

Reconciliation Beyond Subjective histories

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1. Conflict Resolution

It has long been recognized among conflict resolution professionals that ethnic and religious conflicts are the most difficult to mediate. Less frequently it has also been noted that progress in this necessitates addressing the root historical causes. One view is that it should be based on "a process of transactional contrition and forgiveness between aggressors and victims" to establish "mutual acceptance and reasonable trust." "This process depends on joint analysis of the history of the conflict, recognition of injustices and resulting historic wounds, and acceptance of moral responsibility where due."¹ I want to reserve judgment about the question of forgiveness, but there is little doubt I think that "joint analysis of the history of the conflict" is a foundational requirement. I shall return to this.

The need for reciprocal historical understanding is required because most conflicts involve competing notions of victimization, mutual real or imagined fear, and a memory of a catastrophe. This leads to the recognition of the need of acknowledgement. Ordinarily, this translates into facilitating mechanism for communication between "representatives" of the groups in order to change political attitude. The focus is on the personal trust building, interaction, and acknowledgement. Indeed in the field of informal diplomacy, what is generally known as track two, or multi-

¹ Montville, Joseph V. "The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution." *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice Integration and Application*. Dennis J. D. Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe, eds. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993. Pp. 112-127.

track diplomacy, the goal is to change political attitudes through this personal interaction. These special contacts it is argued can delegitimize stereotypical views by introducing new data and encouraging the stakeholders on each side through establishing a working trust to reexamine their views.

What is the role of history in this process? One view is to “to elicit specific grievances and wounds of the groups or nations in conflict which have not been acknowledged by the side responsible for inflicting them. Only the victims know for certain which historic events sustain the sense of victimhood and these become cumulatively the agenda for healing.”² However, the challenge is that while the victims’ perspective of the suffering and the grievances is essential, the view does not necessarily reflect a valid history. Indeed if the process is psychological primarily, and the goal is to enable the patient to recognize her source of suffering and come to terms with it, we face the challenge of validation and recognition. But when we come to conflict resolution, the mere recognition of the grievances establishes the framework, not the resolution. It is necessary to match the grievances with the external perspective, and move beyond the myth of the subjective memory. Transforming the victimhood psychology requires the negotiation of a new political framework between the sides, and the question is what can be added to the tool kit to achieve this?

It is worth noting that historians and scholars can contribute towards the changing perspectives by rigorous analysis which can be done independently, and later on introduced into the negotiations. Serious historical research and writing of historic grievances need not depend entirely on the existence of a problem-solving workshop. Unilateral efforts at balanced review might stimulate the attention and response of “the

² Montville, *ibid.*

other” to previously unknown or ignored aspects of history of violence and aggression which will provide the historical base upon which a trust can be built. Unfortunately, when it comes to conflict resolution mechanism, too often the attention is to the interaction and good social and psychological rapport among the participants, and too little to the product that will provide the material for wider dissemination.

2. Scholarly Civic Involvement

How does the desire of scholars, historians, to be involved in and relevant to contemporary society and politics assimilates with professional integrity and the need of conflict resolution to counter nationalist mythologies? These challenges are most often concerned with social justice and human rights, though not exclusively. The overwhelming political need is to develop a discourse to engage and counter public misconceptions and ignorance that serve as fodder for ethnic and national conflict, opening space for better understanding with the ‘other’. This dual goal is attainable by explicitly adhering to a separation between 1) the politics of advancing non-confrontational history, and 2) writing a professional history that is not directly shaped by political needs. More on this dilemma later. For now, it is adequate to be aware that for a historical discourse to be effective, and not manipulative, it has to represent first-rate professional history.

The need for reparatory history emerges most clearly in cases where there is an urgent need to amend past wrongs, or where the demand for historical redress continues to fan a violent conflict. Reparatory history is increasingly being viewed as a right for redress, and has become a wide-ranging aspirational goal of the politics of transition as well as a tool of conflict resolution. The scope of possible redress includes

retributive justice (courts, tribunals, Truth Commissions) restorative (reparation; restitution of property; restitution of cultural property; historical commissions) and symbolic, such as apologies. Each of these provides a form of atonement. To understand the appeal of redress, we have to go beyond legal analysis to explore the centrality of identity in redress, in particular the role of history in identity as a frame of analysis.

The force of morality in redress revolves around 1) the question of explicit recognition of wrongs as a precondition for redress, and 2) the relation of material redress to symbolic quest. While the form of redress varies (restitution, reparations, or retribution) for redress to play a role in conflict resolution and reconciliation it has to transcend the quest for justice and the individual guilt and responsibility, and address the group identity, paying attention to the ethics of rights and historical imagination.

Redressing the past is a developing field in politics (and scholarship) that has grown roughly in parallel to the expansion of human rights. Both began in the aftermath of World War II, (redress was most evident in the first agreement of reparation Germany paid to Jews and Israel, which is the first case in which a state acknowledged guilt and assumes compensation without being coerced by an external victorious military. Similar to human rights, it was overshadowed by the Cold War, and reappeared in the 1970s with the incipient growth of democratization. We associate this with a concept that evolved in the 1990s, that is Transitional Justice, but the phenomenon preceded it, in most cases a matter of minimal justice and large frustrations, but this was evident from Greece, Spain, Portugal, to Latin America and finally eastern Europe. By the time South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission captured the public imagination, the concept was well entrenched within the growing group of advocates pursuing politics of redress. Redress included retributive justice (trials); restorative (restitution, compensation,

apologies); and a hybrid: truth commissions which were varied among themselves worldwide. Notably, those mechanisms address mostly the immediate past, and it was less frequent that the historical legacy was redressed. That occurred through some form or rather of engaging a historical commission or inquiry.

The need for civil society to engage in addressing historical conflicts impacting the national identity is true both within states and among states. It stems from the recognition that many political conflicts, internationally and domestically, are rooted in conflicts over historical narratives. The concept of 'historical conflict' demands clarification. Many conflicts, probably all conflicts, have historical context. In contrast certain conflicts are 'historical' in the sense that it is the legacy of the conflict that continues to haunt the present, the memory that shapes the identity of the protagonists and its ramification, more than the dispute as an ongoing conflict. The historical context of a conflict is distinct from a historical conflict. These are two separate categories. The historical contexts of conflicts are all around us: postcolonial conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, Russia and Georgia, we can go on. In each the history of the conflict is critical for an understanding, but the conflict is about the present: territory, resources, power. In contrast a *historical conflict* is about our perspective of the past, the legacy of which has ramification at present. The legacy of the Second World War between Japan and China is a well-known example. How many died in Dresden and what is the significance of the numbers? In the conflict between Turkey and Armenia there are the historical conflicts (the question of genocide) as well as the contemporary (Azerbaijan) which is shaped by fears stemming from historical memory. In these cases the divided memory and the lack of acknowledgment shape current relations, more than, for example, trade disputes, territorial ambitions, or electoral politics.

The historian's expertise is obviously useful for both types of conflicts. Understanding the historical *context* of a conflict may allow politicians to engage differently in efforts to resolve the disagreement. In cases of *historical conflicts*, however, the historical narrative is the very core of the conflict. In this case constructing a narrative that bridges the differences and negotiating the polarized perspectives provides for a direct intervention at the heart of a conflict. It is a new tool of conflict resolution.

For scholars and advocates to cooperate there has to be a middle road where the constructed narrative has to address major issues of the identity of the nation, and ethnicity, while making it accessible to the public. That in many cases will mean a simplified version of history, but one that is not on a slippery slope to propaganda. The first order is 'Not to Lie' or perpetrate myth, that is, historians should not advance presentist claims that have no historical foundations, is neither new nor controversial. I believe this should not be a controversial proposition. Accepting the 'authenticity of the past' as a requirement for historical narratives is a must not a virtue. Conversely, although being motivated by contemporary issues is frequently a worthy rationale for an inquiry, constructing a historical narrative to fit a contemporary purpose cannot be the end goal.

3) Examples:

Kenya

One example of this type of involvement was evident in January 2009 when a group of Kenyan historians and intellectuals participated in a conversation on the role history can play in addressing ethnic animosity in the country. The politics of ethnicity is at the heart of Kenya's identity: parties, relationships, networks, and much of the social

relations are grounded in ethnicity, ethnic memory and ethnic fear, or in what is known as 'tribalism', that is the Kenyan designation of 'negative ethnicity.' Prior to the December 2007 election – and the post election violence – many politicians exploited selective narratives around 'domination', 'marginalization' and the 'land issue' to advocate violent approaches to serve their electoral purposes.

Redressing the past is at the core of human rights discourse in Kenya these days. This is not limited to naming and shaming current or recent abuse, it is a struggle over justice and impunity, it is a strong sense that lack of accountability is at the heart of a failed state, or at least the risk that Kenya may turn into one. Human rights in this sense is not only prospective, but retroactive. What would constitute accountability is not spelled out, and presumably there is no static target but rather a process. This will depend on the way the various commissions and other civil society organizations perform.

One example for unofficial civil society activity can illustrate this. In the workshop that explored historical advocacy, there was a voice – at first hesitant – which argued that Kenyan historians have avoided their public responsibility to address the urgent issues of society by 'hiding' in colonial history, which is safer, and does not force the encounter with contemporary political divisive issues. There was general agreement in the room with the statement, and one of the motivating factors for future work stemmed exactly from the need to face this challenge. The fear of engaging potential issues that forces the scholar out of the 'ivory protection', and presents challenges and even the risk of violence is justifiably a critical impediment in social involvement.

Since the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) was appointed it has been under tremendous pressure due to criticism of corruption, complicity of the

Chair in historical crimes, and suffered the seemingly determined government approach to hinder its work, as evident by the continuous budgetary limitations. Resignations and retractions occupied the commission's work and publicity, and there is continuous pressure on the TJRC to shape up or be disbanded. It has begun to engage the public but skepticism and recrimination are pervasive. The civil society has been better at criticizing than providing assistance or presenting alternatives.

East Asia

The legacy of the Second World War and of Japanese colonialism is possibly the most controversial issue between Japan, Korea, and China. These historical disagreements overshadow trade disputes, and often manifested in territorial disputes over several small islands. Given the size of the countries and their wealth, there is little surprise that the conflictual topics are subject to intense scrutiny by both government officials and researchers, as well as by civil society organizations. The most prominent topics include sexual slavery, that is the "comfort women"; massacres, genocide and war crimes (foremost Nanjing, but others too), and history textbooks. The historical disputes engage high diplomacy and over the last generation have been at the heart of the regional relations.

In October 2009, Japanese Foreign Minister Okada (Katsuya) outlined as part of a vision of an East Asian community the need for a common history textbook in East Asia: "It would be ideal in the future to create a common textbook (among Japan, China, and Korea), but it will take a long time. As the first step, it is

important to conduct joint historical research.”³ The statement highlighted the progress over a generation -- that is the recognition that a joint textbook is an aspired goal -- but also the recognition of a joint historical research as a diplomatic tool. There has been a proliferation of international academic conferences on these historical disputes; government-sponsored joint historians’ commissions; and jointly-authored civil society sponsored history school books.

Among the highlights:

- In 2001, the Korean-Japanese summit established the first government-sponsored joint historical commissions. In 2006, after numerous rounds of meetings and discussions, they published their research findings on a wide range of topics from ancient to recent history. (Currently, the Japan-Korea Joint Historical Research is in its second phase,)
- In 2005, after their bilateral relations reached a low point after widespread “anti-Japanese” demonstration in Chinese cities, the Chinese and Japanese government agreed in principle to establish a similar a joint historians’ commission.
- a wave of joint publications, in the form of collected essays after conferences, (historians have joined each other in short- or medium-term projects aimed at producing historical works to be published in respective countries.)

³ “E. Asian Nations Seek Common History Textbook” *Korea Times* (October 8, 2009). In (Daqing ms.)

- Japan has more civil society organizations; Korean participation is more influenced by government; while from China the government scholars participate also in “civil society” projects.
- Groups of young historians are publishing shared histories. Local history (such as on less immediately controversial topics as on Japanese colonialism 16-17th century; gendered based historical publication; etc. Some of the publications have historical mistakes, but these are not nationalist motivated myths.
- In Japan much of this movement has had an appearance of opposition, and mainstream has been slower to adopt the historical rewriting. This is understandable, because so far the phenomenon has largely been critical of Japan, and much less of the violence and crimes committed by Korea or China.
- Perhaps the great accomplishment is the acceptance of the idea of a joint-ownership of history in the sense that no single country can have an exclusive claim to its own history.
- In the end, in varying degrees, participants in these common history projects came to question the historical narratives in their own countries.
- It appears that they have realized that such dialogues are not only exchanges intended to prevent the distortion of historical facts, but also part of the process of building a future-oriented society where different perspectives and “multilateral values” can coexist.

- Alleviate ignorance about the reciprocal histories.

Israel Palestine

Let me give a couple of examples from recent work I did with scholars from Israel and Palestine who participated in attempts to build a shared narrative.

One was a historical atlas of the 1948 war, another was on shared sacred sites, and a third one was on a history of Haifa. The atlas has gone a long way towards completion, but political deterioration in the region, and finally the Gaza war of December 2008/9 led to a suspension of the work. It is unclear whether it will be renewed, and whether it will be done by the same participants. The project lasted a few years, and had suffered from the political tension, yet it went a long way forward, even during the second intifada.

The notion of challenging the national narratives can be done from various angles. Such was the participation of one of the Israeli scholars, who is politically idiosyncratic, and is viewed publically as a radical right winger, but does not see himself as such. His presence in a group working with Palestinians ruffled emotions, but was agreed upon by both Palestinians and Israelis, in part not only because the expertise he brought to the team was greatly appreciated, but also because of the notion that his presence would symbolize to Israeli readers that their national concerns were included and fully represented in the emerging shared narrative. It is noteworthy that the professional standards of this scholar made him politically unpredictable; that is, although nationalist, he would support a 'Palestinian' position because he believed it to be historically true, even if it countered received Israeli narrative. Solidarity and partially in this case were both destabilized, because the professional solidarity was in tension

with the national solidarity. This tension can only take place in doing, not theorizing about it.

The first task was to identify issues that are controversial, consequential, and feasible for an empirical investigation within the constraints of a limited budget. They decided to attempt two specific projects: creating an atlas of the 1948 war, and a joint narrative of scared sites. Each of these created its own difficulties. The atlas presented challenges from the mundane – such as which maps exist; which will need to be created, what should be displayed; to the principled and unanticipated issue of annotating the maps. What is the narrative that is to be included? How much background? What is pertinent? How to describe and name sites and events? These and similar issues had to be worked out, some of which were divided along national lines, others were more professional dilemmas. The language problem was resolved by embracing English as a working language and committing to publish in three languages, including naming places in each language. Most of the maps from the period are British, and the needed additional maps were created by Palestinian and Israeli geographers. Several technical issues had to be resolved, including for example the size of a dot on a map to indicate a place. The dilemma was that too large or small dots of color represent the map and the area differently, and convey seemingly alternative realities, somewhere between the Palestinians' narrative of a populated country taken over by colonialists, to the Zionists' narrative of a land with no people to a people with no land. These fundamental issues had to be negotiated over the size of the dot on the map. When both sides agreed on it, they constructed a *via media* of a shared narrative.

A different issue arose over how to describe and narrate mixed cities. The existing maps do not delineate the ethnic divisions within the cities. This was one type of map that had to be drawn from historical data, which are anything but self evident.

Describing the process of modernization of Palestine can go back to the early Zionist settlement in the second half of the nineteenth century, or back further to the eighteenth century and the rule of Dahir Al Omar. Choosing any one of these frames clearly has political impact.

A second Palestinian-Israeli working group was engaged in intense negotiation over which sacred sites to include in the joint narrative. One issue was how to create parity. The project had to be manageable, so not all sites could be included. But does the list have to present a similar number of sites for each group? Since there are many more Muslim and Christian sites, what constitutes parity? A straight-forward statistical representation could not work. Instead an agreement needed negotiation of what would present to the reader both a sense of shared land, and the numerical imbalance between both sides. Whether shared sites are a source of conflict or coexistence is in part a matter of representation. The groups have encountered numerous difficulties, and administrative and organizational hurdles did not make the work easier. The successes were more local, meaning in the constructing of narrative, than on the larger society. Yet, it provides a rich experience for participants to understand the possibilities and limitations of constructing shared narratives, a methodology that has yet to be widely embraced.

Armenian Turkey -- WATS – Yerevan

The history of Armenian Turkish joint historical work has seen an enormous expansion over the last decade, it involves a number of groups, sites and projects. It is part of the process of democratization in Turkey, and the recognition by Turkey of the 1915 genocide is seen as an essential aspect of

Turkish democratization. In this is sense it is both an interstate and an intrastate issue. Perhaps one of the most active group is the Armenian Turkish Workshop which has been initiated by Michigan University faculty, has met in several workshops involves an active bulletin board email list, which involves both activists and scholars, in both countries, and very intensive Armenian diaspora advocacy. The workshop allowed for the most innovative work in the field to be presented in an multi perspective environment, and led to more research and exchanges. There was the **Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission** which operated from 2001to 2004, it engaged track two diplomacy, and reached certain understanding in an effort to bring the countries to open more negotiations. Regarding the question of genocide, it outsourced the issue to a law firm through the guidance of the International center for Transitional Justice, which rendered the conclusion that since the Genocide Convention was not in effect in 1915, it cannot apply legally to destruction of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire, but that the substance of it, had such a convention existed would have applied. The commission did not embrace the proposed conclusion, and ended its work. Other joint projects have also been slow, but these proliferate.

One such project note mentioning is “Speaking to One Another: Personal Memories of the Past in Armenia and Turkey” an ongoing project of which a first phase has been completed with the publication in 2010 of a book based on oral histories that examines the memory and post memory of people in both countries. Over a150 interviews, of many hours each were conducted, a sample

of which was published, and the transcript themselves are yet to be analyzed. But one provisional conclusion is that there is much more tacit knowledge of the Armenian demise in Turkey than is publically acknowledged, including of the kidnapping – adoption of Armenian women and children by Turks, who now bring up their part Armenian identity.

The question of the 1915 genocide is a major international issue, which everyone is familiar with. Highlights include the legislation in recognition of the genocide in many countries, the denial law in France; the spring routine in the US of recognizing or not recognizing the genocide through congressional legislation. The visibility ensures the interest globally, which means that due to Turkey great international centrality there is more funding for civil society projects that involve historians and addressing the genocide question. The topic had been taboo in Turkey, and mentioning the word led to trials, but that has recently changed.

The commemoration of the 90th anniversary (2005) was the first time that Turkish civil society relatively widely embraced the topic as one of importance, and Turkish universities held a joint conference which was initially blocked by the government. Hirant Dink was the most famous activist in Turkey, and he was murdered in response (2007) to the growing visibility of the issue. His huge public funeral became a formative experience for Turkish Armenian relations.

4) The goal of historical activism

Motivated by the work of human rights advocates, the question for scholars is in what ways can a civil society organization support these goals? The eventual mission I believe is to facilitate a *counter movement* to the claims by nationalists in many countries who perpetrate propaganda and historical mythologies under the guise of history aiming to inflame conflict. In times of crisis, nationalists always find audience and supporters. In contrast it is more difficult to prop a liberal, non-nationalist, rational position. A wider perspective of history, and of national rivalry, especially in times of conflict, has no 'traditional' or 'natural' constituency of advocates. The goal of historical activism is to facilitate a powerful counter narrative that can inform public discourse and undermine the nationalist exclusionary claims of truth well before a crisis takes hold, and in the best of cases, it is a long-term process.

The method to achieve this is to attempt and demarcate the borders of the nationalist narrative and to examine it in conjunction with those who are impacted by it, namely the "others" in the story, but who are not in a position to narrate it. Since no national narrative is told in vacuum, the goal is to bring together scholars from both/all sides of a conflict to write joint narratives that would contextualize the national history.

Given that most of the public in every country is ignorant of any alternative narratives its national view, even the introduction of alternatives provide for a possible significant move towards bridging narratives. The recognition that contemporary society may suffer from ignorance more than denial of historical responsibility is yet to become widely acceptable.

5) Shared narratives

The observation that historical narratives are partial should not be controversial, even if our aspiration is to transcend it. In this they are not different from other systems of

knowledge. One challenge is to reconnect between the recognition of partial truth and the public desire for more than partial truth. (Partial in this case should be understood both as not complete, but also as partisan).

But if the nature of partial truth is that it has a 'social location' and is constructed within structures – economic, political – one goal might be to expand its social location. The recognition of the social construction of truth and knowledge, historical in this case, directs our attention to what constitutes the relevant 'social' group that does the construction. In science, we know who qualifies as an authority, at least we have a discipline – history of science – that conducts an intensive exploration to locate the site of legitimization which has progressed from the genius to the paradigm to the production of material culture. For history as a method of conflict resolution I would like to suggest the analogous notion of 'shared narrative' as a legitimizing methodology. The authority would come from the identity and the work of the scholars and work that is involved.

The term 'shared narrative' is used in this context to describe a historical construction that intertwines and brings closer the perspectives of two or more national histories that are in direct conflict. The shared narrative is unlikely to be linear or monovocal and will most likely have distinct registers. There may be meta-agreement and a variety of interpretations about the local and the specifics, or the other way around. The aim of a shared narrative is to erase the exclusionary dichotomies along national lines, and to redirect the multiplicity of methodologies or interpretations along professional rather than identity divisions. Although there may remain empirical disagreements, the critical rupture will not be among the participants in the shared narrative, but between the historians who participate in a shared solidarity and the nationalist histories. For the public the conflict is very real, and the division is along two camps. This has to be

recognized as a frame, a context that is also essential for scholars who feel commitment to the cause.

The ultimate intended audience of a shared narrative is the public, which must include the scholarly community as the experts. This influences the methodology. Although the negotiations first began with the recognition by the scholars that each side was trying to persuade the other of its own position, it became clear, even if it was not always remembered or explicit, that the final texts and maps have to be acceptable –or at least defensible – to both publics. Too much imbalance would delegitimize the project. The constructing of the shared narrative has first to persuade the participants as proxies for the public.

This is one example of many ethnic and nationalist conflicts that are rooted in unresolved historical disputes and injustices. The goal of civil society ought to be to confront these distortions and myths of history by fostering joint work in order to lead to 'islands' of recognition, reconciliation and understanding of 'the other', which can provide building blocks that will contribute towards the groundwork for peace. These 'islands' are of respected scholars and civil society leaders from opposing sides of a conflict. They could work together to create and disseminate shared narratives that provide reliable facts and commentary as a basis for public debate and discussion. Through these collaborative efforts, academics and civil society organizations ought to develop civil society networks of engaged scholars.

Conclusion

Historians face the increased challenge that advocacy and redress as a human right issue continues to increase in importance. The most significant part of redress is

recognition, which is within the scholarly terrain to demythologize nationalist histories that denigrate the other and incite conflict. But reconciliation built on historical myth may be in its own way counter-productive, and may diminish the value of the enterprise if it is viewed as propaganda. This is particularly so because the role of history in contemporary politics is central, and historians must recognize that isolation has detrimental impact and contributes to political violence in many societies. Scholars may not be able to stem the violence, but I believe they should try. In large doses, such advocacy can be healing for societies. Too much bad and wrong history is traded by nationalists without a counter movement that can respond. Fortunately, there are many scholars who wish to participate as advocates and utilize their expertise to do so. I believe we have responsibility to facilitate such advocacy: create the tools and build the organizational capacity. The combination of technology, new media, and human rights commitment may yet lead to a new type of advocacy – scholarship.