in this particular (perhaps international, perhaps civil) situation is what invigorates the allegation that standard analyses of reconciliation need refinement or change

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[7] Indeed, one of the most common but, to my mind, supremely inadequate explanations for the conflict's persistence holds that it is extreme, fundamentalist, religious elements on each side to the conflict that are ultimately to blame for its intractability.

[8] I continue to name this conflict the "Israeli-Palestinian" conflict – merely for convenience of usage, adopting conventionality for ease of reference. In essence it is the Zionist-Palestinian war.

and that this is true especially concerning their placement of reconciliation at the post-conflict point. In other words, it is the vagaries of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will be called upon to illuminate the more general concept of reconciliation. There is still and always the lingering doubt that perhaps we are all contextually bound to the conflicts we know or are a part of. Perhaps any analysis of any particular conflict is destined to be unique and particular. Perhaps all we can do, in Wittgensteinian manner, is describe, not explain or fall prey to the "craving for generality" (1958, 17). In that case, however, the added value of the theoretical terminology (categories, narratives, labels) of conflict, resolution and reconciliation with which we are engaging is called upon to serve a different purpose: a particular description, not explanation, of what must take place if reconciliation is to be achieved.

3.4   Reconciliation During Conflict

There have been 44 or 63 or over 100 years of conflict between Zionists and Palestinians (neither uniquely national nor ethnic; neither particular states nor religions): wars, blood-letting, killings, suicide-bombings, regular bombings, targeted assassinations, terrorist activities, invasions, and sieges. There have been periods of intense physical violence; there have been periods of what is termed in Israel "low scale violence"; there have been wars, usually marked by a beginning and end date[9]; there have been uprisings and invasions; and there have been periods of calm – some touted as bespeaking a "peace-process," though never as peace.[10] But since there has been continuous oppression and occupation, it is reasonable to opine that the conflict has been with us for decades, not ever letting up or reaching anything akin to a period of even transitional peace. A typical, divergent opinion describes the years between 1993 and 2000, usually called the Oslo years, as such an endeavor of peacemaking; I hope to dispel that illusion. For the proposition on offer here is that the lack of any progress that would lead to a long-lasting truce, treaty, period of transitional peace, or, of course, a semblance of a real, just peace is the result of no real moves being made towards reconciliation. It is my further thesis that such reconciliation requires a number of elements that have rarely been promoted during 63 years of the State of Israel. Without such elements of reconciliation, pursued or attained *during* such conflict, any gestures of tentative peace are either spurious or, even if naïvely construed as authentic, doomed to fail.

It is imperative to clarify: this is not a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for reconciliation to materialize. It is rather an investigation of moments of

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[9] It is an oft-remarked truism that at any time in the past 60 years, any 20-year old could report on five wars that she had personally lived through.

[10] See Biletzki (2007) for a view of the inanity and insignificance of that specific term, "peace-process."

reconciliation that are necessary for the begetting of peace. Remarkably, in specific conflicts – South Africa, for instance – some of these points were reached, in public and global consciousness, while the conflict was raging. I submit that, since *none* of them has surfaced in any substantial form and that, in fact, they are all vehemently and consensually denied in Israel, it has proven impossible to even begin to consider a germination of peace.[11] While the first two functions below, recognition of asymmetry and identification of victimhood, are contingent situations whose ascertainment may be context-dependent, the third – narrative and acknowledgment – is a *sine qua non* of reconciliation, whether during or post-conflict. This last, however, is seductive and paradoxical precisely in that it does not require peace (or any version of less- or non-conflictual situations dubbed "peace") for its embodiment. What, then, are the desirable elements of reconciliation that ought to emerge *during* conflict?

3.4.1 Recognition of Asymmetry (When It Is the Fact of the Matter)

The semantics of several or most of the terms in our repertoire of war and peace – especially "war," "conflict," and "compromise" – presupposes symmetry between the warring sides. Interestingly, apology and forgiveness are not prey to this default. Indeed, in the analysis of reconciliation which claims apology and forgiveness as essential elements of reconciliation, there must be, at the very least, a recognized wrongdoer and a recognized victim of the wrongdoing if apology and forgiveness are to take place. But just as interesting is the conceptual possibility that reconciliation can travel both ways: it has no *a priori* commitment to either a differential of status between reconciling sides or, alternatively, to equality of status between them. So one can surely imagine a situation where both sides to a conflict are wrongdoers and both sides are victims. If we try to entertain a process of reconciliation that, as we conceive it, does not necessarily entail apology and/or forgiveness, it is not implausible to think of the sides of such reconciliation as equals and of the reconciliatory relation as symmetrical. Such has been the lot of political common wisdom on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – positing two sides, each guilty of wrongdoings, each victimized by the other, each needing to compromise, and both equally culpable for the creation and subsistence of the conflict.

It is our wont to question this conventional wisdom.[12] Since the diagnostics of a wrongdoing is a necessary point of analysis in any reconciliation, assessing the relationship between conflicted parties correctly as symmetrical or asymmetrical is mandatory for the reconciliation to be true conciliation. Now, the *bon temps* of

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[11] A political history of the last two decades can discern the deterioration – from the 1993–2000 supposed peace-period of the Oslo accords (which included nary a sign of the elements at issue here) to shorter and shorter periods of "cease-fires," "truces," and other fictional attempts at "peace."

[12] See Biletzki (2008).

contemporary peace-discourse invigorates several factors leaning towards symmetry. Clearly, it is manifest that both sides have perceptions of wrongs having been done to them. Additionally, contemporary political fashion embraces the idea of third parties as "unbiased mediators" showing no (justified or unjustified) partiality to either side of the conflict. And, on the whole, political audiences, as opposed to political players, are more amenable to "there are two sides to every story" than to a one-sided culprit-victim ontology. However, in spite of this general proclivity for symmetry, it is critical for the purpose of *bona fide* reconciliation to arrive at the cognizance that, in a particular story, the descriptive – but no less essential for that – truth might be one of asymmetry: one side may be more in the wrong than the other, one side may have suffered more profusely than the other, one side violated the rights of the other more grievously – one side was more a victim than the other.

3.4.2   Who Is the Victim?

At this point in the argument we do well to distinguish between interpersonal reconciliation and political reconciliation – the latter being effected between a state/group/community, or its representatives, and a state/group/community or an individual. There are various structural options in the distinctive brand of political reconciliation but its definitive trait involves a reconciling public entity (state/group/community or its representatives) on at least one side of the reconciliation. Now, in the case of Israel-Palestine, it is abundantly clear that both Jews and Palestinians, as individuals, have been wronged by individuals of the other group; that is to say, they have been victims. But the pertinent question before us concerns the victimhood of a whole group. And here we come across an interesting variation within the common discourse of reconciliation: Jews justly profess to victimhood of 2,000 years, to a history of anti-Semitism, and to the ultimate victimhood, bar none, during the Holocaust. Indeed, it is a universally accepted platitude, and no less correct for that, that the State of Israel was established – that is, it was voted on by the United Nations General Assembly and legitimized by the global community[13] – as a result of the genocide perpetrated against the Jews in the Holocaust. Palestinians, on their part, point to a victimhood of a little over a century (since the establishment of the political movement of Zionism in the late nineteenth century), to a history of Zionist colonization, and to their ultimate victimhood in the *Naqba*, the Catastrophe of 1947–1948, when about two-thirds of indigenous Palestinians living on their land in Palestine were expelled from their homes to become refugees in a grand operation of ethnic cleansing that, many claim, has been going on ever since.

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[13] The *de facto* founding of the state was a domestic decision of local powers that be in the Jewish community in Palestine (under the British Mandate); the international establishment of the new state is legally ambiguous since General Assembly decisions, such as that of the partition of Palestine, are not binding, but *de facto* recognition (custom) by the international community is, as is the General Assembly's acceptance of Israel as a member of the U.N.

In what way is this a variation on the ordinary reconciliation-discourse of victimhood? The symmetrical form of reconciliation, based on a (possibly false) presupposition of symmetry, involves wrongdoing by each side of a conflict towards the other; each is a wrong-doer but, more importantly and more pertinently for apology or forgiveness, each is a victim of the other. Yet engaging with reconciliation that involves recognition of the other side's suffering, i.e., the other side's victimhood, one cannot help but notice the strangeness of the supposed symmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian case. Both peoples are victims, with a history and evidence to buttress their respective claims of victimhood. But the Jews are victims of history, anti-Semitism, and the Germans; the Palestinians are victims of the Jews. Lacking the symmetry of the victimizer-victim relationship between Jews and Palestinians, it is incongruous to posit equal victimhood for them. *Grosso modo*, and again contrary to conventional wisdom, although there are recognizable, particular cases of individual victimizers and victims on both sides, there is group victimhood, political victimhood – between Jews and Palestinians – on one side only.[14]

The issues of symmetry and victimhood and their accurate identification are circumstantial: circumstances of diverse situations admit various versions of symmetry, asymmetry, and victimhood. There may be mutuality involved (in, e.g., causation of suffering) but this does not imply moral equivalence. So it is incumbent on participants in reconciliation to get "the story" right, or as right as is possible for the forward-looking orientation of reconciliation. In that sense, then, the possibility of reconciliation, which is dependent on Truth – who did what to whom, is indifferent to its positioning during or in the wake of conflict. The corollary is that it could just as well be emphasized (for our purposes) that the end of conflict is not a requirement for these two features of reconciliation. But, given asymmetry and determination of victimhood, there is then a normative condition of the move to reconciliation that is far better placed during an ongoing conflict. Simply put: without the correction of narrative and the pursuant acknowledgment there is less chance of climbing out of the depths of violent, historically weighty conflict. This kind of reconciliation cannot wait for peace, for it is its midwife.

3.4.3 Narrative and Acknowledgment

Narrative and changes of narrative have become staples of the conversation. Griswold's (2007) emphasis on narrative functions significantly in his explication of forgiveness; I do the same for reconciliation. Added to the above insistence on admission of asymmetry and dissimilar victimization, the narrative that challenges

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[14] There are interesting complexities here having to do with the option of indirect victimhood. For instance, Van Evera (Memory and the Arab-Israel conflict: time for new narratives, unpublished manuscript, 2003) has written that Palestinians are *indirect* victims of Christian anti-Semitism, since Zionism was a reaction to and a result of anti-Semitism. The unsurprising vernacular rejoinder has the Palestinians saying "why should we pay for what the Germans did to the Jews?".

us is the Jewish narrative rather than the Palestinian one. In other words, and again in contradistinction to the conventional approach, this thesis does not call for a mutual recognition, by both sides to a conflict, of the other side's narrative. It rather makes a new, strident demand on one side's narrative.[15]

In telling the story of victimhood, Jews point to history and anti-Semitism. This part of Jewish-Israeli identity carries forward with stupendous consistency, almost inertia, into the story of the establishment of the State of Israel. The narrative on that specific piece of history – from 1945 until 1949, the establishment of the state, aka as the War of Independence and sometimes even the War of Revival – includes the mythological structure reminiscent of the whole of Jewish history: the few against the many. The "many" of this particular story are the millions of Arabs surrounding the Jews of Israel or the several Arab states attacking the State of Israel. Astoundingly, nowhere do Palestinians, the indigenous people of the land, figure in the conventional Israeli story. Or, if they are present in the tale, they are depicted as hapless locals who were enticed to leave by other Arab states with promises of victorious return to their homes and lands after the war.

Nowhere is mention made, in the Israeli narrative, of hundreds of villages devastated, demolished, and desecrated – or of hundreds of thousands of people driven out to a refugee existence of over 60 years that has burgeoned into one of the world's longest and greatest refugee crises. The striking point is that these untold facts, making up the essential core of Palestinian story-telling (and therefore automatically suspected, by Israelis, of being a Palestinian myth), have been meticulously chronicled since the 1980s by a group of *Israeli* historians, the New Historians, bent on "outing" the data in Israeli archives. These contrary-to-the-received accounts have now become authoritative history. It is therefore all the more striking that in Jewish-Israeli (not to mention American) common discourse, in elementary school education, in song and story, and in popular media there is no *Naqba*. The professionals' history has changed; the national, cultural narrative has not. Explanation for such a discrepancy between what has been entertained and then accepted in certain professional quarters as history and what functions as the common narrative is straightforward and hinges on these being two very different contexts: the academic-historical context and the popular cultural-political life of a society. When do those contexts meet? When does that known history become the received narrative? Differently put, how can the story of history become a deep narrative of a people?

The essential step is that of *acknowledgment*, an acknowledgment that must accompany the historical account to make it deep, i.e., to make it significant for reconciliation.[16] It is not enough to tell the "unrelated-to-us" story of the *Naqba*; its significance is such that Jewish Israelis must take responsibility for it if it is to change from a historical tale carrying no moral weight to a people's narrative that is

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[15] See Jacob Schiff (2008) for a compelling connection between narrative and acknowledgment (albeit in the context of structural injustice).

[16] This is reminiscent of MacLachlan (2013a) where acknowledgment is called upon to negate the founding myths of a state.

part of a common identity – with accountability attached to actions. That kind of acknowledgement-carrying-narrative carries political risk; but only acknowledgment can give rise to reconciliation. Neither apology alone, forgiveness alone, or apology and forgiveness together can function as this necessary facet to usher in political reconciliation. Only acknowledgment.[17] On multiple occasions I have encountered Palestinians who are eager to begin and then continue the process of reconciliation; arrestingly, their demand has always been "only acknowledge."

The normativity of the requirement of acknowledgment is not unrelated to the earlier elements – precise appraisal of asymmetry and consciousness of obvious victimhood. One could even say that such appraisal and consciousness may be a necessary part of acknowledgement; or more expressly, that we may be called on to *acknowledge* asymmetry and specific victimhood. I think, however, that this belies an important aspect of the reconciliation-during-conflict that is at issue here. The descriptive, truth-telling assessment of asymmetry and victimhood – even when carried out in the time of conflict, perhaps especially when carried out then – does not acknowledgment make. A paradigmatic example of such (historical!) truth telling *sans* acknowledgment is the case of Benny Morris (1988), one of Israel's New Historians, who is to be credited for exposing the previously uncovered facts of Israeli malfeasance during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and its aftermath. Morris's project is, indeed, a matter of doing history, not a case of conducting political or human intercourse or, for that matter, professing value judgments on those historical events. When asked, several years after his shattering findings, about Israeli culpability and wrongdoing, he famously said that not only were Palestinians "transferred" out of their lands but that "the non-completion of the transfer was a mistake" (Shavit 2004). This was admission, but quite the contrary of acknowledgment. The acknowledgment of wrongdoing harbors accountability. Buttressed by recognition of asymmetry it is, instead of a multiplicity of neutral, mutually told narratives, a one-sided taking-of-responsibility for the victimhood of the other side. The deep-rooted seeds of conflict cannot be extracted without such narrative acknowledgment. For that same reason, the conflict itself cannot be truly ended before an explicit act of acknowledgment is enacted.[18]

3.5   A Note on Peacemaking and Reconciliation

We have been witness, mostly in the past two decades, to several "peacemaking" projects; that is to say, groups of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis collaborating in mutual and common ventures whose professed agenda is "peacemaking." We speak

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[17] See Trudy Govier (2003) for a view of apology as a form of acknowledgment. As explained above, we focus on the cognitive, epistemic essence of acknowledgment, rather than its performativity as evidenced in apology.

[18] There are affinities, to be investigated elsewhere, between this view of acknowledgment and Hannah Arendt's political forgiveness.

here not of programs that involve formal political negotiations or culminate in signed treaties – that is left for diplomats and politicians, i.e., for the official authorities. These peacemaking groups are, to be sure, worthy candidates for reconciliation as adumbrated above. First there are the professionals: groups of doctors from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides who work together to alleviate suffering; teachers from both sides who develop joint educational programs; psychologists, architects, engineers, social workers, and students of just as many disciplines – all organizing in professional groups in order to engage in a semblance of co-existence which, they believe, can either lead to peace or take its place when it tarries. (An abiding question inquires how this kind of engagement inter-relates with the official political engagement and negotiations.) Then there are several organizations that gather children and youth from both sides to participate in sports together, or go to camps (sometimes abroad) together, or play in orchestras together. There is the paradigmatic Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization (IPSO) established by Sari Nusseibeh, President of Al-Quds University in Palestine, and Menachem Yaari, Chair of the Israel Academy of Sciences, devoted to developing cooperative scientific projects by Israelis and Palestinians in concert. And most advertised, there are now cooperative economic projects, launched by Israeli and Palestinian businessmen, carrying forward the new Gospel – attributed, among others, to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – that joint business enterprises will usher in the long-dawdling peace.

The ironic voice ascertained above is intentional: these are all so-called peacemaking programs, but do they harbor reconciliation? What would be a criterion to demarcate projects of reconciliation from those of opportunistic "peacemaking"? Do we envision one and can we formulate it? If, as I now suggest explicitly, a process of reconciliation must be at work before any talk of a just peace can ensue, does it not become obligatory to distinguish between specious peacemaking – games and shows of peace – and authentic reconciliation? [19]

Recall that the necessary pre-conditions of reconciliation were, first, the recognition of asymmetry in order, secondly, to acknowledge a real victim. Much is demanded of such recognition. The asymmetry of the conflict, what has been termed the "differential of power" and what we have ascertained as inequity in history, must enter into authentic peacemaking – predicated on genuine reconciliation – by its explicit negation: that is to say, an unequivocal insistence on formal, semantic and behavioral equality in any and all activities of joint peacemaking programs must be mandated and championed. This may be difficult to accomplish but is vital if such enterprises are not to fall, again, into the historical asymmetry, inequality, and one-sided control that has been at the essence of the conflict. A fitting example is given in IPSO guidelines, seemingly naïve in focusing on numbers, which dictate that all its projects be peopled by a precisely equal number of Palestinians and Israelis. Other organizations are more lax about more than just numbers. For example, we find more ambiguity in financial and business ventures, where income and investments

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[19] By "authentic" I do not make a turn here from political reconciliation to the personal reconciliation between (all) individuals of the warring sides. Authentic reconciliation is acknowledgment-bearing.

make their way to Palestine, specifically to Palestinian businessmen, but financial control and profits are decidedly on the Israeli side. This might be, indeed, an intangible criterion – unequivocal parity as the manifestation of the recognition and repair of asymmetry – but it is key to our analysis: disregarding the asymmetry reinforces the historical, political and economic imbalance of power that has accompanied Israeli-Palestinian relations *ab initio*.

Recognition of asymmetry was posited as the first step, with one-sided identification of the victims a second necessary point of reconciliation. In this puzzle of distinguishing between *bona fide* projects and organizations of reconciliation and what I have elsewhere called "the peace industry" (Biletzki 2008), acknowledgment now plays a subtle role. Should one celebrate or view as insidious the impressive peace institutions in splendid buildings, which cost millions of dollars to plan and construct, and which hold as many receptions and peace banquets as programs for Israeli and Palestinian children or business meetings for Israeli-Palestinian "partners"? Is past asymmetry replaced, in these cases, by current impartiality? Is there any true acknowledgement of past wrongs? An abstruse case in point is an institution like the Peres Center for Peace, Israel's most grandiose peace spectacle. Going through its multitudinous publications – pamphlets, invitations, reports, position papers, etc. – one cannot but be struck by the absence of any mention of the word "Occupation." If Occupation, which is the formal, legally accepted status of the Palestinian Territories, is ne'er to be found in the words of a peace center, it is no surprise that the *Naqba*, the constitutive narrative of the Palestinians that must be acknowledged, is absent as well. This is a peace-center devoid of acknowledgment or reconciliation and cannot therefore aspire to peacemaking. More significantly, bogus peacemaking is not only divorced from acknowledgment-based reconciliation; it rather preserves the continued oppression and current occupation of Palestinians by Israelis.

3.6   Conclusion – A Curious Twist of Symmetry

Is there a noticeable instance of acknowledgment for the sake of true reconciliation? Two fascinating groups in Israel-Palestine provide not only exemplars but also, in the case of the second, somewhat of a foil to the whole theoretical exercise which has engaged us here.

The first is an organization called *Zochrot*. Translated into English, this means "remembering" – in the plural, female voice, in various bodies. No more explicit acknowledgment is imaginable: we or they or you, as women, remember the *Naqba*. The organization, made up of Israelis (both Jewish and Palestinian, both men and women), has adopted the objective of remembering, and more so of reminding, the Israeli public of the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948. Its venue involves Palestinian villages – their inhabitants, their culture, their art, their music, their stories, their tragedies – destroyed during the *Naqba*. It organizes trips and tours to villages and towns that no longer exist, led by guides who know Hebrew and Arabic

and by inhabitants who know and remember local history. It publishes articles and interviews on the Palestinian narrative of the *Naqba* years. It holds lectures, symposia, and exhibitions on the *Naqba*. Poignantly, yet effectively, it hangs up road signs all over the land of Israel, marking localities with Palestinian names long ago obliterated. This is physical, cultural, historical, emotional acknowledgment. For *Zochrot*, "acknowledging the past is the first step in taking responsibility for its consequences."[20] This is a case of real reconciliation, constituted of acknowledgment, conducted in these times of dire conflict.

A second reconciliatory group is *Combatants for Peace*. Made up of 600 fighters – quite literally fighters, i.e., Israeli soldiers who have been in battle situations in the killing fields and Palestinian combatants, some even called "terrorists" by the Israeli authorities – this group has decided to "put down our guns, and to fight for peace."[21] They hold meetings discussing how to support peacemaking. They give talks in schools and community centers, enjoining youth and young adults to eschew battle appointments. They build playgrounds where Israeli and Palestinian children play together. And they mutually acknowledge the wrongdoings that they have perpetrated. But there's the rub.

Given a non-ending conflict and also, more so, given an ongoing show of "peacemaking" that has made no headway in the past 44 (or 63 years), it behooves us to think out of the conventional box – particularly the box holding worn-out mantras of peace-processes and negotiations. It has been proposed, above, that one reason for the lack of progress in orthodox peacemaking is the misplacing of reconciliation near the end of the process, specifically in the wake of violence, instead of at its beginning, during on-going strife. Reconciliation, we have said, as opposed to many other games of peacemaking, involves most emphatically the acknowledgment of wrongdoing and admission of its imbalance. But looking at *Combatants for Peace*, who have become almost an icon of reconciliation, one cannot deny that one of the linchpins of *their* concept of reconciliation – which is undeniably a sincere reconciliation – is the insistence on *mutual* acknowledgment of equal wrongdoing and equal victimhood on both sides. This is not to say that *Combatants for Peace* do not recognize the Palestinian *Naqba* or the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian lands: they explicitly make reference to both in explicating their purposes and ends (the end of Occupation and a just peace). Yet they embrace an equal self-recrimination, a well-managed story of symmetry, as the pragmatic means to those ends.

So we conclude with casting doubt. Reconciliation, as carried out by actors like *Zochrot* and *Combatants for Peace*, must start during conflict, it cannot wait for politicians and negotiators, and it is, as such, a peace-less reconciliation. But in cases such as that of Israel-Palestine, when the roots of conflict are so implacably strong and the mythology of identity so rooted and pervasive, changing the received narrative by providing acknowledgment of a one-sided wrongdoing might be a political blunder instead of a courageous, risky political undertaking. Perhaps

[20] http://www.Naqbainhebrew.org/index.php?lang=english

[21] http://cfpeace.org/?page_id=2

peace-less reconciliation, precisely due to its convolution within the conflict, requires the pragmatism of a less-than-unequivocal one-sided acknowledgement. Perhaps it needs subtlety in its formulation, and, yes, even a modicum of pragmatism almost to the tune of cynicism. Perhaps we must, with Wittgenstein again, take note of the idiosyncrasies and distinctiveness of various cases, come "back to the rough ground," (1953, 107) and be satisfied with a description, not a theory, of reconciliation without peace.

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