From invisibility to game changers – Palestinian citizens of Israel

Rethinking reconciliation in the Israeli- Palestinian conflict
From the perspective of Israeli-Arab society

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Abstract

This study explores the possibilities of reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the perspective of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, also known as the Israeli-Arab population vis-à-vis its relations with the Jewish citizens of the state. The theoretical and empirical frameworks aim to provide further research to the field of reconciliation through peaceful containment of narratives between deeply divided groups in intractable conflict. Given the political stalemate in the region, I argue that containment of narratives between Jewish and Arab compatriots is the only feasible mechanism to realize appropriate reconciliation processes between the people.

Keywords: Israeli-Arabs, Israeli-Jews, Reconciliation, Narrative containment, intractable conflicts, conflict transformation

Characters: 69561

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1   Introduction

1.1   Foreword

"This conflict does not have a "just" solution… weighing the relative "rights" of the contestants. […] The partition of this country… is the only feasible solution, even if neither of the two sides will recognize its justice and become inwardly reconciled to it. The alternative is war to the bitter end, which would amount to a catastrophe" (Yeshayahu Leibowitz, cited in Goldman, 1992, 232).

This study is written at a time of many revolutions, the entire Middle East is in a constant jolt that only intensifies in recent years following the Arab Spring and civil war in Syria, leaving this region in a state of uncertainty. Likewise the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is locked in a negative cycle after the failure of the Oslo Agreement, its most violent confrontation (second intifada), the separation of Palestinian Authority into two entities in Gaza and the West Bank, repeated violent cycles between Hamas and Israel and perhaps post- Obama/Kerry plan of two-state solution with no positive outcome. These conditions increase the sense of frustration among the populations involved in the conflict and the international community and the question remains whether there is still a possibility to reconcile these two nations after 100 years of conflict.

In the citation above professor Leibowitz, in his rebuke prophecy, denies the assumption that any settlement of Israeli-Palestinian conflict can involve a situation where a particular party could prove its narrative as right. Thus the reconciliation between the two conflicting narratives cannot be reflected through the element of justice. According to Leibowitz the solution must be two-states partition, whether both sides are willing to compromise on their respective narratives or righteousness, or not. Because of the destructiveness of the alternative (i.e. war to the bitter end) there will be no choice but to bring to a state of containment, willingly or unwillingly, of the other's narrative while physically separating the two countries (Goldman, 1992, 232).

This research acknowledges Leibowitz's assumption that justice of one side's narrative is indeed unattainable in the Israeli-Palestinian. However the process of reconciliation is not a fixed process and tends to emphasize different elements from one conflict to another. State of mutual containment could be reached through other means of reconciliation than the element of justice.

1.2   Contextual framework of the research

Throughout the history addressing the conflict between Israeli and Palestinian narratives was substantially attributed to people of two entities, the state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority and was mainly based on the paradigm of a conflict resolution (e.g. Oslo agreement and the ongoing Kerry initiative). This usually refers to tangible disputes like territory and borders.

This study emphasizes the conflict transformation paradigm that relates to understanding the essences of the conflict and seeks the reconstruction of social organization and expansion of interdependence in order to transform it towards more peaceful direction (Lederach, 1996). Contrary to conflict resolution that relies on intergovernmental negotiations or mediation, this study reflects on the role of inside actors that is more compatible with conflict transformation (Strömbom, 2010, 17), that is Israeli-Arab population vis-à-vis their interdependence with the Israeli state and its Jewish society.

1.2.1   Why narrative containment?

In the Israeli – Palestinian conflict the negation of the other's narrative is a central element. Demonizing and de-humanizing the other makes it much easier for violence to erupt since it reduces the feeling of one's own guilt. In addition it reinforces the feeling of victimization towards the other, making it a substantial challenge for reconciliation to take place. Therefore it is essential to conflicting parties under the same political sphere to alter negative interdependence of their identity to positive interdependence (Kelman, 2004, 121).

During Oslo Peace Process, reconciliation efforts were taking place between Israelis and Palestinians on civil society level. These efforts conducted by non-governmental organizations or other informal institutions from both sides (Herzog & Hai, 2005, 7-8).

Today it is clear that these actions were failed to have any impact on the political level as well as on mobilizing reconciliation locally. The political situation in Israel and the Palestinian Authority presents pretty grim picture for the process of reconciliation. In the absence of efficient peace talks, considering the volatile political situation, the internal rift between the Palestinians factions and the situation in which each party does not perceive the other as a partner for peace, it is difficult to produce the basis for interaction between the two peoples. For the past decade Israel has political agenda of unilateral actions, e.g. the withdrawal from Gaza and the construction of the separation fence in the West Bank. Thus created a situation in which the interaction is minimal with "hard" borders (Herzog & Hai, 2005,9-10). These issues raise serious questions about the possibility of solving this dispute through the process of peaceful containment of

narratives and require re-thinking of the subject and its implementation in practice, which this study seeks to shed light on.

1.2.2   Why Israeli-Arabs and why now?

The Israeli-Arab (Palestinian citizens of Israel) population has a unique position that requires a separate outlook since they do not take part in these conditions of separation and hard borders but rather coexists with the Jewish population while sharing identity with the other Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza.

     The origin of the Arab population in Israel is in the minority of Palestinians, anywhere between 60,000 to 150,000, depending on the sources, who remained and became citizens of the newly established Jewish state of Israel in the aftermath of 1948-war (Sa'di & Abu- Lughod, 2007,3). Some 70 percent of them were Muslim, 20 percent were Christian, and 10 percent were Druze. Today this population numbers about 1.5 million that is approximately 20 percent of the Israeli population, with more or less the same religious divergence (Lavi, 2011, 36).

     The Israeli-Arab population experienced the most significant event of the Palestinian narrative, the nakba, i.e. the loss of Palestine and becoming a defeated minority in their homeland due to 1948-war and the establishment of the State of Israel. This population was always observed with suspicion by both Israel and other Palestinian factions and as a minority in their homeland faced adaptation difficulties and discrimination (Shougry, 2012, 6). However, the vast majority of Israeli-Arabs tie their fate and future with the State of Israel rather than seek to become part of a future Palestinian state (Haidar, 2011, 24).

     The helplessness and inability of the various initiatives over the years to resolve the conflict also influence the Arab society in Israel by paralyzing the determination of its social status and its economic progress. Aziz Haidar clarifies that the status of Israeli- Arabs is liminal (where self identity is not certain). In other words, they belong to two conflicting parties at the same time as they are being completely excluded by both of them (Haidar, 2011,11). This is expressed, for instance, by the mutual fear of both Jews and Arabs in Israel regarding the sociopolitical status of Israeli-Arabs. The Arabs themselves fear of transfer in case of a two-states solution, i.e. transforming them into Palestinian citizens. The Jews are both afraid of domestic demographic shift in favor of the Arabs and that increasing nationalism in the Arab sector may create a threat to the security of Israel (Shamir, 2009, VI).

     The relationship between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel is an unfortunate matter that evokes the feeling of missed opportunity in retrospect. This is a high-charged issue fed intensively by the circumstances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and yet remained repressed in the public debate for many years. This study seeks to explore positions of Arab society in Israel in the areas of reconciliation, relations with the Jewish state and its Jewish citizens and within

political and social contexts. The overarching aim of this study is to expand the concept of reconciliation within this conflict by examining interactions between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel. Thus, building mutual legitimacy and containment of the other's narrative through reconciliation is at focus.

1.3   Operationalization of terms

I chose to use the term "Israeli-Arabs" even though its ambiguous character and the risk to be perceived as biased. There is a high tendency among Israeli- Jews to categorize Arab citizens that define themselves "Palestinians" as the enemy while those who define themselves "Israeli-Arabs" as loyal compatriots (Bar & Eady, 1998, 523). I am aware of this tendency however this is not the case in this study. The use of this term is made because is often used by all my acquaintances, Arabs and Jews alike, and also generally by Jews and Arabs in media. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that this is not to undermine the Palestinianness of this population.

1.4   Research design

The theoretical framework of this study refers to the field of reconciliation through peaceful containment of narratives in intractable conflicts. The empirical study concentrates on reconciliation mechanisms within the Israeli society, between the Jewish and Arabic communities. In terms of methodology, I conduct a qualitative case study of the Israeli-Arab population by applying the method of process tracing on my empirical cases. The aim is to trace the process of narrative containment within interactions between Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Arabs. Four empirical cases are being investigated, all classic cases of attempts to achieve mutual peaceful containment of narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first empirical case being studied is the bridging narrative project that sought to rewrite master narratives in Israeli history books. The second case is the writing of common history books, the double narrative project. The third and the fourth are through joint educational projects for Jews and Arabs. In terms of material this study is mainly based on secondary sources in form of academic literature but also primary sources, such as texts and statements from individuals and institutions that have participated in the reconciliation projects.

1.5   Aim and argument of the study

I aim to contribute to the empirical and theoretical research area, by highlighting the potential of building reconciliation through the concept of narrative containment. Subsequently, I argue for the potential of this research to contribute to the field of conflict transformation in the wider conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The overarching aim of this study refers mainly to exploring what mechanisms of reconciliation between Jews and Arabs within the prism of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that incorporate peaceful containment of narratives internally in Israel. The non-scientific relevance of such research is its possible positive implications on the relation between Israel and its Arab minority in terms of civil status, welfare and political engagement.

It is important to stress that with this study I do not aim to determine the merits or demerits of any of Israeli or Palestinian narratives, nor do I wish to resolve their differences. My purpose is rather to examine them in a fair and practical way where there is a possibility to overcome their zero-sum character, in a situation where they could accommodate the other in conciliatory manner. My main hypothesis is that concept of mutual containment and recognition of the other's narrative has a significant and perhaps exclusive importance for the reconciliation process among Jewish and Arabic compatriot. In long-term perspective such process can reasonably be a practical initiative step to transform the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict towards more positive direction. However, this essay does not intend to delve into this wider question but rather to suggest its implications for further examining.

Reconciliation is a very general term. As mentioned above, there is a need of re-thinking of how to reconcile the conflicting narratives. This study aims to explore the essence behind reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who is to be reconciled and on what level should it take place. This requires identifying particular reconciliation mechanisms that are more feasible in this particular conflict in order to increase the applicability of narrative containment in practice. I therefore address the following research questions:

1. How can narrative containment be understood as reconciliatory mechanism between Israeli-Jews and Israeli- Arabs?

2 Theory

I will now introduce the theoretical framework through which this research can be analyzed. I present relevant theories regarding nature of conflicts, reconciliation and identity and their interaction with the field of narratives, which is substantial for the implementation of my analysis.

2.1 Intractable conflicts

Conflicts are not a linear phenomenon, rather cyclical processes (Strömbom, 2012, 5). To understand what it takes to reach reconciliation in a conflict it is necessary to first understand the nature of conflict. Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an archetype of an intractable conflict. This conflict has all the necessary characteristics of intractable conflict. It is *protracted* (lasting almost a century), *violent* (causing thousands of victims in both societies), *central* in daily life of both populations, *total* (the other's existence is being perceived as a threat to self existence) and requires *extensive psychological and material investment* by the parties, in order to cope with the devastating consequences of conflict (Bar-Tal & Nets-Zehngut, 2007, 3).

2.2 The role of narratives in intractable conflicts

One of the important distinctions when studying this conflict is the distinction between tangible and intangible disputes. Tangible disputes include issues that can be defined, such as a territory, sovereignty and borders, and are generally easier to negotiate and do about concessions, since they are comprised within the dynamics of interest bargaining. Intangible disputes produce much more complex obstacles, which are difficult to reshape or to be willing to compromise about. Such differences consist of psychological barriers in the form of beliefs and narratives that are full of myths and stereotypes. The conflicting parties perceive any concession on these social beliefs as an existential threat for its own population. Thus, in intractable conflicts that are inherently seen as unresolvable, narratives are shaped by the parties mainly to undermine each other since the narrative of the "other" is ultimately seen as an existential threat for the "self".

Since its very beginning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is clearly understood as intractable also because the leading elites have been consistent with the presentation that the situation on the ground enables no accommodation for the both national aspirations on the same small piece of land (Caplan, 2010, 10-11, 29).

2.3   The theory of Narrative Containment and its role in reconciliation

Reconciliation is a growing phenomenon in international relations both between former rival states but also between former local antagonist societies. Louis Kriesberg identifies four central dimensions within the field of reconciliation that assist in transforming conflicts and nurturing equitable and enduring relations between former antagonists: Truth, justice, security and regard. Regard refers to the recognition of the humanity and identity of the other (Kriesberg, 2004, 82-84).

Regard is the dimension that this essay deals with most comprehensively. The assumption being presented here is that mutual containment is the founding stone on which transforming the Israeli- Palestinian conflict is inevitably based on. The issue of mutual recognition has of course no exclusivity on explanations to the outbreak or continuation of social conflicts (Kriesberg, 2004, 90-91). Some scholars, for instance, argue that reconciliation cannot be established unless there is an appropriate mechanism of healing and forgiveness for the past misdeeds of the other. Other scholars do not favor this claim similarly. They agree that a collective review of the past is substantial but are skeptical if this can obtain healing or forgiveness in deeply divided societies (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004, 18-19). Nevertheless, mutual recognition is a key indicator in which accommodations between people are sustained or changed and on which conflicts escalate or alternatively restrain. Therefore regard is critical to the process of conflict transformation (Kriesberg, 2004, 90-91).

The process of reconciliation requires learning about the other group's collective memory and at least reaching mutual recognition that there are two legitimate collective memories to the same conflict. Recognition of the legitimacy of the other's narrative does not have to be linked to every element of the narrative. This means that each element has a different significance. Previous dialogue groups between Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Arab youth indicates that Arab youth were more willing for contacts with Jews than to accept the Israeli-Jewish narrative. Thus although recognition was only limited, such interaction could be seen as satisfactory conciliatory forum (Bar-Tal & Solomon, 2006,23-24).

For the purpose of my research I discover the definition of the theory *narrative containment* with the two processes of Yehudit Auerbach's narrative-based reconciliation pyramid (See figure 1). According to the latter narrative

containment consists of the acquaintance of the other's narratives, i.e. introducing them to both societies in a more balanced and neutral way, for instance through history books. By the second phase, it consists of acknowledgment of the other's narratives, which implies understanding and recognizing them as legitimate stories. However, the transition from acquaintance to acknowledgment is very complicated as it seeks to overcome one essential element of intractable conflict, which is the zero-sum identity perception that legitimacy of one's own narrative outweighs the legitimacy of the other's narrative (Auerbach, 2009, 305).

One of the most significant problems that such process evokes is that strong mutual hatred and fear cause each side to concentrate on its own national narrative and historiography together with denying and even banning those of the other side. This factor causes the population of both conflicting parties to become incapable of scrutinizing their own national narrative in conciliatory eyes and helps to maintain violence and stalemate in the conflict (Auerbach, 2009, 304-305). The narrative containment theory is confronting this problem through the distinction between narratives and metanarratives (see section 2.3.1).

2.3.1   The distinction between narratives and metanarratives

The conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian narratives deals mainly with the question of who was first in the country of dispute, and to whom it belongs from the beginning (Caplan, 2010, 41). National narratives are tangible stories about dramatic events that occurred during the life of a certain people. Metanarratives are the holistic framework that unites all these stories and channel them to three key issues: Who are we (identity)? What is our affiliation to the country of dispute (territory)? And what is our historical role as people, both in general and in relation to the other party (victimhood)? (Auerbach, 2010,160-161,173).

The importance of metanarratives is that they take tangible disputes that are usually easier to settle and inflict on them identity-based conflictual dimension that is usually not negotiable. The reason identity dimension in a conflict is more resistant to compromise is that ethnic groups are strongly preoccupied with the self-portraying as victims against the victimizers. Metanarratives receives a sacred dimension such as accounts to Moses or Mohammad, and therefore they are subjected to high sensitivity and remain unchangeable (Auerbach, 2009,295).

National narratives are more prone for compromise on the other hand. The distinction between national narratives and metanarratives allows deconstructing national narratives into sub-stories in order to pick up their least controversial elements. This enables the parties to accommodate the other's narrative without having to deal with the zero-sum character of metanarratives (Auerbach, 2009, 298).
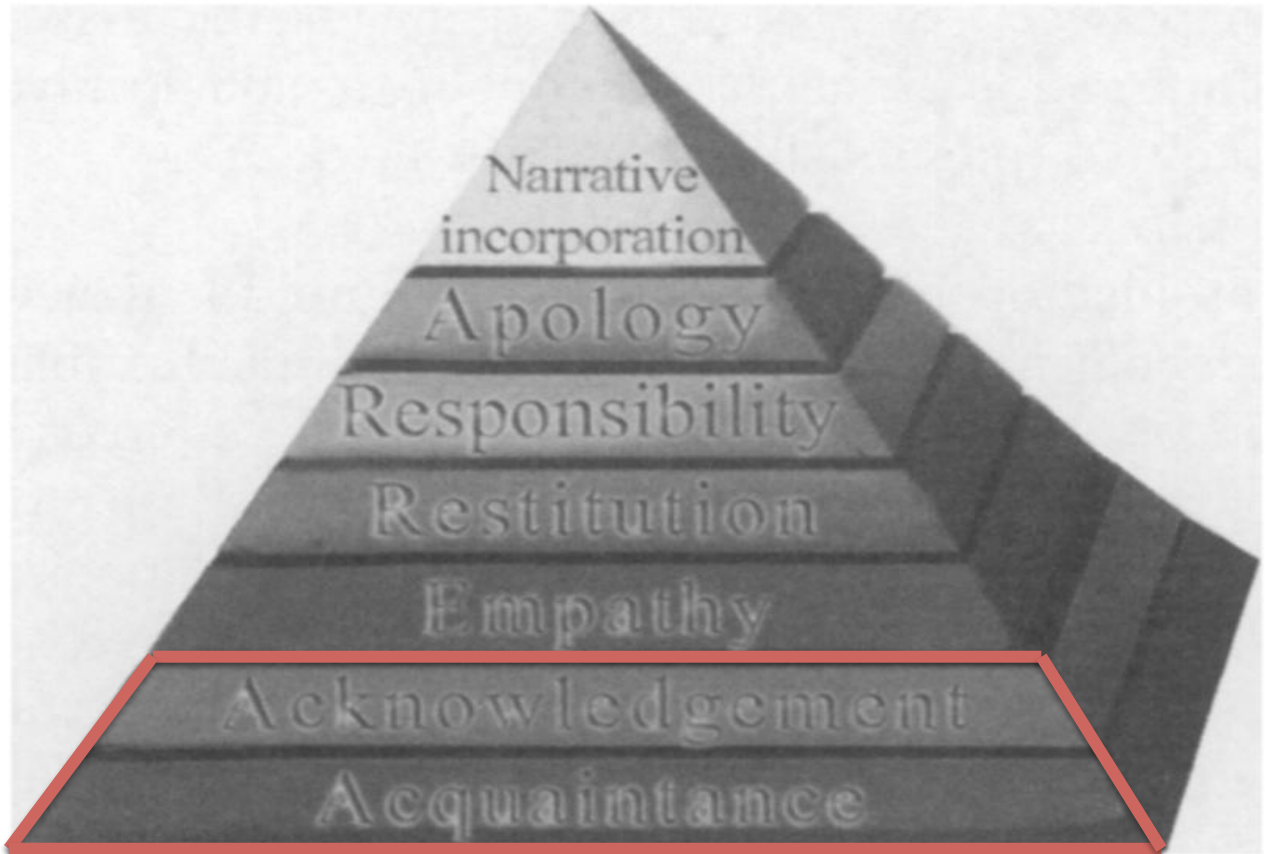
Figure 1. The reconciliation Pyramid (Auerbach, 2009, 303)
* (Narrative containment in red)

2.3.2 Building legitimacy through narrative containment: the basis of reconciliation process

In order to enable future process of full reconciliation there is a need to fulfill the very first condition that seeks to remove the mutual negation of the other's identity and narrative. Hence the aim is to pile up interactions that perceive the other in moral approach, such as political recognition, mutual acknowledgment of the other's collective memory, recognizing the "otherness" of their connection to the land and their national rights, alongside the concern for the other's dignity, welfare and security (Kelman, 2004, 122-123). Only when this pre-condition is a achieved there can be a practical way of building models to promote the following processes of reconciliation like empathy, justice (responsibility) and apology.

The process of reconciliation through narrative containment refers, for instance, to joint examination of history books or even shared projects to re-write

these books. Such projects were evident between Germany and France in 2008 when a history book written by both German and French historians was implemented in their respective high school systems, in order to improve relations between these two historic rivals. Another example was between China and Japan regarding the "Nanking massacre" where 400,000 Chines were killed. The Chinese people were associating Japan with this massacre every time they heard the word "Japan" and presented Japans' refusal to deal with its past misdeeds as a barrier to improve the relations between the countries. This led to a committee of historians from the two sides that wrote a shared history book that present both versions to the massacre in Chinese and Japanese (Auerbach, 2010, 167)

In the Israeli-Palestinian where the situation is even more complicated, the extent of identity self re-evaluation is vital factor for reconciliation. Here building legitimacy through the containment of narratives is ultimate without the necessity to reach an agreement upon their authenticity. Given the incredible power of narratives in each party, the most important step is that both sides revise their own narrative just enough to enable a peaceful accommodation of the other's identity, any further measures would be much harder to achieve. If we take the principle of justice as an example, this is much easier to be agreed upon in cases where one or more of the parties are willing to denounce parts of its identity, like in Post-Nazi Germany or Post-Apartheid South Africa. This is a far dream in Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Similar principle, although slightly more likely, is the acknowledgment of collective guilt towards the other, which is evident in the case of Post-Nazi Germany towards Israel but also seem as "too high tree" to climb on in Israeli-Palestinian case (Kelman, 119-121).

2.4 The process of "bottom-up" reconciliation

The true essence of the concept reconciliation has many observations. Many researchers tend to resolve this dilemma by choosing too general definition to the term. Yet, a successful study of reconciliation in a particular case requires a specific definition of the term. Tamar Hermann presents a particular definitional structure of reconciliation, by three types of emphasizes: cognitive, emotional-spiritual and procedural. Those who stress emotional-spiritual reconciliation refer mainly to the process of forgiveness, while those who highlight procedural reconciliation indicate the establishment of official dialogue groups on the grassroots level, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (Hermann, 2004, 44-45). I find the cognitive definition most appropriate to my analysis. Here the intention is to go beyond formal agenda of peacebuilding and to trace models that could allow Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Arabs (and perhaps even Palestinians), from bottom-up and gradually, in non-conflictual cognitive

environments, to alter their hostile emotions, aspirations and perceptions and to foster peaceful containment of each other's narratives.

"Bottom-up" reconciliation aims to initiate projects that bring individuals of deeply divided groups to interact and bridge matters that reinforce their differences. It embraces plurality of ideas and experiences that must not necessarily result in agreement. This is reflected through four main aspects:

1. Understand – the aim is to reshape the mutual understanding between the groups that would allow reduction of negative attributes such as demonization.

2. Appreciate - goes beyond understanding to positive reception of the other.

3. Collaborate – refers to the ability of the groups to cooperate in the pursuit for shared goals.

4. Prefer for peaceful resolution - indicates the development of the groups' ability to face the challenges of external factors such as spoilers and violence, thus preserving the strong reconciliation between them. (USAID, 2011, 7).

3   Methodology and Limitations

3.1   Case study

To realize my study I choose to conduct a qualitative case study on the Israeli-Arab population as the research has an exploratory character (Teorell & Svensson, 2010, 265) while dealing with the understanding of identities and how individuals perceive the conflict, the self and the other.

Case study method seeks to contribute to the principle of cumulativity and progressive generalization about social phenomena. Case study method has several significant advantages that allow researchers to develop and test their hypothesis. One advantage is that it has the potential to gain high theoretical value to the hypothesis. It also helps to link the hypothesis to a specific context and to reflect it through an individual case (George & Bennett, 2005, 19). Reconciliation can occur in various forms. Therefore, in order to achieve higher conceptual validity for my hypothesis, more extensive focus is given to the field of narrative containment. By doing so, I can highlight standards that could serve as indication for similar situations and cases.

Case studies may also be perceived as unrepresentative for the studied populations and as incapable of generalizing their applicability to these populations except in marginalized groups. Limitation of the case study helps us to assume to what extent the variable we analyze actually affect the case and how much the case study contribute to the field of similar research (George & Bennett, 2005, 25). The relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel are neither ideal nor are they perceived as such within majorities in both communities. The scope of this research is alternatively to provide explanatory richness through particular cases of interaction between smaller groups of the respective populations. Thus I aim to extend the existing literature on Israeli-Arab population in relation to conflict transformation.

3.2   Process tracing

Process tracing method is considered especially fitted for single case studies as it emphasizes the need of a systematic within-case analysis (Teorell & Svensson, 2010, 247). Process tracing provides more accurate measurements to locate

critical junctures of causality (Levy, 2008, 12), such as in this study, between narrative containment and reconciliation. Here, I seek to find the explanation to the outcome of my studied variable, mutual containment of narrative, through the process of reconciliation. I identify this outcome within a certain chain of conciliatory practices that relates to my unit of analysis, i.e. interrelations of Israeli Arab and Jewish compatriots.

One possible obstacle in process tracing method is that one outcome may generate multiple rival explanations. Therefore it is important to be aware of the likeliness of "overflow of explanations" when searching for a single explanatory pattern (George & Bennett, 2005, 207). Narrative containment and reconciliation in general may be traced in many other occurrences or living aspects between Jews and Arabs in Israel, besides my studied cases. Therefore, I do not disregard the significance of any other possible reconciliation mechanisms but rather suggest them as complementary observations to the ones I investigate.

3.3   Case selection

When the researcher has foreknowledge on the values of the studied variables case selection is perhaps subjected to cognitive biases in favor of particular hypothesis. On the other hand, preliminary knowledge on cases can foster stronger research designs as it increases the researcher's academic orientation in the case, by finding the right existing studies. It also helps the researcher to determine to what extant the required theoretical framework is tested and whether it considered strong or weak for this case (George & Bennett, 2005, 24).

One important notion in this research is that it is written from a perspective of an insider. Being an Israeli Jew, I am aware of the inevitable cognitive bias that might affect my research due to my belonging to the majority group, which has a social-constructed structural advantage compared to the Arab minority. Therefore, I had to be extra thoughtful of keeping, as much as possible, balanced and objective academic approach, since no research can be bias-free. At the same time, the insider perspective improves my understanding of cultural and linguistic nuances as well as conflict repertoire.

3.4   Material

The theoretical research is mainly based on secondary sources of previous academic literature. The empirical study is based both on primary and secondary sources. The first conciliatory practice I examine is the writing of shared narrative- based history books between Israelis and Palestinians, which I analyze

through the empirical cases of bridging narrative project led by the Israeli "new historians" and the "double-narrative" book-projects, initiated by the late professor Dan Bar-On of Ben Gurion University and professor Sami Adwan of Bethlehem University. The second conciliatory mechanism I explore is containment of narratives through shared bicultural and bilingual educational practices. This I intend to link to the case of Hand in Hand, Center for Jewish-Arab Education In Israel and Oasis of Peace a joint community of Arabs and Jews at the outskirts of Jerusalem. In order to increase the validity of the data for these empirical practices I use the method of triangulation where I present accounts about them both from primary resources and also secondary literature with further interpretations from outsiders.

4   The Israeli-Arab perspective on reconciliation with Israel

In order to understand and analyze the field of narrative containment we need to understand the sociopolitical sphere of which the unit we analyze connected to. Therefore I will now illustrate the historical timeline of milestones that shaped the identity of Israeli-Arab population - its sociopolitical activity in the last 20 years from 1993 until today and the reconciliation progress with the state of Israel and the Jewish sector. In chapter 5.1 I discuss the effects of this chain of events on this population in the context of the disputed narratives.

1993-2000: This period is characterized by the explicit support of Israeli-Arabs in the peace process and Oslo agreement in order to satisfy the national dimension of their identity. At the same time, sociopolitical activity was intensified with focus on the improvement of their status in Israeli society and their living circumstances. Relations with Israel were channeled into four distinct movements within the Arab sector. The biggest movement recognizes Israel's existence, struggle for civil equality together with maintaining the national and cultural identity. The second movement also recognizes the State but denies its Jewish definition and Zionist character. The third movement is more radical in terms of nationalism and religion and emphasizes the demand for educational and cultural self-rule as well as civil equality and rejecting the Jewish definition of the State. The last movement, the smallest one, does not recognize Israel on either religious or nationalist basis (Haidar, 2011, 18-19).

2000-today: The violent events of the second intifada (2000) and the failure of the Oslo agreement deteriorated the relations between Israel and its Arab citizens. This has also halted, to large extant, programs meant to decrease socioeconomic inequality. On the political elite level, the Committee of Local Arab Councils published the "Future Vision Documents" in 2006 and 2007. Although these documents do not stress new desire for inclusion of the Israeli-Arabs to future Palestine (Haidar, 2011, 22) they signify strengthening of the Palestinian national narrative among Israeli-Arabs. For example, all the territory of Israel, even before 1967, is seen as an occupied land (Auerbach, 2010, 177). However, despite the hardening of Israeli- Arabs attitude towards the state, the Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel from 2012 shows that almost 60% of them reconciled themselves with Israel as a state with Jewish majority. 54.7% stressed that they would prefer to live in Israel rather than in any other state. Although reconciliation here does not signify preference, since almost 70% think that Israel

should become binational state, it has great significance for reconciliation as the vast majority of Israeli-Arabs, 80.5%, express their commitment to coexistence with the Jewish sector (Samooha, 2013, 11-12)

4.1 The impact of the conflicting narratives on the Israeli-Arab population

The identity crisis that struck the Israeli-Arab population in 1948 has made it separate from the rest of the Palestinian population in terms of political aspirations. The primary observation is that while the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza strip focused on liberation from Israeli occupation, the Israeli-Arab population stressed the struggle for equality within Israel as its priority (Pappe, 2006, 224). The Israeli-Arab population was thus excluded from the Palestinian discourse and even from the Israeli- Palestinian peace process, while both sides (i.e. Israel and PA) have treated them suspiciously (Shougry, 2012, 7).

The Arab minority's grievance and violent clashes between Israel and its Arab minority are being portrayed within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, the violent incidents of Land Day and October 2000 for instance, are linked to master narrative frames of nationalism and land confiscation considered as occupation of the land (Shougry, 2012, 7,35-36).

At the political level, the advancement of peaceful containment of narratives seems to be caught in a cycle of non-progressive kind of political interests and Intrigues that prevent its progress (It is important to note that this can also relate to the Jewish sector of the political spectrum, however this is not of the matter of this study). Representatives of the Arab political elite in Israel have declared in the shared document "the Future Vision document" from 2006 that "Israel is the outcome of a (Jewish) settlement process... realized by colonial countries..." (Auerbach, 2009, 296). According to this document the Jews has no national ground to claim ownership of the land. In addition the victimhood in this conflict is being presented exclusively of the Palestinians by the "oppressive, worse than South Africa, apartheid state of Israel" (Auerbach 2010, 172).

4.2 Essential framework for grassroots reconciliation to facilitate peaceful containment of narratives between Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Arabs

Given the intense rivalry between the narratives that is embedded also very directly in Israeli-Arab population, even though the majority seek reconciliation

with the state, the necessity is to find conciliatory mechanisms that could accommodate this rivalry without damaging the fabric of peace between the Arab and Jewish sectors.

Since reconciliation processes on grassroots level is not linear and requires addressing both attitudinal and institutional elements (USAID, 2011, 7). For narrative containment to be applicable these must be taken into account and designated according to recurring elements in relations between Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Arabs like the following: -

1. Victimhood - One significant barrier for creating environment of collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians in general is that both tend to dwell endlessly on past wrong and matters of who suffered more and who is guiltier. Hence, the assumption that adherence to these issues is necessary in order to achieve collaboration is inaccurate and useless (Shtarkshall, 2007, 34).

2. Recognition of the conflict – Reconciliation practice cannot overlook the dimensions of time and place in which it operates. Israeli-Jews and Palestinian are in existing conflict that affects every aspect of life of the conciliatory groups. Each group has its own national identity and distinct perception of the reality (Bar & Eady, 1998, 524).

3. Recognition of asymmetry - A genuine reconciliatory process entails seeking socioeconomic equality in the groups. Asymmetry prevails between Israeli-Jews and Israeli-Arabs in many areas, such as civil inequality and work opportunities (Bar & Eady, 1998, 422). More important is that a genuine process of reconciliation cannot come from a place of patronage where a superior group supplies resources for the benefit of the weaker group. On the contrary, this process requires equality of benefits that the cooperation yields, both materially and in terms of social and intellectual interests. (Shtarkshall, 2007, 34).

4. Persistency - Finally, changing climate between former adversary groups, especially in intractable conflicts, requires long-term process (Shtarkshall, 2007, 34).

As I mentioned the fate of the Israeli-Arab population, since 1948, is deeply intertwined with the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The developments of this conflict merely designed their collective identity and national aspirations. Thus, in the cognitive dimension the differences between Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians on the root and essence of the conflict are minor. At the same time, on grassroots level, Israeli-Arabs' "isralization" process has a significant influence on their collective identity until today. This process is expressed in bilingualism, biculturalism and by the fact that they relate their fate and future with the state of Israel (Lavi, 2011, 36).

In Israel today reconciliation between Jews and Arabs is reflected in many social and economic areas, for example, Arab football players represent Israel national football team, there is also an increase in the number of Muslims who

enlist in the Israeli army and even in medicine there is an increase in the number of doctors and nurses of Arab origin in hospitals all over Israel. However, these circuits do not deal directly or related to actual implementation of the peaceful containment of the conflicting narratives between two populations.

For this purpose I focus on the following cases that explore the field of narrative containment in other methods of reconciliation. These highlight the distinctiveness of relationship between Jews and Arabs inner Israel and by whom I can better evaluate the practicality of the above criteria present in section 4.2.

5 Building legitimacy through narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

5.1 Bridging narrative concept and the Israeli movement of "New History"

One of the most significant attempts to build legitimacy through narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the bridging narrative concept. This concept proposes simply the construction of common historiographical narrative to the conflict. This is to be established where a critical revision of the past by historians from both sides, is coordinated into one shared narrative. Ilan Pappe, one of the founders of the concept, sees the asymmetry in power between the groups as decisive factor. According to him, the Israeli-Jewish side is responsible for the inability to lead a process of reconciliation between the narratives. He thus calls the Israeli- Jewish side to initiate the bridging narrative concept. He then encourages "bottom up" joint groups of historians from both sides that are endowed with high capacity of self-criticism, to challenge their respective national narratives (Pappe, 2004, 194-195, 203). Pappe is one of the founders of the self-critical "New History" movement of Israeli intellectuals who questioned the Israeli master narrative of 1948-war as the triumph of the weak over the strong, and described rather the Palestinians as victims of Israeli-Jewish aggression (Strömbom, 2012, 11-12).

Mordechai Bar-On highlights that Israeli and Palestinian master-narratives are in direct conflict as the one undermines the other while beating in the hearts of millions on both sides. The ability to change a component, even the smallest, or try to merge them into the same professional history literature seems impossible. According to Bar-On what is being reflected here is the element of truth that comes to mislead rather than actually create a bridge for reconciliation, whereby the process of bridging narratives is usually intertwined with attempts to present one's "truth" against the other's "falsehood" (Bar-On, 2006, 143).

5.2   Independently, but common – the double narrative project

Professors Dan Bar-On and Sammy Adwan sought to find a formula for writing a book that will contain the narrative of the other in an efficient and balanced way. They argue that bridging narrative concept is currently not applicable because it does not acknowledge the totality perception of the narrative of the self in this conflict. Furthermore, it does not have the capacity to gain real impact on society or to produce significant interaction between Jews and Arabs. Instead, they claim, that there is a need to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the narratives and deconstruct them in order to find the certain qualities of the other's story and terminology that each group can feasibly accommodate (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006, 205-206).

Based on this assumption they developed an experimental book that contained the two narratives with a hope that they thus would become less hostile and more sensitive towards each other. They then ran a grassroots experiment with an equal number of intellectuals and teachers on both sides, i.e. Israeli-Jews and Palestinians in the occupied territories, that were to present the book to their respective pupils. The project itself was unlucky in terms of timing that was during the violent events of the second Intifada. Although it evoked curiosity and interest among students the project was encountered with rejection of students on both sides that expressed their wonder why their teachers present them to "the enemy's propaganda" (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006, 207-213).

This led to a second phase reformulation of some of the expressions and terminology about certain events that seemed to have created an uncompromising antagonism among the pupils. In the end of the experiment the entire process was culminated in the publication of one book, Palestinians and Israelis Learn the Narrative of the other, which consist of shared but independent narratives of nine events, and was later implemented in their respective classrooms (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006, 217-218).

Bar-On and Adwan believed that despite the difficulties and adverse reactions the experiment created, the interaction between the teachers and their experiences incorporates several constructive conclusions. Teachers expressed a real willingness to find ways in which it will be possible to draft texts in a less self-centered attitude on both sides. The students' opposition to the experiment didn't break the spirit of the teacher. On the contrary, the conceptual validity of the other's narrative among the teachers themselves, allowed them to deal with the opposition of students in a constructive manner by addressing the necessary changes to the texts and improve them. According to Bar-On and Adwan the overall goal is to reach a situation where people on both sides are confident on their national identity. Individuals' identity insecurity leads to a state of stagnation and lack of will to deal with issues related to the conflict between narratives. So

when people from both groups will feel comfortable enough with their own national identity it would be easier to face and contain other ways of telling the same stories that are incorporated in their narrative. This reflects the advantage of this experiment even though its results are being implemented in these teachers' limited number of classes (Bar-On & Adwan, 2006, 216-218).

Although the project received large recognition within the EU (Haaretz, 2010) it has not acquired significant political support and was even banned by the Israeli right government. Similarly, it was not warmly accepted in the Palestinian Authority. However despite the general rejection the project is continuing under the realization that mutual trust is weak and requires further development (Auerbach, 2009, 305).

Following are some reactions from individuals involved in the project:

- Michal Wesser, Israeli teacher from Sha'ar Hanegev High School in the southern Israel near the border with Gaza, who implemented the book in her class: "Last year the class had 15 students and this year another group will join… and more importantly - we educate self-criticism and understanding (of the other)" (Ha'aretz, 2010).

- Bar & Shirley, graduators from Sha'ar Hanegev: "When we learned the history of the Palestinians and the history of the Jews and of Israel, It actually strengthened our Zionist identity - we understood what the founders of the state went so that we can live here" (Haaretz, 2010).

The fact that the Israeli High School of Sha'ar Hanegev has, on own initiative, introduced it to its students signifies that there is a social and intellectual interest and curiosity towards it. This process increases the confidence of the students in their own national identity, which as noted increases their readiness to contain other stories that are challenging their narrative.

This pioneering experiment is shedding light on the issue of narrative containment through writing shared history books. The problem of this reconciliation initiative is that except the teachers the participators are not experiencing it with the out-group, rather discusses it individually in in-group forums. Narrative containment with high validity and higher potential to expand to the wider society does indeed require the recognition of the distinctiveness of the two narratives. However it is obvious, this reconciliation process in its attempted constellation couldn't overcome the hard barriers that currently characterize the relation between Jews and Palestinians.

5.3 Hand in Hand – Narrative Containment through shared education

A different case of reconciliation organization that gives an opportunity to assess narrative containment through the distinctiveness of the Israeli-Arab perspective is through the capacity to establish joint educational systems that can facilitate it.

In cases such as the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, high level of mutual ignorance and unawareness of imbalances and injustices is often evident. Therefore, education has a substantial role in bridging the gaps and raising the awareness of the groups to each other and thus increasing their interdependence (Lederach, 1995, 12-13). There are multiple examples of joint Jewish-Arabic educational systems in Israel today. I hereby present one substantial example of a school network that corresponds precisely with the latter.

- "Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel is building inclusive society, partnership and equality through a network of integrated, bilingual schools and shared communities of children, youth and adults throughout Israel" (Hand in Hand, 2014).

The main objective of Hand in Hand is to teach young Israelis, Jews and Arabs, recognition and acceptance of cultural differences in non-conflicting environment. Equality is emphasized at all levels. There are two principals, one Jew and one Arab. Each class shares two teachers, one Arab and one Jew and consists of equal amount of students. Each class is also taught simultaneously in both Arabic and Hebrew, while nothing is being translated (Mendelson, 2007, 261,262).

Founded in 1998 with two schools and 50 children, Hand in Hand has expanded to five schools and 1,080 students as for today. The school has won variety of prizes for its enterprise both domestically and internationally and aims to copy its success and expand its influence to the wider society, in order to improve Jewish-Arabic relations in Israel. Hand in Hand represents a unique environment in Israel where Jews and Arabs engage on a daily basis in a multicultural shared activities, such co-teaching schools as mentioned above or celebrating each other's holidays. Hand in Hand's vision for the next decade is to expand to a network of ten to fifteen bilingual schools and multiply the number of students to more than 20,000 (Hand in Hand, 2014).

I discover two central examples of peaceful containment of narratives taking place in the schools of Hand in Hand. The first is the linguistic equality carried out in the schools. This is revolutionary since the dominant language being used among Jews and Arabs in Israel is Hebrew, which has contributed to the asymmetry between them (Bar & Eady, 1998, 528). The second is the celebration

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of Identity Day when students celebrate their differences. This took place this year on March 24th in Jerusalem:

- "The exhibit is the culmination of months of learning in the 1st-9th grade classes and included expressions of many layers of identity: personal, familial, communal, religious, and national. Over the course of this project, students learned about their multiple identities, deepening their understanding about themselves and their surroundings." (Hand in Hand, 2014).

Here are some reactions by the people involved in Hand in Hand:

- Magda, mother of Azam, 10-year-old who have attended one of the schools: " We are equal in this school. That is why I feel equal to the parents, an Arab teacher feels equal to a Jewish teacher, and my son feels equal to the Jewish child sitting next to him" (Mendelson, 2007, 261).

- Moataz, graduator: "I'm proud I was able to put a 60-years-old conflict aside in order to be human and understanding. And that is the greatness of this school (Hand in Hand, 2014).

The attribute of celebrating distinctiveness of national identities is as mentioned above, substantial for this conflict since it enables to cope with external negative influences and to better preserve the reconciliation within the schools. The impressive progress of the school network also indicates that the process is persistent. There is a significant potential for expansion even after the difficult years of violent conflict since it's founding in 1998.

5.4   Oasis of Peace – Narrative containment as way of life

Oasis of Peace is a cooperative community/village near Jerusalem where Jewish and Arab families, citizens of Israel, live together with the vision of promoting peacemaking. In Oasis of Peace the containment of narratives is getting thicker than in any other reconciliatory forum. 52 families, Jewish and Arab, live in this village that demonstrates de facto coexistence based on mutual recognition, acceptance and compromise. This even exceeds the stages of narrative containment in the reconciliation pyramid. Like Hand in Hand the goal of Oasis of Peace is to create Bilingual/bicultural/binational School coordinated by teachers of both nationalities (Oasis of Peace, 2014).

There is not much research on villages whose sole purpose and essence is peacebuilding in their daily lives. Regarding narratives, what distinguishes the village is that the residents actually construct new narratives of "lived experience" that are being added to the peaceful containment of the disputed master- narratives of the conflict. The "lived experience" narratives are created by moral dilemmas, conflicts and ambiguities that the residents confront in daily situations. Presenting them as narratives helps to develop mechanisms of settlement of similar incidents in the future. The village aims to serve as a micro society- role model for the wider Israeli society. It does not overlook hard questions and moral dilemmas arising out of the ongoing conflict. A significant part of the school's curriculum is devoted to the teaching of Jewish and Arab identity. Children are taught about their personal cultural, social and national identity and also about the other's identity. The main target is not assimilation rather respecting differences and maintaining mutual recognition and acceptance of the different identities (Feuerverger, 1998, 490-494).

A good way to illustrate the role of the narrative containment conception in the village actually lies in the shared ownership on the determination of the school history curriculum. Historical symbols and terminologies are extremely powerful in this community. One example is the Israeli War of Independence, which is obviously not looked upon as independence for Palestinian Arabs anywhere. Joel a history teacher in the village describes the moral dilemma of narratives accurately:

- " There is a lot of interaction… regarding how we look at historical symbols…We have to present both points of view and that's what we're grappling with. We've got onto some harsh disputes… it's such a delicate process. But we're moving forward and... it's all worth it because we're trying to give our children a better future. The children are being presented with both Arab and Jewish perspectives. Many time we can't resolve issues but at least we're facing the problem- which at least allows the children to reflect on these problems in a more balanced way." (Feuerverger, 1998, 498-499)

This indicates that even here there is need to maintain the different identities separately. The interaction on the other hand, allows routing each child's understanding of self-identity into a moral "way of knowing" that helps him to accept the fact that the other child's identity is different and even contradictory without damaging the fabric of its reconciliation (Feuerverger, 1998, 499).

The unique identity of the Israeli- Arab is evident also in Oasis of Peace. Ahmad is a Palestinian teacher that moved to the village from East Jerusalem:

- "This problem with identity for Israeli-Arabs is very difficult… we don't feel like we totally belong in Israeli society but that we have

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different values from many (Palestinians) in the West Bank." (Feuerverger, 1998, 503)

The interesting part here is that the move to Oasis of Peace enabled Ahmad to maintain his Palestinian identity without needing to reject his Israeli identification (Feuerverger, 1998, 503). Thus, the impact of the implementation of narrative containment in practice in Oasis of peace assists individuals to be responsible for their own identity and at the same time have the opportunity to share it with each other without the inherent need to negate any of the narratives. Thus, the students create new narratives of shared experience that allows them to contain the "other's" narrative peacefully.

6   Summary and discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the issue of reconciliation of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict and evaluate the capability of conflict transformation by means of the theory of containment narratives. In writing this research I do not propose to disregard other methods of peacebuilding, the opposite is true. Peace process through negotiation or mediation of a third party, as well as seeking agreement on tangible disputes like borders or territory may lead as well to transformation or solution of identity disputes. However, there is a general understanding that in order to achieve long and lasting there is a need to transform the nature of relationship between rival societies and provide foundations for cooperation. From this view reconciliation through peace agreement between deeply divided ethnic groups in intractable environment is not sufficient and therefore emphasis placed on efforts to reshape mutual acceptance and social relationships in order to transform the course of conflict towards more peaceful direction.

This study shows that although the Arab population in Israel is sharing identity with the Palestinian side in the conflict, its way to reconciliation with Israel is different and requires individual analysis. In the relationships between Israel and its Arab minority there is a, somewhat unique, dimension that is this minority's affiliation with the Palestinian people, which is in intense conflict with Israel. This makes them to a deviant case of minority whose country is in a state of continuous war with its people and enables, as mentioned above, deep narrative conflict between citizens of the same country, i.e. Jews and Arabs in Israel. In the case of Israel and its Arab minority the conflicting parties have to continue to live together, which has a different significance to the process of reconciliation compared to between two separate entities, as in the case of Israel and Egypt, or presumably Israel and the PA. Notwithstanding, I have found that the potential of the relationships between Jews and Arabs in Israel was far from being utilized throughout the years of the conflict. Despite the obstacles of identity, discrimination and violent crises, openings for containment of narratives with the Jewish population are a much broader than for other Palestinian factions in the West Bank and Gaza.

Narrative Containment as mechanism of reconciliation

This study discusses the need to build mutual legitimacy through slow process of reconciliation. Reconciliation does not emerge naturally rather requires a significant active engagement by the conflicting parties. In the Israeli- Palestinian conflict there is a necessity for bottom-up cooperation between the two people. Even though there have been countless attempts for reconciliation through narrative containment between Israelis and Palestinians it is still stuck at this initial stage of reaching mutual recognition and subjected to various barriers that stop its progress. This is also evident within Israel, among Jews and Arabs. Still their relations have more potential to reach a positive outcome at this stage.

Concepts of narrative containment were unable to produce positive outcomes because they have tried to apply incompatible processes of reconciliation like guilt, apology and justice to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other concepts have tried to bridge the narratives by trying to alter their master metanarratives, which in essence are impossible to change. As mentioned above, narrative containment can be achieved more easily by differentiating between national narratives and metanarratives. Undermining metanarratives exacerbates the perception of the other as a threat. Accordingly, the attempt to bridge between the contrasting perceptions of 1948-War can be perceived as a threat to the metanarratives of the parties, which put in doubt the ability of the bridging narrative concept to bring to a peaceful mutual containment of narratives. The reasonable assumption to be taken here is that this concept seeks to take too large "jumps" between the different stages of the reconciliation pyramid, which is paralyzing its ability to promote any of the stages individually. Although scrutinizing own narrative is indeed vital for reconciliation, it ought be well modified in order to improve its practical applicability.

The double narrative book Bar-On and Adwan, in my opinion, disregards the uniqueness of the Arab population in Israel. The project ignores the role of the Israeli –Arab population to large extent especially on implementation level. In cognitive dimension, furthering the experiment to the Israeli-Arab education system or encounters between Jews and Arabs in Israel may foster better results of peaceful containment of narratives.

In cases where two conflicting groups live under the same political system, like in Israel, the focus is on long-term reconciliation process that encompasses extensive policies of inclusion, integration and ending discrimination (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004, 11-12). Thus, even if far from representing the majority of the population the relative success of Hand in Hand and Oasis of Peace shows that process of containment of narratives in which participants experience the reconciliation on daily basis is unambiguously more effective compared to the process where they only talk about the narrative of the other and learn to know it. It is clear that the clash between the narratives is unbridgeable, even by people who see reconciliation as the highest value. However, peaceful containment of

narrative, like in the cases of Hand in Hand and Oasis of Peace pave the way to for the creation of narrative of mutual "live experience" of moralities that practically enables the peaceful coexistence of the conflicting narrative even without reaching an agreement upon them. This I propose is currently the only conciliatory mechanism that can overcome the complexity and tensions between the two narratives, and it is accurately embedded in Hand in Hand and Oasis of Peace. There is a commitment to allow plurality of opinions and identity aspirations even if they are in direct contradictory. Heavy cognitive barrier such as victimhood does not produce stalemate in the development of these organizations. Asymmetry is not being overlooked, what comes to expression in the attempt to balance the usage of the two spoken languages, Hebrew and Arabic. The organizations attempt to perform as microcosm of the wider society and confront harsh issues that could occur due to violence and war. Finally and above all, these organizations are persistent and do not give up to failures and disappointments in their progress which is vital to the process of narrative containment.

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