

Francesco Ferrari / Martin Leiner / Zeina M. Barakat / Michael Sternberg / Boaz Hameiri (eds.)

Encountering the Suffering of the Other

Reconciliation Studies amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict





Research in Peace and Reconciliation

Edited by
Martin Leiner and Francesco Ferrari

in co-operation with
Benoît Bourguine (Louvain-la-Neuve),
François Dermange (Genève), Dennis Doyle (Dayton/Ohio),
Matthias Gockel (Jena), Makoto Mizutani (Kyoto),
Arie Nadler (Tel Aviv), Bertram Schmitz (Jena)
and David Tombs (Belfast/Dublin)

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Martin Leiner, Francesco Ferrari</i> Encountering the Suffering of the Other. Introduction to the present volume .. | 9 |
| <i>Francesco Ferrari</i> The Concept of Reconciliation after Auschwitz. Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the Irrevocable | 27 |
| <i>André Zempelburg</i> Rabbinic Jewish Perspectives on Interpersonal Reconciliation and the Reconciliation with Oneself in the Context of Yom Kippur | 45 |
| <i>Zeina M. Barakat</i> Reconciliation as Transformation from Extremism to Moderation. The Case of Palestine-Israel | 59 |
| <i>Martin J. O'Malley</i> Narratives and Justice in Reconciliation Research. An Applied Ethics Perspective | 69 |
| <i>Yoav Kapshuk</i> Reconciliation in Peace Agreements? The Case Study of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process | 87 |
| <i>Dina Dajani Daoudi</i> Transitional Justice and Reconciliation in Intractable Conflicts | 103 |
| <i>Rahav Gabay, Boaz Hameiri, Tammy Rubel-Lifschitz, Arie Nadler</i> The Tendency for Interpersonal Victimhood. Conceptualization, Cognitive and Behavioral Consequences, and Antecedents | 115 |
| <i>Tammy Rubel-Lifschitz, Rahav Gabay, Boaz Hameiri, Arie Nadler</i> The Victimhood Oriented Leader. Tendency for Interpersonal Victimhood among Powerholders | 127 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Boaz Hameiri, Rahav Gabay, Tammy Rubel-Lifschitz, Arie Nadler</i> Victimhood Acknowledgment as a Vehicle to Promote Intergroup Conciliatory Attitudes in the Context of Intergroup Conflict | 139 |
| <i>Anat Sarid, Anan Srour, Shifra Sagy</i> Sense of National Coherence and Willingness to Reconcile. The Case of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | 151 |
| <i>Michael Sternberg, Shifra Sagy</i> When Israeli Students Encounter Palestinian Narratives | 165 |
| <i>Efrat Zigenlaub, Shifra Sagy</i> Learning the Narrative of the Other. What Type of Encounter is More Effective? | 181 |
| <i>Becky Leshem, Shifra Sagy</i> Legitimization of the Other Narrative as a Mediator of the Relationships Between National Honor, Dignity Perceptions, and the Willingness to Reconcile. The Case of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict .. | 203 |
| <i>Manar Faraj</i> Palestinian Students introduced to the historical narrative of the other. The role the intragroup Dialogue Encounters [Play] in Reconciliation... | 221 |
| <i>Sharón Benheim</i> The Impact of Encountering the Other. A Long-Term Study of Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli Participants in a Multicultural Program at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies | 241 |
| <i>Yael Ben David, Orly Idan</i> Talking Politics. The Delimitation of the “Political” as a Gendered Disciplinary. Mechanism in Intragroup Dialogue among Young Israelis | 263 |
| <i>Shiri Levinas</i> Women in Conflict, Narratives from the Periphery. Stories of Women Living in the Southern Periphery of Israel | 279 |
| <i>Iyad Muhsen Al Dajani</i> Applied Ethics in Digital Humanities for Reconciliation Processes | 295 |

About the Editors 309

About the Authors 311

Francesco Ferrari / Martin Leiner / Zeina M. Barakat / Michael Sternberg / Boaz Hameiri (eds.):
Encountering the Suffering of the Other

Martin Leiner, Francesco Ferrari

Encountering the Suffering of the Other

Introduction to the present volume

Encountering the Suffering of the Other. Reconciliation Studies amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict offers a collection of essays from team members of the DFG-funded project *Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone: Does Meeting the “Suffering of the Other” Influence Reconciliation in the Middle of Conflict?* (GZ: LE 1260/3–2). Research activities of the trilateral partners from Germany, Israel, and Palestine began on March 19, 2013, and continued until 31st August 2021. Led by the Friedrich-Schiller University Jena (Germany) and directed by the theologian and reconciliation scholar Martin Leiner, “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” comprised four cooperating teams: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev-team (Israel, leader: Prof. Dr. Shifra Sagy); Friedrich-Schiller University Jena-team (Germany, leader: Prof. Dr. Martin Leiner); Tel Aviv University-team (Israel, leader: Prof. Dr. Arie Nadler); Wasatia team (Palestinian, leader: Prof. Dr. Mohammed Dajani).

1. Initial questions and objective of the project “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone”

To our knowledge, “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” is the first major international project in transdisciplinary reconciliation studies. It generated innovative research and fruitful new perspectives for reconciliation studies. It was guided by the following theoretical frameworks:

- Arie Nadler’s “Needs-Based Model” of inter-group relations (Shnabel and Nadler 2008)
- Shifra Sagy’s narrative-oriented “Action-Research” (Sagy 2020)
- Amélie Mummendey’s “Ingroup-Projection Model” (Wenzel, Mummendey and Waldzus 2007), represented by her pupil and successor Thomas Kessler, member of the Jena-team
- Martin Leiner’s Hölderlin Perspective of transdisciplinary reconciliation research (Flämig and Leiner 2012)
- Mohammed Dajani Daoudi’s “Wasatia” concept of moderation in a challenging political climate (Dajani Daoudi 2009)

1.1 Three main hypotheses

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” analyzed the effects of encountering the suffering of the opposing group (out-group), by investigating three main hypotheses:

1. Encountering the suffering of the out-group “other” can effectively counter widespread marginalization or even denial of such suffering in conflicting societies.
2. Encountering the suffering of the out-group can generate empathy and contribute to willingness to reconcile. “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” showed both potentials and limitations of empathy generation for addressing conflict contexts. Research findings reveal the need for identifying and clarifying conditions of conflict contexts within which empathetic relations are relevant and potentially impact willingness to reconcile. Interventions of “encountering the suffering of the other” can be effective. However, they require careful identification and controlling of a) contributing and limiting intervention conditions, b) the nature of empathy generated, and c) the potential of generated empathy to impact conflict-relevant conditions. Helpful approaches for understanding empathy dynamics include, for example, Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness (TST) and Empowerment to Human and Sensitive Communication with the Enemy (ESC).
3. Contextual factors play a very important role in encountering the suffering of the out-group, and affect the willingness of groups to reconcile. “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” studied contextual factors relevant to empathy and willingness to reconcile.

1.2 Three different approaches

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” primarily focused upon groups of Palestinians and Israelis. German and South African groups were studied for the purpose of comparison and control. The research was organized following three different approaches:

- A series of nine empirical field experiments named ESOs (from “Encountering the Suffering of the Other”) took place. Sequentially numbered, “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” is referred to them as ESO1, ESO2, etc. till, ESO9. Their object has been the encounter of mixed-gender, mixed-region, and mixed-age Palestinians with the Holocaust (in Auschwitz and Buchenwald) and Israeli students with the Nakba by visiting sites of Palestinian displacement (in Ramle and refugee camps). These experiments were treated with methods from different disciplines (participant observation; questionnaires; semi-structured interviews; content analysis of texts, specifically letters).
- A series of laboratory experiments were conducted in Jena and Tel Aviv aiming at assessing the impact of “respect” on willingness to reconcile (Jena) (Nägler,

- Harth, Kessler in prep.) and identifying a new personality construct in the Tendency for Interpersonal Victimhood (Tel Aviv) (Gabay, Hameiri, Rubel-Lifschitz and Nadler 2022). In laboratory experiments, some factors favorable to reconciliation could be studied in more detail. Respectful communication was one such factor. The distinctions of victimhood, victim identity and the so-called “competitive victimhood” to understand the needs and discourses of reconciliation better, as well as to critically examining diverse forms of acknowledgment of victim identity (Hameiri, Gabay, Rubel-Lifschitz and Nadler 2022; Rubel-Lifschitz, Gabay, Hameiri and Nadler 2022). Arie Nadler also further developed his Needs-Based Model during the time of the project’s inception by replacing “empowerment” with “agency” as a need in the victim position (SimanTov-Nacheli, Shnabel & Nadler 2013).
- A series of academic qualification writings took place at the Friedrich-Schiller University Jena and at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. They have also been partly based on the “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” empirical research and implemented further methodologies and approaches, such as:
 - Netnography as content analysis in social media and on websites. In his examination of social media, Aldajani 2020 was able to show that netnography can be used for deliberative processes and to promote reconciliation.
 - Biographical research. Providing an account of the lifelong journey of the Jerusalem-born educator and peace activist Mohammed Dajani Daoudi from extremism to moderation, Barakat 2017 pointed out the key agents which caused such transformation in favor of reconciliation.
 - Textbook reform. Challenging one-sided historical narratives, Dajani 2019 highlighted ways to take further steps to promote reconciliation through schoolbooks.
 - Semi-structured interviews. Faraj 2022 addressed the question of Palestinian refugee women’s identity by conducting interviews in a refugee camp and a village.
 - Narrative-oriented Action-Research. Researchers from Ben-Gurion University explored in different ways the contribution of meeting narratives of the other to foster reflexive learning in the context of a binational conflict:
 - a. as intragroup dialogue, i. e., within one national group (Sternberg and Sagy 2022);
 - b. comparing intra- and inter-group dialogue groups (Zigenlaub and Sagy 2022);
 - c. analyzing long-term full-time residential programs, with participants from social groups in conflict (Benheim 2022).
 - Gender studies. Practices that discipline the political discourse from a gender perspective were analyzed, demonstrating how emotionality can serve as a tool for resistance within the hegemonic male-dominated political sphere (Ben

David and Idan 2022), as well as to which extent gender roles are charged with new meanings and significances in societies that are involved in violent conflicts (Levinas 2022).

With reference to the processes that emerged during the ESOs and to key issues of reconciliation research, further qualification writings addressed topics such as:

- Reconciliation in Judaism. Zempelburg 2019 aimed to cover the meaning and major trends of the concepts of reconciliation and atonement within the Jewish tradition, starting in the days of Ancient Israel and ending in the early twenty-first century.
- The philosophical debate on reconciliation after Auschwitz. Ferrari 2022 dealt with the most important texts of Jewish philosophy of the mid-twentieth century on the issue. Given the many layers of the topic, his research adopted a transdisciplinary approach as a hermeneutic phenomenology through which the concept of reconciliation faced that of irrevocable. He previously presented this concept in Ferrari 2019.
- Assessing the role of justice, transitional justice, and peace processes in reconciliation. O'Malley 2022 introduced three derivative priority rules (of ethics, politics, and local) in the context of a justice definition for reconciliation, offering practical guidance for understanding and dealing with conflict and post-conflict transitions. Dajani 2022 also formulated critical insights on the interrelation between transitional justice and the role of reconciliation in intractable conflicts. Challenging the widespread assumption according which reconciliation is understood as a process or an aim to be achieved after or beyond formal peace processes between political leaderships, Kapshuk 2022 found that principles of reconciliation as crucial elements may be applied in formal agreements to end conflicts.
- National pride and willingness to reconcile. The correlation between the willingness to reconcile and variables such as “national honor” (Leshem and Sagy 2022) and “sense of national coherence” (Sarid, Srour and Sagy 2022) has also thematized by scholars from Ben-Gurion University.
- Empathy research. Further development of empathy research was also brought into the discussions in the project by the doctoral dissertation of Krauß 2020, supervised by Miriam Rose and Martin Leiner.

2. Development of the project “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone”

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” allowed transdisciplinary and multidirectional research to thrive. International conferences and workshops, such as *Alternative Approaches in Conflict Resolution* (Zürich, November 2015) and *Transitional Justice*:

Contemporary Theories and Practices (Jerusalem, September 2016), investigated the relationship between reconciliation research, conflict resolution, and transitional justice. These conferences provided the best opportunity to share the obtained results and exchange and implement fruitful feedback by the “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” teams. Relevant topics received important impulses for their further developments, such as empathy and emotions in conflict and reconciliation, research on trauma and loyalties, narratology, and general reconciliation theory. This was also made possible thanks to workshops and conferences held by international experts, with whom intensive cooperation has been initiated thanks to “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone”, such as: Björn Krondörfer; Eran Halperin; Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela; Christo Thesnaar; Dagmar Kusa; Boyd Blundell; Richard Kearney; Fanie du Toit.

The field experiments ESO1 to ESO9 were a series of encounter experiences beginning in 2014 of approximately 30 persons for each experience. These were conducted together with empirical analyses as planned in the DFG-supported project despite delays and complications from violence-impacted tensions in the Holy Land (especially in 2014), unrest due to the relocation of the American Embassy to Jerusalem (announced 2017, completed 2018), and, at the end of the project, the COVID-19 pandemic (since late 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic required the transformation of ESO9 from a face-to-face encounter between Israeli and Palestinian participants of the preceding ESO into an exchange in epistolary form. Except for ESO9, the ESOs organized by Ben-Gurion University took place without postponements between February 2015 and July 2018.

The interim evaluation after the first three years of “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” already considered the changes in the trips of Palestinians that were needed. The first Auschwitz trip (ESO1) had a worldwide and very positive press echo (Haaretz, New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, Wall Street Journal, Le Monde, La Repubblica, Die Zeit, Die Welt, etc.) as the first group trip from the West Bank visited Auschwitz organized by Palestinians. A very positive article about the trip was reported in Haaretz (by Matthew Kalman, March 28, 2014), but that account was erroneously maligned in the online Al Quds News website, claiming that the trip was funded by Zionist organizations instead of by the DFG. The project leader of the Palestinian group, Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, subsequently faced threats to his life and scholarly occupation. His office at Al Quds University and his library were vandalized, and a little later, his car was torched. Some of the students as well as some organizers of the project had to cope with mixed emotions and with pressure from their respective societies. All this showed a tragic reality inherent in reconciliation research: resistance to reconciliatory processes often comes from one’s own in-group. As a result of these experiences, and in coordination with DFG officials, ESO field trips with Palestinian participants were postponed for a year and redesigned to provide safe and productive experiences. The intervention was designed to emphasize in-group experiences and avoid potential contact-intervention

conditions. The destination was changed from Krakow and Auschwitz to an entirely German national context with visits to Berlin and Buchenwald instead of encountering Jewish historical suffering of the Holocaust. Also, Mohammed Dajani Daoudi transferred leadership of the field experiences to the coordinator of the Palestinian team, Zeina Barakat. The goal of modifying the study design was to optimize conditions for encountering the historical suffering of the outgroup “other”.

Presenting the outcomes of “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” at the conference *Reparation, Recognition and Reconciliation* (November 2018), hosted by Stellenbosch University (South Africa), also was not possible. The attendance of “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” team members had to be canceled at the last minute because the boycott movement against Israeli scholars made participating impossible (Weinthal 2020). From the beginning, “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” was aware that conflict events would impact its development and the results of its field experiments and was prepared to adjust.

3. Achievements of the project “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone”

3.1 Visiting places of suffering of the opposing group

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” assessed that visiting sites of memory by traveling to places where the suffering of the out-group can be experienced is of great importance in making reality and the extent of historical events clear. This is especially relevant when the reality and extent of the out-group’s suffering are denied or downplayed. “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” recognized the participants as partners who both want to and are able to find out the truth themselves. A significant outcome of the ESOs included acknowledging the reality and extent of the suffering of the out-group by all participants, who then also integrated it into their worldview.

3.2 Inputs for theorizing reconciliation research

Field experiments on encountering the suffering of the out-group are of great importance for reconciliation research on the theory level. More and more scholars understand reconciliation as a long-term process. Reconciliatory acts such as confessions of guilt or expressions of forgiveness must be charted as moments on that long-process timeline. And this raises an important question for research: How can reconciliatory processes be optimally explored and profiled in terms of distinct developmental elements and stages?

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” assessed Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness (TST) and Empowerment for Human and Sensitive Communication with the Enemy (ESC)

as two specific and interrelated stages that ought to be examined in more detail in their components through further research. For both TST and ESC, visiting sites of memory by traveling to places where the suffering of the out-group can be experienced is valuable. The strongest effect of traveling to such places is the recognition of the atrocities the out-group endured as fact-reality. These visits have lasting consequences on the worldview of the participants. They modify their emotional attitude toward the suffering of the out-group and lead to a reflective departure from one-sided nationalist narratives or even denial and the emotions associated with them.

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” showed that attitudes of Tragic Sensitive Truthfulness and Empowerment for Human and Sensitive Communication with the Enemy can be reinforced by initiatives such as: participating in additional classes related to the topic; encountering personal testimonies and/or members of the opposing group who are willing to reconcile; viewing and commenting on artworks, documentaries, and films; discussing within spaces that encourage each participant’s own development. In the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this is probably the maximum that can be achieved for a larger number of people under the current conditions of spatial separation and incessant violence.

3.3 Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness (TST) within Action-Research approach

Theorized by the Ben-Gurion University team of the “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” project, Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness describes the shift away from nationalistic stereotypes toward a personal, complex view of the conflict – one that searches for truthfulness grasps the tragedy of the present situation and is open to the opposing group (Ben David et al. 2017; Sternberg, Litvak Hirsch and Sagy 2018). Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness can be reached by integrating the now reflected narrative of the out-group into one’s narrative. For this purpose, the approach of Historical Dialogue has also been integrated into reconciliation research. The goal of such dialogues is the emergence of a common narrative that includes and respects the opposing side. The participants of “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” were well prepared for this step.

The Action-Research approach, also adopted by the Ben-Gurion University team, pursued the goal of creating a space for the participants’ own reflection during the ESOs. In the beginning, all participants were influenced by the fact that at school, in the army, and the media, they had learned nothing or very little about the Nakba and the suffering of the Palestinians. By encountering the suffering of the Palestinians, this narrative was challenged. “Exclamation points” became “question marks”; the overly clear nationalist narrative was replaced by a more complex multi-perspective perception of history that included the narratives of Palestinians and

different groups of Israelis (e. g., Israelis who immigrated from North Africa and the Middle East and felt culturally closer to Palestinians).

The change was not solely cognitive but also emotional. Participants displayed emotions typical of grieving stages, such as denial of reality, sadness, aggression, and loneliness. Expressions of aggression were directed against the group leaders (Yael Ben David and Michael Sternberg), and also against other group members, the educational system, the media, and sometimes against themselves. As stimulated by the encounter with the suffering of the Palestinians and through the diversity in one's own group, the reflexive view did not lead to withdraw loyalty to one's group but a reflected loyalty. For example, one participant commented: "Without the Nakba, there would have been no state of Israel. The state of Israel is necessary for our survival. Nevertheless, the Nakba as injustice against Palestinians (and other injustices against them) should be redressed after so many decades."

Willingness to acknowledge the narrative of the out-group and to reconcile were further analyzed as (negatively) correlated with factors such as "national honor" (Leshem and Sagy 2022) and (positively) with "human dignity" and "sense of national coherence" (Sarid, Srour and Sagy 2022). In a comparative study, Telaku, Mana, Srour, and Sagy 2021 have also assessed and confirmed the positive correlations between willingness to reconcile and a sense of national coherence among Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo.

3.4 Empowerment for Human and Sensitive Communication with the Enemy (ESC)

Empowerment for Human and Sensitive Communication with the Enemy (Barakat et al. 2022), i. e., new possibilities of conversation between Palestinians and Israelis based on the common emotionally-anchored rejection of the Holocaust as a terrible and heinous crime against humanity, consistently took place in the "Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone" project, from the encounter between the two groups in Auschwitz (ESO1, Spring 2014) to their exchange of letters (ESO9, Spring 2021), as well as in private and professional encounters outside the project.

In the Palestinian groups, the encounter with the suffering of the Holocaust and its recognition as real and heinous led to new behaviors. By witnessing the historical evidence of the Holocaust's six million murdered Jews, all Palestinians who participated in the ESOs realized the incomparable suffering of Jews from that tragedy. Some came forward through articles and posts on social media to affirm the reality of the Holocaust and what they had experienced. In their responses to questionnaires, they often answered that they would recommend such trips and repeat them with friends. One participant of the first trip to Buchenwald (ESO 5) visited on his own initiative Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp with some

Palestinian friends during the following vacations. Almost all participants asked for additional trips of this kind.

Palestinian doctoral students visited Buchenwald several times with friends. These sites of memory become significant places for the participants of “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone”. Their meaning unfolded individually in each participant through reflection and empathy, often only over time. Those who continued to work more intensively on these experiences regularly showed empathy with the victims.

3.5 Contextual factors matter

In the midst of an existing conflict, “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” was able to determine to which extent traveling together to the places of the suffering of the out-group can have very different effects.

Contextual factors matter. Without preparation for the visiting group and trust building, the presence of out-group members within a field experience was disruptive to the encounter of the outgroup’s historical suffering. During ESO1 in Auschwitz, for instance, some Palestinians felt observed and emotionally pressured by the presence of project members who were Israeli Jews. After the reaction to Al Quds news after ESO1 travel to Auschwitz, encounters with Israelis were not possible for security reasons. However, ESOs organized by the Ben-Gurion University team showed that encounters with singular members of the other group, who were emphatically conciliatory, could produce increased willingness to reconcile.

In the mixed travel to Auschwitz, reactions such as distrust (suspicion of “brain-washing”), reactance, competitive victimhood, or shifting to current political discussions interfered quite often with the experience of encountering the suffering of the other. Members of the group whose suffering was being addressed, were often overwhelmed by the memories of their in-group suffering. They therefore, appeared to be dismissive interlocutors for the out-group. Members of the visiting group may also be reminded of their own suffering. This was described (Barakat et al. 2022) by a Palestinian participant who was reminded of her time in an Israeli prison during her visit to Auschwitz. When participants are massively thrown back on their own suffering, opening up to the suffering of others is very difficult. Here too, “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” made clear that participants on educational trips to places of suffering never enter such journeys as a *tabula rasa* but are always accompanied by their previous history.

3.6 Empathy and-or willingness to reconcile

Empathy (in the sense of taking victims’ perspective), compassion (for example, expressed through tears or shock reactions), and sympathy with the victims could be observed in numerous participants through the ESOs-visits of places of suffer-

ing. Unsettling empathy (Krondörfer) or an empathy leading to forgiveness was not observed. Some affective response was universally observed – there was no observation of indifference or lack of emotion. One interesting common response from Palestinian participants emphasized that their in-group (Palestinians) was not to blame for the suffering of the out-group (Jews) caused by the Holocaust.

The average effect of increased empathy and willingness to reconcile as measured by questionnaires was not very high among Palestinians. Disruptive contextual factors were so strong during the first trip to Auschwitz (ESO1) that the questionnaires' scores for empathy and willingness to reconcile actually decreased. An important factor was the appearance of the above-described media report in Al Quds News (online) while the ESO1 was still taking place. The following onset of critical reactions from friends and family members demanded the participants loyalty towards Palestine and disassociation from Zionism.

Encounters with the suffering of the out-group also depend strongly on the context in which they take place. If reconciliation is socially desirable in one's own group and if there is hope for peace, it can be expected that such encounters give rise to this sequence:

a) Encounter with the suffering of the other → b) Empathy → c) Willingness to Reconcile

In “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone,” this sequence was statistically verifiable only in individual participants. Conversely, it is to be expected that in more violent conflicts filled with hatred or contempt, satisfaction with the suffering of the other group would also occur to a greater extent instead of empathy. We found small hints of this in only two participants, one of whom changed her mind during the project toward compassion for the victims of the Holocaust. The other participant was ideologically very strongly tied to the view of Hamas.

3.7 Unexpected loyalty-increase

The most paradoxical result of the “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” project was the increase in loyalty to one's own national narrative found among both Israelis and Palestinians during the ESOs. This desire was expressed externally to participants during the interventions of friends and relatives on the occasion of the Al Quds News article (ESO1) but also came very clearly from participants themselves during the visits to Buchenwald. During the bus ride to Buchenwald (ESO5), some participants unfurled Palestinian flags and sang Palestinian folklore, and held a minute's silence in remembrance of the Nakba. Only after acknowledging of their own group's suffering were, they open to talking about their Buchenwald experience.

This outcome is most easily explained by the fact that the readiness to encounter the out-group aroused a strong desire to express loyalty toward one's in-group.

Loyalty effects can be triggered simply by spending time abroad. Since these effects could also be measured among the Israelis at home, it seems that in important subgroups of one's in-group, it is socially undesirable (or not strongly desired) to feel empathy and willingness to reconcile with the out-group. This fact has a major influence on reinforcing loyalties to one's own group and its view of the conflict. In the case of the Israelis, their own national narrative was changed in the sense of Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness as described above. A next step in the dialogue was explicitly achieved only among doctoral students from Palestine, namely that the tragedy-sensitive narrative of the Israelis was also adopted into their own Palestinian narrative, and empathic dialogue was considered. In addition, the desire to express loyalty among Palestinians was reinforced by the fact that they faced accusations of "normalization" from within their group.

3.8 Individual variables in dealing with incomprehensible atrocities

"Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone" confirmed that individual variables played a large role in enacting participants' emotional reactions. During the ESOs, it was very clearly observed that emotionally accessing incomprehensible suffering (of others) through the memory of one's own suffering is a widespread strategy. In our ESOs, this strategy was observed not only among Palestinians and Israelis who experienced each other's suffering by visiting their sites of memory, and among South Africans who visited Buchenwald with Christo Thesnaar and Francesco Ferrari and recalled their Apartheid-experiences (Leiner 2019).

This way of dealing with incomprehensible atrocities does not preclude and rather often allows visitors of sites of memory to see the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust (as a group, and usually as individuals too) as greater and different than that of black South Africans or Palestinians. Encounters with the suffering of the out-group led to a heightened perception of the suffering of one's in-group. In Auschwitz, each group wanted to show the other that it was suffering and hoped for listening and recognition. In many discussions, the effects of being a victim were inextricably intertwined with victimhood as identity (Gabay et al., 2020; Hameiri et al., 2017).

A recurring comment among Palestinians who visited sites of the Holocaust was: "If the Jews experienced this terrible thing once, why are they doing to us know what they are doing to us?" This question was central in the letters between Palestinian participants and Israelis (ESO9). On a broader horizon, the question was asked whether the Holocaust has universal ethical meaning ("Never again for anyone!"), or group ethical meaning ("Never again against Jewish people!"). Another issue in both groups was the connection between those who suffered the

Holocaust and the Nakba and the suffering of Israelis and Palestinians of today. These differences (today's counterparts and victims of that time) allow for different emotional attitudes toward the victims (with whom empathy and compassion were felt in both cases) and toward today's members of the group (whose behavior is experienced as threatening and unjust on both sides). Palestinian participants articulated the continuing relevance of the Holocaust in their conflict with Israeli Jews. With the Holocaust as a reference point, Palestinian-Israeli engage in human and sensitive communication and inquiry, an experience that can benefit both groups. Jewish Israelis conversations with Palestinians benefited from a shared recognition of the Holocaust as a great, perhaps the greatest, human crime in history. This was a claim made publicly by President Mahmoud Abbas shortly after our ESO1 and most likely in reference to its highly publicized travel of Palestinian students to Auschwitz.

3.9 Identity-related resources and the role of recognition

The project also examined religious, cultural, and identity-related resources for willingness to reconcile, such as role models, family tradition, gender, condition as a refugee, etc. In several unexpected places, the importance of these resources was revealed to be very high. One doctoral student associated with the project brought her experience of having committed to be a suicide bomber in the First Intifada (1987) but changed her mind after a conversation with an imam. Another very religious Palestinian woman, whose brother had been kidnapped and murdered by an Israeli settler in 2014 as an act of revenge for an incident near Hebron, decided to participate in the first trip to Buchenwald (ESO5) and was confirmed in her religious view that she cannot have any desire for revenge against Israelis. In this area, there are great opportunities among Israelis and Palestinians to strengthen reconciliation. The avenues of the school system and social media could also lend themselves as ways to disseminate these resources (Dajani 2019; Aldajani 2020).

Further observations were made on intergenerational transmission of trauma and \multiple forms of recognition (of suffering, achievements, humanity, rights, and personal respect for all involved). ESO1, ESO 5, ESO7 (second travel to Buchenwald), and laboratory experiments conducted by Larissa Nögler in Jena were able to show that respect is an independent factor in the success of reconciliation processes. According to Gryglewsky 2013, the recognition of the Holocaust is particularly difficult when the suffering of the Palestinians has not been acknowledged beforehand. This study conducted simultaneously with the preparatory phase of "Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone" is in line with the outcomes of our project. Beyond it, "Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone" incorporated trauma, lack of hope for peace, and conflicts of loyalty more strongly as further explanations for the scarcity of willingness to reconcile.

3.10 Long-term effects

In addition to contextual factors, individual variables, and identity-related resources, an essential role for empathy and for the willingness to reconcile with the out-group is played by loyalty dynamics, by the tendency to defend and maintain one's own narrative, the social desirability of empathic and reconciliatory behavior, and by the existing hope or hopelessness with regard to a just, reconciled peace with the adversary. Far-reaching positions such as cooperation and willingness to reconcile can usually only be achieved if trust and hope are reinforced. They can only emerge in tandem with favorable contextual and individual variables.

Despite the numerous political confrontations during the project (Gaza wars, relocation of the American embassy to Jerusalem, numerous local experiences of violence), long-term effects were observed: the convictions that the suffering of the opposing group was real were very stable; the empathy with the victims and the self-reflective attitude towards one's own history were lasting experiences. Together with the desire awakened in numerous participants to know and find out for themselves and share these experiences, these are significant effects for a path toward further reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For any conflict context, the goal of reconciliation takes on characteristics of the conflict history. The Holocaust and Nakba tragedies and the histories since 1948 present historically and geographically unique elements, and thus, any reconciliation would be likewise unique. In a theoretical sense, a "thick reconciliation" would require public confessions of guilt, responsibility-taking, and requests for forgiveness, which would all be followed by the acceptance of confessions and the granting of forgiveness. Given the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian context, it is hard to imagine how such a "thick reconciliation" could emerge, and certainly, the "Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone" project activities did not strive for such a result. O'Malley 2022 attempts to deal with conceptual questions relevant to reconciliation processes, such that realistic "justice" goals of non-violence and mutually beneficial social cooperation can break impasses of the perceived inconsistency of justice versus peace. Moreover, the approach of Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness and Empowerment to Human-Sensitive Communication offers insight to promote processes of interaction whereby opposing groups can find their own paths toward a reconciliation recognizing historical traumas, value commitments, and potentials for shared futures.

In a conflict with strong power asymmetries, it is evident that a further process will emerge when the stronger side, according to traditional power aspects such as military and economic strength (Israel) will open up to critical self-reflection via Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness and when the weaker side, according to the same traditional power aspects (Palestinian Territories) will receive Empowerment for Human Sensitive Communication.

4. Final Remarks

Reconciliation research began as a scholarly field in the 1990s. It is concerned with the question of how states, societies, organizations, groups, and individuals can come together again after serious incidents (Leiner, 2018). “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” was the first major interdisciplinary reconciliation research project in Germany, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories on this new field of studies.

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” dealt with the issue in conflicts that the suffering of the out-group is often unknown or actively minimized and denied - an issue especially challenging for Israelis and Palestinians. Most Israelis know little about, or even deny, Palestinians’ displacement from the Nakba (1948). For Palestinians, recognition of the Holocaust (1941–1945) is a topic often burdened with misinformation and denial. The “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” approach was based on the hope of encountering the suffering of the out-group through visits to the actual sites of memory like Auschwitz and Ramle. Such encounters required preparation through courses, workshops, attentive personal support, and debriefing afterward. All such project activities aimed to develop participants’ reflective awareness of in-group and out-group narratives and the ways such narratives impact the conflict.

Without exception, all participants in the ESOs organized by the “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” project acknowledged the reality and extent of the suffering of the out-group. The biggest additional step towards reconciliation was that many Israelis developed a reflective attitude towards their own history, which can be described as a position of Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness (TST). It manifested itself in statements such as: “The Jews need a state in order to be safe. But the state was founded on the land of the Palestinians, and as a result, new injustice has occurred”. Among the Palestinians, a recurrent reaction was: “If the Jews experienced this terrible thing once, why are they doing to us now, what they are doing to us?” This position can be called Empowerment to Human Sensitive Communication with the Enemy (ESK). Both positions leave behind one-sided nationalist narratives and acknowledge the suffering of others. Both positions play a major role in the beginning of reconciliation processes, even before apologies in each other occur.

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” showed surprising characteristics in its ESOs, such as increased loyalty to one’s in-group and the development of a reflexive narrative. Whereby feelings of empathy, sympathy, and decreased fear toward the opposing group were noted, however, further processes toward reconciliation are blocked by contextual factors, such as the lack of a political partner that would convey trust and of a situation that would convey hope. Emotional effects were not as large, nor did they lead as clearly toward the willingness to reconcile as hypothesized at the beginning of the project. Reflexive recognition of reality led a relatively large proportion of participants to share their findings beyond the experiment and to want to find out more themselves.

In addition to the field experiments, laboratory experiments in Jena and Tel Aviv investigated the positive influence of respect on willingness to reconcile, agency as a basic need of victims, and the distinction between victimhood and victim identity. “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” made further studies possible as well, which have examined: the centrality of Auschwitz for the concept of reconciliation; the importance of religious and social resources for reconciliation; the particular experience of Palestinian refugee women, and their view of reconciliation and martyrdom; the importance of textbooks in transmitting images of the enemy; the possibilities of using social media to promote reconciliation. All these studies contribute to a better understanding of the field experiments.

The “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” project was invaluable for the still young research direction of reconciliation studies, It has developed a very efficient transdisciplinary approach to overcome Holocaust and Nakba denial. The most important project result is the description of reconciliation as a long-term process in which trust, forgiveness, and recognition of the truth, including the guilt (culpability) of one’s in-group, are often not achieved directly. As formulated by Israeli participants in the project, a tragedy-sensitive perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an essential step toward improving relations.

“Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” interventions provide insights relevant to other reconciliation processes, especially those where contested traumatic histories are relevant. Organized site visits or trips to sites of memory and places of suffering (Holocaust, Nakba) of the out-group, perhaps considered hostile, can also benefit from project results and experiences.

The scientific reconciliation research conducted in “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” is also economically relevant for peace-, encounter- and history projects carried out by governmental and non-governmental institutions. This applies to projects in contexts outside the Israel-Palestine conflict and in relation to other experiences of suffering than the Holocaust and the Nakba. The relatively large sums invested in such projects are still matched by a relatively low level of scientific evaluations of the respective interventions. There is often criticism of such projects (see: Engstrom 2009), but there is also a lack of empirical studies working with an appropriate variety of methods.

Although the results of “Hearts of Flesh–Not Stone” are commercially relevant, they are made available to the public as open access by parties involved in the project. Further studies can be initiated at numerous points. The two positions of Tragedy Sensitive Truthfulness and Empowerment to Human Sensitive Communication with the Opponent should be researched more closely. They are often at the beginning of reconciliatory processes and are also specific to how people deal with war experiences.

In addition, the significance of different forms of recognition for reconciliation processes is still a broad field that needs to be investigated in a much more differ-

entiated way. What is the significance of the recognition of facts and-or narratives? What is the recognition of persons? For what and what do people in conflicts want to be recognized? For their suffering as victims? For their humanity? As persons who have rights? Or for a combination of all of the above? These are questions we would like to explore in later research.

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